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Presenting a Model for Managing the Development of Sound Ethics in Shahed Schools of Shahr-e Kord County Inspired by Grounded Theory

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The objective of this research was to present a model aimed at enhancing the education of sound ethics in the Shahed schools of Shahr-e Kord County.

Methods and Materials: The present research utilized a sequential exploratory mixed-method design. The statistical population in the first part of the research (qualitative) consisted of 20 education experts from the city of Shahr-e Kord, selected through purposive sampling based on the principle of data saturation. In the quantitative section, 300 students from the second secondary grade in Shahr-e Kord were selected as the sample using multi-stage cluster sampling and the Cochran formula. Data collection tools in the qualitative section included semi-structured interviews. In the quantitative section, a researcher-made questionnaire was used, with its face validity assessed through a pilot study, content validity evaluated by expert judgment, and construct validity examined through factor analysis. Additionally, the reliability of the questionnaire was calculated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient and the test-retest method. Data analysis in the qualitative section was conducted through content analysis, and in the quantitative section, exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis and one-sample t-tests were performed using SPSS-V22 and LISREL-V8 software.

Findings: The results indicated that sound ethics comprise four dimensions: educational, social, environmental, and religious. The components of the educational dimension include teacher, curriculum, classroom environment, and school management. The social dimension encompasses group values, empathy, social trust, and mutual respect. The environmental dimension includes the moral atmosphere, encouragement and punishment, parents' literacy and income level, and an individual's socioeconomic status. The religious dimension involves adherence to religious values, religious beliefs, and chastity.

Conclusion: The research findings demonstrated that the model presented in this study for the development of sound ethics in the schools of Shahr-e Kord County has a desirable fit.

Keywords: Sound Ethics, Shahed Students, Grounded Theory

1. Introduction

Ethics in education, particularly within the context of schools, has garnered increasing attention over the years, with growing recognition of its critical role in shaping not only academic success but also the moral development of students. Ethical behavior in educational settings, including the adherence to professional ethics and the fostering of a sound moral environment, is essential for creating a learning atmosphere that nurtures students' holistic development. The importance of integrating ethics into educational curricula is supported by the assertion that ethical practices contribute to the overall efficacy and integrity of educational institutions (Bagherian et al., 2022; Bagherinia et al., 2022).

The integration of ethics into education is not a novel concept; however, its implementation varies significantly across different educational systems and cultural contexts. In Iran, where this study is situated, ethical education is heavily influenced by cultural, religious, and social factors. The hidden curriculum, which encompasses the implicit values and ethical lessons conveyed through the educational environment, plays a significant role in the ethical development of students (Azadi et al., 2017). Research has shown that the hidden curriculum in Iranian schools can either reinforce or undermine the formal ethical education provided, depending on how well it aligns with the intended moral outcomes (Azadi et al., 2017).

Moreover, the professional ethics of educators themselves is crucial in this process. Educators' ethical behavior directly impacts students' ethical development, as they serve as role models within the educational environment (Boroujeni et al., 2013; Shahriari et al., 2011; Shahriari et al., 2016). This dynamic highlights the necessity of ensuring that teachers and school administrators adhere to high ethical standards, which in turn supports the ethical growth of their students.

The role of ethical education in schools extends beyond the mere transmission of knowledge; it involves the cultivation of moral reasoning, ethical sensitivity, and the capacity to make sound moral judgments. Ethical sensitivity, as highlighted by Milliken (2016), is particularly important in the field of nursing education but is equally relevant in the broader educational context (Milliken, 2016). It refers to the ability to recognize ethical issues and understand the implications of one's actions within a moral framework. In the context of schools, fostering ethical sensitivity among students can help them navigate complex moral situations

both within and outside the school environment (Torabizadeh et al., 2020; Torabizadeh et al., 2016).

The significance of ethical education is further underscored by the need to address the ethical challenges that students and educators face. Research by Naseri-Salahshour and Sajadi (2019) highlights the ethical dilemmas encountered by novice professionals, which often stem from a lack of preparedness to deal with real-world ethical issues. This underscores the importance of incorporating robust ethical training into the educational curriculum to better equip students for the ethical challenges they will face in their professional lives (Naseri-Salahshour & Sajadi, 2019).

The ethical challenges within the Iranian educational system are multifaceted, influenced by cultural, religious, and socio-political factors. As highlighted by Nemati and Taghizade (2018), the ethical components of education in Iran are deeply intertwined with Islamic values, which shape the ethical framework within which educational institutions operate (Nemati & Taghizade, 2018). However, this alignment with religious values also presents challenges, particularly in balancing traditional ethical teachings with the demands of modern educational practices (Khalili et al., 2021).

One of the key challenges is the variability in the implementation of ethical education across different schools and educational levels. While some schools may place a strong emphasis on ethical education, others may lack the resources or expertise to effectively integrate ethics into their curricula (Bagherinia et al., 2022). This inconsistency can lead to disparities in students' ethical development, which may have long-term implications for their moral reasoning and behavior.

Moreover, the ethical climate within educational institutions, including the attitudes and behaviors of educators, plays a significant role in shaping students' ethical development (Khajepour, 2023; Maarefvand & Shafiabady, 2024; Ofem, 2023; Sadat Mousavi & Ebrahimi, 2024). The ethical climate refers to the prevailing moral atmosphere within an institution, which is influenced by the values, norms, and behaviors of its members. A positive ethical climate, characterized by mutual respect, fairness, and integrity, can foster students' ethical development, while a negative ethical climate can hinder it (Borhani et al., 2021).

Given the pivotal role of educators in shaping the ethical development of students, it is essential that they receive adequate training in professional ethics. Research by Boozaripour et al. (2017) and Borhani et al. (2021)

emphasizes the importance of ethical training for educators, particularly in terms of enhancing their ability to serve as ethical role models for their students. Effective ethical training programs can help educators develop a deeper understanding of ethical principles, improve their moral reasoning skills, and enhance their ability to navigate ethical dilemmas in their professional practice (Boozaripour et al., 2017; Borhani et al., 2021).

In addition to formal training, the role of ongoing ethical education and reflection is crucial. Educators must continually engage in ethical reflection to ensure that their teaching practices align with their ethical values and the ethical standards of their profession (Jafari & Alamolhoda, 2021). This process of continuous ethical reflection and learning is essential for maintaining high standards of ethical behavior in educational settings. This study to present a model for managing the development of sound ethics in schools, specifically focusing on Shahed schools in Shahr-e Kord County, with the grounded theory serving as a foundational methodology.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present study, which was conducted in 2024, employed a mixed-methods research design (quantitative and qualitative) and was applied in nature. The qualitative segment of the research included staff and experts employed in the education sector in Shahr-e Kord, specifically those working in the field of sound ethics. For the qualitative sample, purposive sampling was used, and 20 individuals from the Shahr-e Kord education department were selected as interview participants. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in the qualitative phase of this research. To assess the reliability of the information obtained from the interviews, the intra-subject agreement percentage was used as a reliability indicator (Abdolrahimi et al., 2017). In this study, the reliability obtained from the intra-subject agreement percentage, which serves as an indicator of reproducibility, was 75.1%, indicating an appropriate level of reliability.

Considering the research objective, which was to develop a model for the promotion of sound ethics in Shahr-e Kord schools, the quantitative segment of the study included all secondary school students (second cycle) in Shahr-e Kord. A multi-stage cluster random sampling method was used to select the participants. Initially, the city of Shahr-e Kord was divided into five geographical zones: north, south, west, east,

and center. From each zone, three secondary schools were selected. Subsequently, 20 students were randomly selected from the second cycle list of each school, leading to a total sample of 300 secondary school students in Shahr-e Kord for the quantitative segment of this study.

In this research, data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire, which was derived from the codes obtained from the interviews. The questionnaire was completed by surveying the secondary school students. This questionnaire consisted of 65 items, scored using a 5-point Likert scale. To calculate the validity of the researcher-developed questionnaire, face, content, and construct validity were utilized. The final questionnaire was devoid of editing, formatting, spelling, and other errors, as it was developed with the help of the researcher, several sample members, and an advisor. Content validity was examined using CVR (Content Validity Ratio) and CVI (Content Validity Index) forms. Based on this type of validity, no questions needed to be eliminated, although some were revised.

To assess the construct validity of the current questionnaire, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used, and considering the model fit indices, the construct validity of this questionnaire was confirmed. Additionally, to assess the reliability of this test, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for all components of the ethical education dimensions in this study was above 0.7. Content analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data collected.

The stages of qualitative data analysis were conducted through open coding and axial coding. The quantitative analysis was performed using SPSS and LISREL software. The results from LISREL software were used in the form of structural equation modeling (SEM). Other tests, such as exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and one-sample t-tests, were also utilized.

During the research process, several ethical considerations were taken into account. The most significant of these included explaining the research objectives to the participants, ensuring their confidentiality, and thus obtaining their informed consent to participate in the study.

3. Findings and Results

Based on the demographic information obtained from the participants in the qualitative segment of the study, 14 participants (80%) were men, and 6 participants (20%) were women. Among them, 3 participants (15%) held a bachelor's degree, 11 participants (55%) held a master's degree, and 6

participants (30%) held a doctoral degree. In the quantitative segment, 122 participants (40.66%) were boys, and 178 participants (59.33%) were girls. Furthermore, 129 participants (43%) were 15 years old, 111 participants (37%) were 16 years old, 33 participants (11%) were 17 years old, and 27 participants (9%) were 18 years old.

To extract the components of sound ethics, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used. In identifying the components of sound ethics in secondary schools, it was first necessary to confirm that the existing data could be used for analysis, or in other words, whether the number of data points (sample size and relationship between variables) was appropriate for factor analysis. For this purpose, the KMO

(Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) index and Bartlett's test were used. The results showed that the KMO index was greater than 0.6 and showed values close to one, indicating sample adequacy for factor analysis. A significance level of 0.000 for Bartlett's test also indicated the suitability of the research variables for factor analysis, as the assumption of the identity matrix was rejected.

In identifying the components of sound ethics in secondary schools, exploratory factor analysis was conducted on 65 identified indicators based on qualitative findings and content validity. The communalities for all indicators were above 0.5, and no questions needed to be removed. The total variance explained is shown in [Table 1](#).

Table 1

Explained Variance of Extracted Components

Component	Initial Eigenvalues	Initial Variance %	Cumulative Initial Variance %	Total of Extracted Sums of Squared Loadings	Variance of Extracted Sums of Squared Loadings %	Cumulative Extracted Sums of Squared Loadings %	Total of Rotated Sums of Squared Loadings	Variance of Rotated Sums of Squared Loadings %	Cumulative Rotated Sums of Squared Loadings %
1	35.213	54.174	54.174	35.312	54.174	54.174	10.195	15.685	15.685
2	2.482	3.818	57.992	2.482	3.818	57.992	8.884	13.668	29.352
3	2.696	4.137	62.129	2.696	4.137	62.129	6.112	9.403	38.755
4	1.381	2.125	64.254	1.381	2.125	64.254	5.448	8.381	47.137
5	1.327	2.042	66.296	1.327	2.042	66.296	5.418	8.335	55.472
6	1.207	1.856	68.152	1.207	1.856	68.152	4.325	6.653	62.125
7	1.133	1.743	69.895	1.133	1.743	69.895	4.113	6.328	68.453
8	1.129	1.529	71.424	1.129	1.529	71.424	3.608	5.543	70.228
9	1.121	1.406	72.830	1.121	1.406	72.830	3.318	5.104	71.781
10	1.118	1.284	74.114	1.118	1.284	74.114	3.030	4.662	73.111
11	1.109	1.185	75.299	1.109	1.185	75.299	2.796	4.303	74.262
12	1.100	1.167	76.466	1.100	1.167	76.466	2.754	4.235	75.381
13	1.098	1.112	77.578	1.098	1.112	77.578	2.624	4.033	76.399
14	1.092	1.076	78.654	1.092	1.076	78.654	2.539	3.906	77.392
15	1.050	0.994	79.648	1.050	0.994	79.648	2.346	3.605	78.207
16	0.994	0.788	80.436						
17	0.914	0.723	81.159						
18	0.835	0.661	81.820						
19	0.770	0.610	82.430						
20	0.758	0.601	83.031						
...						
64	0.028	0.048	99.963						
65	0.022	0.037	100.000						

As shown in [Table 1](#), the first 15 components have eigenvalues greater than one and remain in the analysis. These factors explain approximately 78.20% of the variance in the dimensions and components of ethical education in the second cycle of secondary schools. To investigate the nature of the relationships between variables and to achieve definitions and naming of components, coefficients greater

than 0.4 in the definition of components are important and significant, while coefficients lower than this threshold are considered random factors. For the interpretation of factors, researchers have used a minimum coefficient of 0.40. Finally, through exploratory factor analysis after rotation, 15 components and 65 indicators were identified, as reported in [Table 2](#).

Table 2

Extracted Components after Exploratory Factor Analysis

Dimension	Component	Number of Indicators
Learning	Educator	5
	Curriculum	5
	Classroom Climate	5
	Management	5
Civil	Synergy	4
	Empathy	3
	Trust	3
	Mutual Respect	4
Environmental	Ethical Climate	5
	Encouragement and Discipline	3
	Parents' Financial and Academic Ability	4
	Socioeconomic Environment	5
Value-based	Religious Beliefs	5
	Religious Values	4
	Modesty	5

As seen in Table 2, after using exploratory factor analysis and Varimax rotation, 15 components and 65 indicators were identified. Based on the identified components, the final conceptual model of the research is reported in Figure 1.

To determine the current status of the identified dimensions and components in ethical education, considering the normal distribution of data and the interval scale of variables, a one-sample t-test was used.

Table 3

One-Sample t-Test to Assess the Current Status of Ethical Education Components (Test Value = 3)

Component	t-value	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
Teacher	10.574	299	0.000	0.481	0.392	0.571
Curriculum	2.892	299	0.004	0.138	0.044	0.232
Classroom Climate	10.482	299	0.000	0.453	0.368	0.538
School Management	4.414	299	0.000	0.229	0.127	0.331
Educational Factors	7.630	299	0.000	0.325	0.241	0.409
Group Values	3.048	299	0.003	0.153	0.054	0.252
Empathy	1.763	299	0.009	0.088	0.010	0.186
Social Trust	8.378	299	0.000	0.401	0.307	0.495
Mutual Respect	7.193	299	0.000	0.328	0.239	0.418
Social Factors	5.427	299	0.000	0.243	0.55	0.331
Ethical Climate	6.199	299	0.000	0.259	0.177	0.342
Encouragement and Discipline	4.243	299	0.000	0.189	0.101	0.277
Parents' Education and Income Level	4.687	299	0.000	0.212	0.123	0.301
Individual's Socioeconomic Status	6.341	299	0.000	0.288	0.199	0.377
Environmental Factors	5.830	299	0.000	0.237	0.157	0.317
Adherence to Religious Values	8.881	299	0.000	0.406	0.316	0.496
Religious Beliefs	7.805	299	0.000	0.363	0.272	0.455
Modesty	2.456	299	0.015	0.110	0.022	0.198
Value Factors	6.934	299	0.000	0.293	0.210	0.376

As shown in Table 3, the significance level for all dimensions and components is less than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected with 95% confidence, and the research hypothesis is confirmed. Additionally, given the positive mean differences, it is inferred that the status of the dimensions and components is favorable.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to determine the suitability of the conceptual model. CFA, after identifying the pre-experimental factors through determining the model's fit indices, tests the optimal match between the observed factor structures and the theoretical structures for the dataset. The most important indices

considered include the RMSEA index, which should be less than 0.08 for good models, and the GFI (Goodness-of-Fit Index) and AGFI (Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index), which should be equal to or greater than 0.90 for the model to be accepted. Additionally, the Chi-square/df ratio should be less than 3. In this study, the RMSEA was 0.38, the GFI was

0.89, the AGFI was 0.92, and the Chi-square/df ratio was 2.53, indicating that the model presented in this study has a desirable fit. In this study, all factor loadings were favorable, indicating the ability to measure the dimensions of ethical education effectively.

Figure 1

Final Conceptual Model of The Study



4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to develop a model for the enhancement of sound ethics in the secondary schools of Shahr-e Kord County, utilizing a mixed-methods approach that combined both qualitative and quantitative data. The results of this study revealed a multi-dimensional model of

ethical education that includes learning, civil, environmental, and value-based dimensions, with 15 key components and 65 specific indicators identified through exploratory factor analysis. These findings provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the factors that

contribute to the promotion of ethical behavior among students in educational settings.

The findings of this study align with previous research that emphasizes the importance of a holistic approach to ethical education. The identification of learning components, such as the role of educators, curriculum, classroom climate, and school management, underscores the critical role that educational structures and processes play in shaping students' ethical development (Azizi, 2024; Boroujeni et al., 2013). This is consistent with the findings of Boozaripour et al. (2017), who highlighted the significance of ethical values in nursing education, indicating that the ethical climate and the moral behavior of educators have a direct impact on students' ethical perceptions and actions (Boozaripour et al., 2017).

The civil dimension, which includes components such as synergy, empathy, social trust, and mutual respect, reflects the social aspect of ethical education. This is in line with the findings of Asare et al. (2022), who emphasized the importance of social interactions in healthcare ethics, noting that the attitudes and behaviors of individuals within a community significantly influence ethical outcomes (Asare et al., 2022). The inclusion of civil components in the model suggests that ethical education should not be limited to formal instruction but should also encompass the broader social environment in which students interact.

The environmental dimension, which encompasses ethical climate, parental financial and academic ability, and socioeconomic environment, highlights the influence of external factors on ethical education. This finding is supported by the work of Khajehpour (2023), who found that the ethical climate in educational institutions is a significant determinant of students' moral behavior (Khajehpour, 2023). The role of parents and the socioeconomic context also align with the research of Dehghani (2019), who identified the broader social and economic environment as a key factor in the development of professional ethics among students (Dehghani, 2019).

The value-based dimension, which includes religious beliefs, religious values, and modesty, emphasizes the importance of aligning ethical education with cultural and religious values. This is particularly relevant in the Iranian context, where religious values play a significant role in shaping ethical norms (Khalili et al., 2021). The findings of this study are consistent with those of Shahriari et al. (2011), who proposed codes of ethics for Iranian nurses that incorporate religious values as a core component (Shahriari et al., 2011). This suggests that ethical education models in

Iran should be culturally sensitive and reflective of the religious beliefs that underpin the moral framework of the society.

The confirmatory factor analysis further validated the proposed model, with all factor loadings showing strong correlations, indicating that the identified components are reliable indicators of the dimensions of ethical education. The goodness-of-fit indices, including RMSEA, GFI, and AGFI, demonstrated that the model has an acceptable fit with the data, suggesting that the proposed model can be effectively applied in the context of secondary schools in Shahr-e Kord County.

The results of this study are consistent with the findings of previous research that emphasizes the multifaceted nature of ethical education. For example, Dehghani (2019) found that professional ethics development in students is influenced by a range of factors, including the educational environment, social interactions, and broader cultural values (Dehghani, 2019). Similarly, the study by Milliken (2016) on nurse ethical sensitivity highlighted the importance of a comprehensive approach to ethics education that includes both formal instruction and the cultivation of an ethical climate (Milliken, 2016).

The civil dimension identified in this study aligns with the findings of Porr (2023), who explored the ethical conflicts experienced by community nurses and found that social trust and mutual respect were critical in resolving ethical dilemmas (Porr, 2023). This suggests that fostering a supportive and empathetic social environment within schools can enhance students' ability to navigate ethical challenges.

The environmental dimension of the model is supported by the work of Bagherinia et al. (2022), who found that the socioeconomic status of students' families plays a significant role in their adherence to ethical standards (Bagherinia et al., 2022). The findings of this study suggest that ethical education programs should consider the socioeconomic context of students and provide additional support to those from disadvantaged backgrounds to ensure that they have the resources and opportunities to develop sound ethical values.

The value-based dimension, particularly the emphasis on religious beliefs, is consistent with the findings of Khalili et al. (2021), who compared religious education in Iran and Finland and found that religious values are deeply embedded in the ethical frameworks of both countries (Khalili et al., 2021). This suggests that ethical education in Iran should be closely aligned with religious teachings to ensure that it resonates with students' cultural and moral beliefs.

Overall, the results of this study contribute to the existing literature by providing a comprehensive and context-specific model for ethical education in secondary schools. The alignment of the study's findings with previous research underscores the validity of the proposed model and highlights the importance of a multi-dimensional approach to ethical education.

While this study provides valuable insights into the development of a model for ethical education in secondary schools, it is not without its limitations. First, the study was conducted in a specific geographic and cultural context—Shahr-e Kord County in Iran—which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions or countries. The cultural and religious values that underpin the ethical framework in Iran may differ significantly from those in other contexts, which could impact the applicability of the model in different settings.

Second, the study relied on self-reported data from participants, which may be subject to biases such as social desirability bias, where participants may have provided responses that they believed were socially acceptable rather than reflecting their true beliefs and behaviors. Additionally, the sample size, particularly in the qualitative phase, was relatively small, which may limit the robustness of the findings. Although purposive sampling was used to select participants with relevant expertise, the small sample size may not fully capture the diversity of perspectives within the education sector.

Third, the study's cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causality between the identified components and ethical outcomes. Longitudinal studies are needed to examine how the implementation of the proposed model impacts students' ethical behavior over time. Moreover, the study focused primarily on secondary school students, which may not fully capture the ethical development that occurs at earlier or later stages of education.

Future research should aim to address the limitations identified in this study by conducting similar studies in different geographic and cultural contexts to test the generalizability of the proposed model. Comparative studies that examine the effectiveness of the model in different countries or regions would provide valuable insights into how cultural and religious values influence ethical education.

Additionally, future research should consider using larger and more diverse samples to capture a wider range of perspectives within the education sector. Expanding the sample size in both the qualitative and quantitative phases

would enhance the robustness of the findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that contribute to ethical education.

Longitudinal studies are also recommended to examine the long-term impact of the proposed model on students' ethical behavior. Tracking students' ethical development over time would provide valuable data on the effectiveness of the model and identify any areas for improvement. Furthermore, future research could explore the integration of ethical education at different stages of education, from primary school through to higher education, to develop a more holistic understanding of ethical development across the lifespan.

The findings of this study have important implications for educational practice. First, schools should prioritize the integration of ethical education into their curricula by adopting the multi-dimensional model proposed in this study. This model provides a comprehensive framework for promoting ethical behavior among students by addressing the educational, social, environmental, and value-based dimensions of ethical development. Educators should be trained in ethical education and equipped with the tools and resources needed to effectively implement the model in their classrooms.

Second, schools should foster a supportive and empathetic social environment that encourages students to engage in ethical behavior. This can be achieved by promoting synergy, empathy, social trust, and mutual respect within the school community. Schools should also engage parents and the broader community in ethical education efforts to ensure that students receive consistent messages about ethical behavior both at school and at home.

Finally, schools should be mindful of the socioeconomic context of their students and provide additional support to those from disadvantaged backgrounds. This could include providing financial assistance, academic support, and access to resources that enable all students to participate fully in ethical education programs. By addressing the broader social and economic factors that influence ethical development, schools can help ensure that all students have the opportunity to develop sound ethical values and behaviors.

In conclusion, the development of a multi-dimensional model for ethical education in secondary schools represents a significant contribution to the field of education and sociology. The findings of this study provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the factors that contribute to ethical behavior among students and offer practical guidance for educators and policymakers seeking

to enhance ethical education in schools. By addressing the limitations of this study and pursuing further research, the field can continue to refine and improve models of ethical education to better serve students in diverse educational contexts.

Authors' Contributions

All authors significantly contributed to this study.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

In this study, to observe ethical considerations, participants were informed about the goals and importance of the research before the start of the interview and participated in the research with informed consent.

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