

Examining the Impact of Professional Ethics on the Psychological Well-Being of Accountants

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ABSTRACT

Considering the nature of professional ethics in an accounting system and the emphasis on psychological well-being, the aim of this study was to examine the impact of professional ethics on the psychological well-being of accountants. The statistical population of this descriptive-correlational study included all certified accountants of Iran Khodro Company, totaling 10,000 individuals, based on a human resources inquiry in the company in 2024. The sample size was determined to be 373 individuals using Cochran's formula and selected through a simple random sampling method. In this study, standardized questionnaires of Kaduzier's Professional Ethics (2002) and Psychological Well-Being (1980) were used for data collection. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS statistical software and AMOS software. The results showed that the standardized path coefficient between the variable of professional ethics and psychological well-being was 0.72, indicating the impact of professional ethics on psychological well-being. Additionally, the t-statistic was approximately 8.517, which, in addition to being greater than the critical value of 1.96, also surpassed 2.58. Consequently, it can be concluded with at least 95% confidence that there is a significant relationship between professional ethics and psychological well-being. Overall, it can be concluded that adherence to professional ethics has a positive and significant effect on the psychological well-being of accountants. Therefore, organizations can utilize these findings to develop strategies for strengthening ethical values and creating a positive work environment to enhance both the productivity and performance quality of accountants and the long-term sustainability and success of the organization.

Keywords: Professional Ethics, Psychological Well-Being, Accountants.

1. Introduction

In today's high-stress and challenging work environments, the importance of employees' psychological well-being, especially in high-pressure jobs, has become more evident (Lee et al., 2024). Psychological well-being encompasses various aspects of mental health, such as job satisfaction, self-confidence, a sense of belonging, and purpose in work, and it significantly influences individual quality of life and organizational productivity. Accountants, as professionals with heavy responsibilities and high sensitivity, are directly affected by these factors (Cho & Jeon, 2019). They must manage sensitive and complex activities with precision, integrity, and adherence to financial regulations. Consequently, the psychological stress and pressures from the need for accuracy and precision, alongside organizational expectations and legal requirements, make accountants face more psychological challenges than other professions (Powell et al., 2023). These challenges may lead to increased stress, job burnout, and even psychological and ethical conflicts, all of which impact accountants' mental health and productivity. Considering the significant impact of these factors on accountants' professional performance and their side effects on the organization, focusing on their psychological well-being is essential.

Psychological well-being in the workplace has extensive impacts on the quality and accuracy of accountants' performance. The accounting profession involves sensitive and complex responsibilities that require detailed analysis, processing financial information, and adherence to legal requirements and professional standards (Chow et al., 2018). Due to these complexities, accountants are often under time pressure and heavy workloads, which can raise stress levels and negatively affect work quality and mental health. When accountants enjoy good psychological well-being, they perform their tasks with greater focus and precision. Higher job satisfaction and self-confidence enable them to handle stressful situations and challenges effectively, making smarter decisions (Jarden et al., 2020). This also prevents job burnout, which is a common problem in this profession. Accountants with better mental health tend to be more committed to their work, have a higher spirit of collaboration, and show greater willingness to learn and keep their skills up to date (Cooke et al., 2019).

Furthermore, accountants with high psychological well-being can communicate more effectively with stakeholders, managers, and other organizational members. These

communication skills are crucial for clarifying reports and financial decisions, as accountants must present complex financial information in a simple and understandable way for other departments to use in strategic decision-making. Enhancing psychological well-being can improve trust and transparency within the organization, ultimately contributing to overall organizational performance (Gillet et al., 2018). In summary, accountants' psychological well-being plays a vital role in increasing productivity, improving work relationships, reducing financial errors, and creating a positive and dynamic environment. Organizations can invest in this area to achieve long-term sustainability and success (Erickson Cornish et al., 2019).

On the other hand, professional ethics for accountants constitute a set of principles and values that help them make fair, responsible, and correct decisions in the workplace. These principles provide accountants with an ethical framework that guides their behaviors, communications, and decision-making along principled and trustworthy paths (Svenaeus, 2020). Adherence to professional ethics aids accountants in acting with honesty and accountability when faced with complex and sensitive situations (Clair et al., 2023). Professional ethics can foster an environment of trust and transparency in the workplace, as accountants who uphold these principles demonstrate to clients, colleagues, and organizational stakeholders that they are trustworthy and care about the collective interests and organizational health. Acting ethically reduces work pressures and psychological stress, as accountants no longer need to comply with inappropriate requests or make unethical decisions (Breslin et al., 2023). As a result, instead of facing internal tension and ethical dilemmas, they experience satisfaction and calmness in their work, positively affecting both their professional and personal lives. Conversely, a lack of professional ethics or failure to adhere to them can create internal and psychological conflicts (Varelius, 2019). When accountants are forced to make decisions against illegal or unethical requests, they experience anxiety and stress, lowering their job and life satisfaction. Such ethical conflicts may lead accountants to constant worry about the consequences of their decisions, causing them to lose self-confidence and a sense of belonging to their profession (Moreno-Milan et al., 2021). Therefore, professional ethics are not only essential from a legal and job requirement perspective but also have a direct impact on accountants' mental health, job satisfaction, and well-being. They are recognized as a key factor in reducing job stress and

enhancing motivation and quality of professional life (Sen & Yildirim, 2023).

In today's work environment, the importance of psychological well-being alongside professional ethics is particularly apparent in professions like accounting, which involve work pressures, legal requirements, and precise expectations (Kanso et al., 2024). Accountants, due to the sensitive nature of their responsibilities and the large volume of information they handle, often face stress, burnout, and ethical conflicts that can negatively impact their mental health and performance quality (Hughes & Rushton, 2022). This research investigates the role of professional ethics in improving accountants' psychological well-being. Adherence to ethical principles not only helps increase workplace trust and improve professional relationships but also reduces psychological conflicts and job stress, leading to higher job satisfaction and work commitment. Examining this relationship can aid organizations in developing supportive programs and creating a healthy and dynamic environment, thereby enhancing accountants' productivity, workforce sustainability, and performance quality.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This research is categorized as a descriptive study based on the data collection method, using path analysis to test the relationships between variables and the significance of the estimated models. The study is applied in terms of its objective and descriptive-correlational in terms of information collection. To achieve this, a questionnaire was utilized to describe and analyze the research variables. The statistical population of this study consisted of 10,000 certified accountants from Iran Khodro Company, as reported by the company's human resources department in 2024. Using Cochran's formula, a sample size of 373 participants was selected through a simple random sampling method. Data were collected using a survey questionnaire.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Professional Ethics

The Professional Ethics Questionnaire was developed by Kaduzier in 2002, consisting of 16 questions that measure professional ethics across eight dimensions: responsibility (questions 1, 2), honesty (questions 3, 4), justice and fairness (questions 5, 6), loyalty (questions 7, 8), competitiveness and striving for excellence (questions 9, 10), respect for

others (questions 11, 12), empathy (questions 13, 14), and adherence to social values and norms (questions 15, 16). The questionnaire is scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Very Low" (1 point) to "Very High" (5 points). To interpret and analyze the questionnaire, the scores from the 16 items are summed, with a minimum possible score of 16 and a maximum of 80. Scores between 16 and 32 indicate weak professional ethics, scores between 32 and 48 represent moderate professional ethics, and scores above 48 indicate very good professional ethics. The reliability of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which was reported as 0.84 in Kaduzier's study. The validity and reliability of Kaduzier's Professional Ethics Questionnaire have been confirmed (Rahmdel et al., 2019).

2.2.2. Psychological Well-Being

The Psychological Well-Being Questionnaire was designed by Ryff in 1980. The original form contained 120 items, but subsequent reviews led to shorter versions of 84, 54, and 18 items. This study used the 18-item short form, which measures six components: self-acceptance, autonomy, positive relations with others, purpose in life, environmental mastery, and personal growth. This is a self-assessment tool with responses on a 6-point continuum from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" (1 to 6). Notably, items 1, 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 13, and 17 are reverse-scored. Each of the six components is assessed with three questions, and there is an overall score. A higher score indicates higher psychological well-being. Ryff validated the instrument by examining its relationship with measures that assess personality traits and psychological well-being indices, such as Bradburn's Affect Balance Scale (1969), Neugarten's Life Satisfaction Index (1965), and Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (1965). The correlations were deemed acceptable, establishing the construct validity of the tool. Cronbach's alpha coefficients reported in Ryff's 1989 study were: self-acceptance (0.93), positive relations with others (0.91), autonomy (0.86), environmental mastery (0.90), and personal growth (0.87) (Taghipour et al., 2019).

2.3. Data analysis

SPSS version 20 and AMOS version 26 software were used for data processing and statistical analysis. An alpha level of $p \leq 0.05$ was considered significant.

3. Findings and Results

According to Table 1, the mean score for the variable of professional ethics, as reported by respondents, is 3.82 with a standard deviation of 0.471. Additionally, the lowest score pertains to the variable "Justice and Fairness," with a mean of 3.30, while the highest score pertains to the variable

"Loyalty," with a mean of 4.20. Similarly, the mean score for psychological well-being, as reported by respondents, is 3.67 with a standard deviation of 0.3516. The lowest score pertains to the variable "Self-Acceptance," with a mean of 3.05, and the highest score pertains to the variable "Personal Growth," with a mean of 4.05.

Table 1

Statistical Description of Professional Ethics and Psychological Well-Being Variables

Variables	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Responsibility	373	4.10	0.631	-0.975	0.392
Honesty	373	3.75	0.762	-0.419	0.087
Justice and Fairness	373	3.30	1.018	-0.104	-1.625
Loyalty	373	4.20	0.910	-1.148	0.872
Competitiveness and Striving	373	4.04	0.633	-1.144	-1.175
Respect for Others	373	3.42	0.511	-0.443	0.414
Empathy	373	3.92	0.703	-0.921	-0.121
Respect for Social Norms	373	3.85	0.452	-1.462	-1.467
Professional Ethics	373	3.82	0.471	-1.943	-1.632
Self-Acceptance	373	3.05	0.5101	-0.878	-1.704
Positive Relations with Others	373	3.72	0.5153	-0.953	-1.900
Autonomy	373	3.54	0.6176	-0.593	-0.336
Environmental Mastery	373	3.89	0.4415	-1.026	-1.546
Purpose in Life	373	3.81	0.7241	-2.355	-1.111
Personal Growth	373	4.05	0.7909	0.7909	1.072
Psychological Well-Being	373	3.67	0.3516	0.3516	1.429

To identify and categorize factors, exploratory factor analysis was used. Initially, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) sampling adequacy test was conducted, yielding a value of 0.851, indicating the sample size was suitable for factor analysis. To ensure the correlations among the test items were not equal to zero in the population, Bartlett's test of sphericity was employed, yielding statistically significant results at the 95% confidence level. Bartlett's test results confirmed that the questionnaire items had sufficient

correlations to form factors, permitting the use of factor analysis in this study. These results are shown in Table 2. Given that the KMO index is close to 1, the sample size is adequate for factor analysis. Moreover, based on Bartlett's test results (p-value < 0.05), exploratory factor analysis is suitable for identifying the structure. Four factors had eigenvalues greater than 1, explaining a total of 85% of the variance across the 67 items studied.

Table 2

KMO and Bartlett's Test Results

Indicator	KMO Value	Bartlett's Value	Sig	Conclusion
Value	0.851	8452.23	0.000	Confirmed

To determine whether the factors are independent of each other, varimax rotation was used. In Table 3, the varimax loadings indicate which variables are associated with each

factor. The rotated matrix also shows which questions are linked to the defined factors based on factor loadings.

Table 3

Statistical Indicators for Research Variables After Varimax Rotation

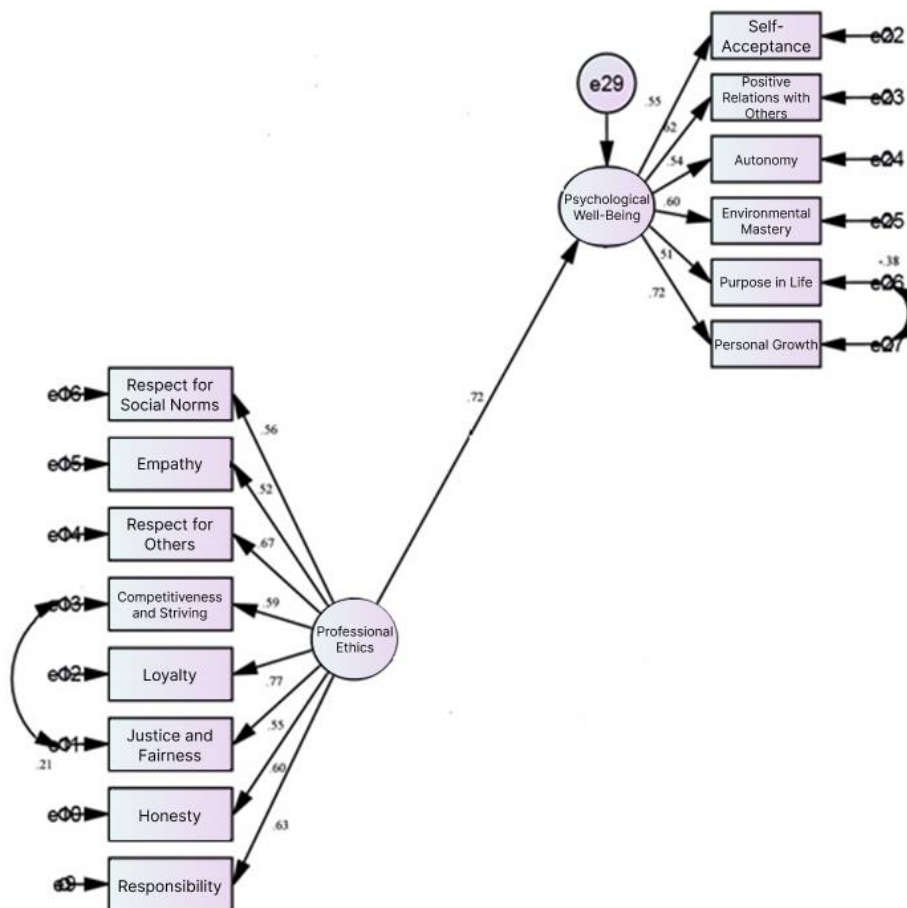
Factor	Conceptualization	Correlation Level	Number of Questions
Factor 1	Professional Ethics	0.736	16
Factor 2	Psychological Well-Being	0.737	18

According to Figure 1, the factor loadings for each component of the variables can be observed. The coefficient of determination ranges between zero and one, with values closer to one indicating greater explained variance. The estimated t-values indicate the significance of the

relationships in the model. The t-values are used to judge the significance of relationships: if the t-values fall between -1.96 and +1.96, the coefficients are not significant, leading to the rejection of the hypotheses. If they fall outside this range, the relationships are significant.

Figure 1

Structural Model in Standard Estimation Mode



The test results are presented in Table 4. According to these results, the standardized path coefficient between professional ethics and psychological well-being is 0.72, indicating a significant impact of professional ethics on psychological well-being. As observed, the t-value is

approximately 8.517, which is greater than both the critical value of 1.96 and 2.58. Consequently, it can be concluded with at least 95% confidence that there is a significant relationship between professional ethics and psychological well-being.

Table 4

Direct Effect Coefficient and Significance Values for Research Indicators

Indicators	Direct Effect Coefficient	p	t-value	Conclusion
Professional Ethics >>>> Psychological Well-Being	0.72	<0.01	8.517	Confirmed

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the research indicate that adherence to principles of professional ethics can have a direct effect on reducing psychological stress among accountants. These findings align with the prior studies (Cooke et al., 2019; Sen & Yildirim, 2023). Based on the results of this study, it can be stated that accountants operate with greater confidence in their decisions when they adhere to ethical principles. Adherence to ethical principles is beneficial for accountants in two ways: first, it reduces the psychological pressures associated with ethical dilemmas or difficult decisions because accountants no longer face conflicts between job requirements and their own ethical values; second, adherence to ethical principles fosters a sense of commitment and loyalty to the profession and the organization, which in turn reduces stress and enhances job satisfaction (Kanso et al., 2024). These findings also suggest that when accountants work in an environment with clear and reliable ethical standards, they feel more at ease and less psychologically pressured. This type of ethical environment and adherence to professional principles prevent issues such as chronic stress, anxiety, and job burnout, as accountants focus on fulfilling their responsibilities transparently and ethically rather than trying to comply with unethical or unreasonable demands (Sen & Yildirim, 2023). These results highlight the importance of establishing and promoting ethical frameworks in accounting workplaces, as such frameworks not only enhance the mental health and well-being of accountants but also help organizations improve productivity, reduce financial errors, and increase trust and transparency (Breslin et al., 2023).

Adherence to professional ethics in the workplace not only improves mental health and individual performance but also plays a crucial role in strengthening professional relationships and a sense of belonging among employees. The findings are consistent with the prior studies (Moreno-Milan et al., 2021; Svenaeus, 2020). When accountants work in an environment where ethical principles are well-observed and justice is evident in decision-making, they feel greater security and respect in their work. This leads to a stronger sense of trust and loyalty to the organization

because they are assured that the workplace supports them as professionals and recognizes their ethical values (Chow et al., 2018). In such an environment, accountants feel that the organization values their professional principles and ethics, which boosts their job commitment and motivation. Additionally, the trust and sense of belonging that result from adherence to professional ethics lead to greater empathy and support among colleagues (Moreno-Milan et al., 2021). This empathy, particularly when facing challenges and work pressures, helps accountants avoid feelings of isolation and burnout, reinforcing their confidence in their position within the organization and their individual capabilities. As a result, work relationships improve, as people operate in an environment where shared ethical values and standards are accepted as organizational norms (Gillet et al., 2018). This ethical and fair work environment creates a positive organizational atmosphere where accountants and other employees are encouraged to collaborate, consult, and support one another rather than engage in unhealthy competition and individualism.

This research has limitations that may affect the generalizability of its findings. One limitation is the narrow scope of the study population, as it only includes accountants from Iran Khodro Company, and the results may not be applicable to accountants in different contexts and organizations. Additionally, the use of self-reported measures to assess psychological well-being and adherence to professional ethics may be influenced by response biases and personal inclinations. Furthermore, this research does not account for other individual and organizational variables that could impact psychological well-being and professional ethics.

Organizations can develop and implement training programs to familiarize accountants with professional ethics and the positive effects on mental health and job satisfaction. Establishing clear and mandatory ethical codes can also assist accountants in making professional and ethical decisions. Strengthening an organizational culture based on ethical values and providing a fair and supportive environment is essential for improving accountants' work experiences. Conducting specialized workshops to enhance

skills for managing work pressure and stress can reduce the likelihood of job burnout. Providing support structures, such as psychological counseling and discussion sessions, especially when facing ethical challenges, is another measure organizations can take. Moreover, organizational managers should continuously assess working conditions and the psychological needs of accountants to identify and address factors that affect their well-being and performance quality.

In conclusion, this research demonstrates that adherence to professional ethics has a significant and positive impact on accountants' psychological well-being. Commitment to ethical principles not only prevents internal conflicts and psychological stress but also enhances accountants' sense of trust, belonging, and job security. Accountants working in an ethically focused environment are more motivated and satisfied, experiencing lower levels of stress and burnout. These findings underscore the importance of organizational investment in fostering an ethical culture. Supporting ethical principles in the workplace can improve mental health, increase job satisfaction, and boost employee commitment. Therefore, organizations can use these findings to develop strategies that strengthen ethical values and create a positive work environment, thereby enhancing both accountants' productivity and performance quality and the long-term sustainability and success of the organization.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

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

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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