

## Ethics in Occupational Therapy Research in Iran: A Scoping Review

Moslem Cheraghi Fard<sup>1</sup>, Arian Shamili<sup>1</sup>, Fatemeh Motahari Nejad<sup>1</sup>, Soraya Gharebagh<sup>1</sup>,  
Narges Shafaroodi<sup>\*2</sup> 

1. PhD Student in Occupational Therapy, Faculty of Rehabilitation, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran
2. PhD in Occupational Therapy, Faculty of Rehabilitation, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran

### Article Info

Received: 2018/05/13  
Accepted: 2018/08/10  
Published Online: 2018/09/27

DOI: 10.30699/fdisj.1.3.1.1

### How to Cite This Article

Cheraghi Fard M, Shamili A, Motahari Nejad F, Gharebagh S, Shafaroodi N. Ethics in Occupational Therapy Research in Iran: A Scoping Review. *Func Disabil J.* 2018; 1 (3) :1-9

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### ABSTRACT

**Background and Objectives:** Ethics is an important issue in various scientific fields, including rehabilitation and occupational therapy. Since ethics can be affected by the environment, culture, and religion, there was a need to identify a systematic examination of the published literature about ethics in occupational therapy in Iran. Therefore, the purpose of this scoping review was to identify, summarize, and describe existing literature on ethic in occupational therapy in Iran.

**Methods:** A scoping review was conducted based on the five steps framework of Arksey and O'Malley. Two researchers separately searched international and Iranian database by using relative keywords for articles published from January 2000 to February 2019.

**Results:** After considering the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the founded articles, seven articles were selected for evaluating the scoping review. Three articles have been performed quantitatively and four articles have been done qualitatively.

**Conclusion:** The lack of sufficient studies in the field of ethics in occupational therapy shown that it doesn't take an important place in the following area of research. Therefore, this scoping review revealed the need for the conduction of extensive studies and further research in this area.

**Keywords:** Ethics, Occupational Therapy, Review

### Corresponding information:

Narges Shafaroodi, PhD in Occupational Therapy, Faculty of Rehabilitation, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran. Email: shafarodi.n@iums.ac.ir Tel: 0098+21-22228051

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## Introduction

Medical ethics is a science that evaluates the relationship between patients and health care teams. This science is an interdisciplinary knowledge about ethical issues and subjects in the field of medical sciences. The issues and topics related to this in the various branches of medical sciences such as a rehabilitation course is considered (Adel & Ataei, 2012).

Rehabilitation is a set of coordinated treatment, educational, vocational, and social services and practices which is provided for disabled individuals to improve

his or her performance to the highest possible level to achieve an independent life in the society (Karimi Dermani, 2006). Rehabilitation services play an important role in promoting the quality of life as well as improving the health of individuals in society. The final purpose of the rehabilitation course is the empowerment and self-sufficiency of people with disabilities (Mirkhani, 2006). It is obvious that this goal is achieved in compliance with the ethics in providing rehabilitation services to people.

Occupational therapy is one of the rehabilitation

fields that many people may need its services. According to the World Federation of Occupational Therapy (WFOT), occupational therapy is a specialty in the health care system with the client-centered view, trying to improve the recovery and well-being of the client through occupation and purposeful activities (WFOT, 2012). The professional ethics and the standardized ethics help achieve an increased level of confidence between clients and experts of occupational therapy (AOTA, 2004). In 2011, Galheigo reported that the occupational therapists and investigators of this field should be sensitive to human rights issues and that they should provide a supportive environment that facilitates the efforts of the patients for their engagement in health care services (Galheigo, 2011).

At present, people's general knowledge about health care services and clients' rights has increased. Respecting the client's rights can help to increase satisfaction of both clients and the healthcare team. However, failure to comply with these rights result in distrust between the clients and healthcare team (Kyler-Hutchison, 1998; Dehghan, et al., 2013).

Although certain ethical codes have been adjusted and approved for occupational therapy services by the Occupational Therapy Society in some developed countries, no curriculum or ethical approval for occupational therapy has been registered in any countries except Iran (Galheigo, 2011). The aim of this scoping review study is to report and explain the studies and articles in the field of ethics in occupational therapy that have been carried out in Iran.

## **Materials and Methods**

A scoping review method was used to map relevant literature. We chose this type of review because scoping reviews are useful when reviewed in an area not done comprehensively before. Many different study designs are employed (Rumrill, et al., 2010), especially in newer topics which lack the randomized controlled trials, making it difficult to undertake systematic reviews. Moreover, scoping reviews are more time and cost effective than full systematic reviews (Levac, et al., 2010).

The scoping review provides an overview about the

current state of research in the reviews of the considered area (Levac, et al., 2010). In addition, identifying the research gap is one of the most common reason for performing these kinds of review studies (Wagman, et al., 2015).

The present review has used the five step framework of Arksey and O'Malley (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). These steps are: identification of the research question, identification of related studies, selection of studies, data tabulation, summarization, and result reports.

### **Identifying the Question**

Until now the literature of occupational therapy in Iran has not fully addressed the concept and place of ethics. In addition, the scope of research in this area is not clearly identified. Therefore, the present study has been conducted with the aim of evaluating the extent of the studies in this field, in addition to identifying research gaps in regards to scattered data in texts. This review study attempts to answer the following central question: what are the scope and dimensions of the studies on ethics in occupational therapy in Iran?

### **Identifying the Related Studies**

Two investigators separately searched international databases, such as PubMed, Medline, Google Scholar, ProQuest, CINAHEL, as well as Iranian databases, such as SID, Magiran, Medlib, ISC, Irandoc, and Iranmedex, using key words of occupational therapy, occupational therapist, ethic, ethics, Iran, Persian, in addition to its Persian equivalence in finding possible articles in the field of ethics in occupational therapy in Iran which have been written in English or Persian.

### **Selecting the Article**

For the published articles in Iran, the external and internal databases were searched from January 2000 to February 2019. The studies were excluded if in the forms of poster, lecture, and sole abstract (without the full text article).

### **Tabulation of Data**

In this step, the key sections of the information are provided and classified (Tables 1 and 2). This classification is categorized by the name of the authors, the

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year of publication, the participants, the sample volume, the methodology of the study, the type of data analysis, and the significant research results.

#### Summarizing and Reporting the Results

The obtained studies have been reported in two distinct qualitative and quantitative forms.

#### Results

Generally, 34 articles were found about occupational

therapy and ethics in Iran (figure 1). After considering the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the articles, seven articles were selected for the evaluation of the scoping review. The information related to the articles has been presented in Tables 1 and 2 using quantitative and qualitative methods, respectively. These articles have been published from 2011 to 2015. Amongst these articles, three articles have been conducted quantitatively and four articles qualitatively.

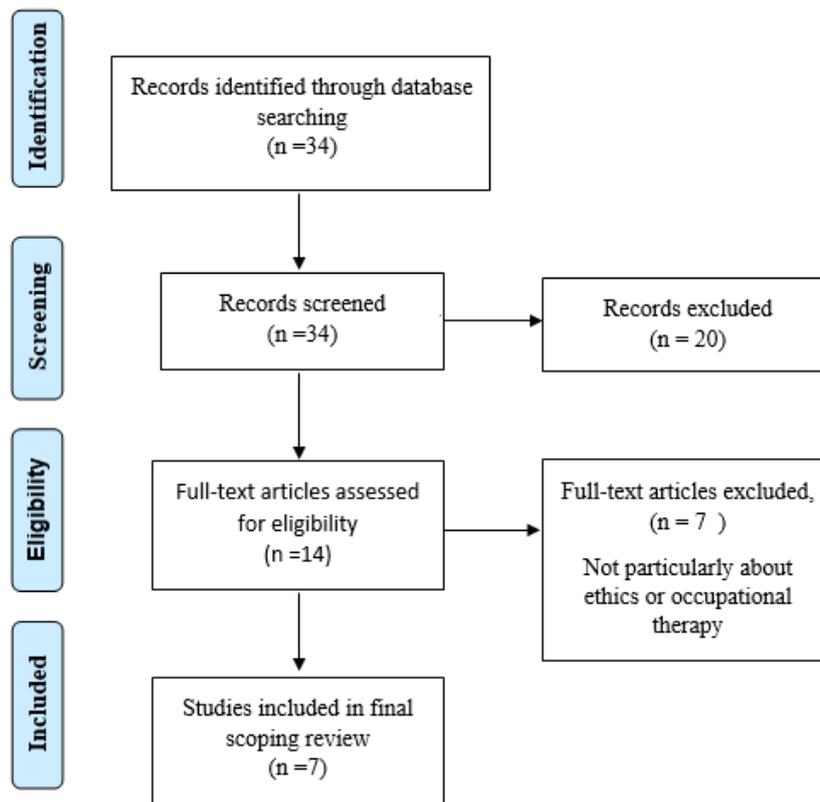


Figure 1. Flow Diagram

Table 1. The Quantitative Studies in the Field of Ethics in Occupational Therapy

Author (year)	Purpose	Method/material	Participants/number	Results
Vojdani et al. (2015)	The level of students' knowledge on patient rights	Cross sectional-descriptive/ Questionnaire of patient rights	The students of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation University of Sciences/ 70 people	8% had a poor level of knowledge, 90% had a moderate level of knowledge, and 1.4% had a good level of knowledge on patient rights. Most of the knowledge was related to field of service accessibility and the least was related to individual freedom.
Dehghan et al. (2013)	The level of occupational therapists' knowledge on patient rights	Cross sectional-descriptive study/ researcher-made questionnaire	Graduates in occupational therapy/ 125 people	53.6% of occupational therapists had a high level of knowledge on patient rights. There was not a significant correlation between work experience and knowledge on the rights of clients.

Author (year)	Purpose	Method/ Material	Participants/ Number	Results
Ghaleh Rashidi et al.(2011)	Evaluation of relationship between knowledge on patient rights and its compliance	Descriptive analytic- cross sectional/ researcher made questionnaire	Rehabilitation experts/ 62 people	59.7% of participants had a very good level of knowledge, 35.5% had a good level of knowledge, 5.3% had a moderate level of knowledge. The rates of compliance with patient rights were 79% at the level of moderate, 13.6% at the level of poor, and 8.5% at the level of good. There was a positive and significant correlation between the level of education and the rate in compliance with patient rights. The relation between knowledge on patient rights to its compliance was positive and significant.

Table 2. The Qualitative Studies in The Field of Ethics in Occupational Therapy

Author (year)	Purpose	Method	Participants/ Number	Results
Vahidi et al. (2015)	To recognize the immoral cases in the clinical practice of occupational therapists for adults with physical problems	Content analysis	Graduates of occupational therapy/ 10 people	The result of this study had four categories: deviation from the path of treatment (incorrect application of therapeutic interventions, being careless occupational therapy philosophy, invalid notification), neglecting the client benefits and the clients (lack of compassion, harm to clients, disregarding the patients' expectations), neglecting the principles of communication (communicating with clients, communicating with colleagues), and emphasizing on financial gains (payment of clients, payment of therapist, managerial programs of therapeutic centers) are considered as immoral cases in the clinical practice of occupational therapy for adults with physical disorders.
Kalantari et al. (2015)	To explain the perception of occupational therapist on professional ethics during work with children	Content analysis	Graduates of occupational therapy/ 10 people	The result of this study with three categories include: attention to personal characteristics (honesty, kindness, perception, and competence), responsibility to clients (equality, respect, confidentiality, discretion, profitability, lack of harmfulness), and professional responsibility (loyalty, improving professional knowledge, attempting to improve and develop the profession of occupational therapy) are considered as the perception of occupational therapists on professional ethics in their work with children.
Rezaei et al. (2014)	To explain the experience of occupational therapists on ethical problems in the field of mental health	Content analysis	Graduates of occupational therapy/ 20 people	The result of this study with four categories in 24 subclasses include: treatment tailored to patient characteristics (such as inappropriate referrals, not having a patient-centered approach, and etc.), to choose clients for occupational therapy services (such as psychiatrics' inappropriate attitude towards occupational therapy, and etc.), attitude and the manner of behavior to clients (lack of education on ethical standards, physical aggression, and etc.), comfort and well-being of patients and the quality of services (physical welfare, comfort in the environment, and psychological well-being) are considered as perceived ethical problems by occupational therapists.
Kalantari et al. (2015)	To find the effective factors of moral behavior of occupational therapists on children	Content analysis	Graduates of occupational therapy/ 12 people	The result of this study with four categories include: organizational factors (ethical principles, inadequate education, regulations and supervision, facilities, and workload), therapist related factors (personal characteristics, concerns, and eligibility), family problems and client conflicts ( family awareness and their views and beliefs), and social factors (support systems and moral values) are considered as effective factors on the ethical behavior of child occupational therapist.

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The purpose of the studies was to evaluate the level of knowledge of occupational therapist about patient rights in the various fields of occupational therapy and professional ethics. It was also to recognize immoral cases and its ethical problems, and to determine the factors affecting ethical behavior. Among seven studies, two studies have been conducted on children, one study on adult neurological problem, and three studies on all diagnostic groups in regards to the evaluation and determination of ethical problems of the therapists against different clients.

In the quantitative studies, the questionnaires have been used for the collection of data. Researcher-made questionnaire was used in two studies and questionnaire of the patient rights were used in one study. The content analysis was used as methodology in the qualitative studies.

Review of the studies demonstrated that the level of knowledge of the students of occupational therapy about patient rights was moderate. However, the level of knowledge of graduated occupational therapist about patient rights was reported at a worthy level (Vojdani, et al., 2015). Most knowledge about patient rights was related to patient privacy, such as the right of the patients to be taken care of regardless of any racial and cultural differences (Dehghan, et al., 2013). However, the results indicated that there wasn't a significant correlation between higher level of knowledge on patient rights and its compliance (Ghaleh-Rashidi, et al., 2011).

For determining the ethical challenges and difficulties, Vahidi et al. in their study, categorized the immoral behaviors of occupational therapists towards clients with physical disorders in four classes: deviation on the path of treatment, neglecting client benefits, disregarding principles of communication, and emphasizing on financial gain (Vahidi, et al., 2015). In occupational therapy for children, the problems were categorized in 3 classes: personal characteristics of the therapist, responsibility for clients, and professional responsibility (Kalantari, Kamali, et al., 2015).

In occupational therapy for adults with psychiatric disorders, there are some factors that affect the failure of compliance with ethical standards. This is the lack of general knowledge about psychiatric clients and the

unfamiliarity with professional ethics principals such as conflicts between therapists in the work place and the lack of adequate financial budget for solving the problems, selecting the best and the most effective intervention, inappropriate referral for occupational therapy services, inability in providing appropriate treatment due to limitations of the work environment, disagreement amongst therapists and other members of the therapeutic team. Disagreements between the therapist and clients or the therapist and the patient's family, overlapping tasks between specialists, lack of detailed job descriptions, failure of performance, and the failure to provide basic needs of therapists including physical and occupational security are the most important factors in the avoidance of ethical principles (Rezaee, et al., 2014).

In addition, the effective factors in respecting the ethical principals in occupational therapy for children are categorized into four classes: organizational factors (ethics, inadequate education, regulation and supervision, facilities, and workload), factors related to the therapist (personal characteristics, concerns, and eligibility), the patient's family problems (family awareness and their views and beliefs), and social factors (supportive systems and moral values) are considered as effective factors on the ethical behavior of occupational therapists (Kalantari, Kamali, et al., 2015).

### Discussion

The purpose of the present study is to identify and explain the studies that have been conducted in the field of ethics in occupational therapy in Iran with the aim of examining the research necessities in this area. It is concluded that only a few investigators have considered the ethics in occupational therapy in Iran. The ethical problems are common in rehabilitation centers due to the dynamic nature of these environments and the usage of the models and therapeutic approaches by rehabilitation therapists (Vahidi, et al., 2015).

The majority of the discussions related to ethics in occupational therapy have been investigated qualitatively, which is due to the abstract concept and the nature of morality (Vahidi, et al., 2015). Morality is a complex and subjective concept, which is less ad-

dressed in eastern societies and developing countries due to the lack of financial and human resources (experts) for studying the occupational sciences.

Some of these articles investigated the moral challenges in clinical occupational therapy and the main problems in the field of ethics (Vahidi, et al., 2015, Rezaee, et al., 2014). However, other papers have examined the other effective factors on observing the ethical principles. Many of these studies focused on the knowledge and understanding of the occupational therapists and students of rehabilitation on ethical issues and professional ethics. The important points in this research are the lack of knowledge on behalf of students and occupational therapists about professional ethics related to occupational therapy and the lack of comprehensive laws and regulations in the field, which is the main reason for the immoral actions of therapists. Therefore, education previous to vocation and academic educational programs can facilitate ethical decisions (Kirschner, et al., 2001). In Hansen's study, the most common ethical issues that are consistent with the evaluated studies are: deciding to choose the best and most effective intervention, inappropriate referral to occupational therapy services, failure to provide a suitable treatment, and disagreements between therapists and other members of the therapeutic team (Hansen, 1988). These are considered as results in the majority of the evaluated studies and they revealed the major moral problems and challenges of occupational therapists in the clinical practice. In addition, the studies specify the need for further separate research on each aspect of this area. As mentioned, academic educational programs are helpful, but are not sufficient. Therefore, comprehensive supervision is required in various aspects of this profession (Kirschner, et al., 2001).

Occupational therapists work in dynamic and complex situation and should be alter to ethical issues faced in everyday practice. Therapists, clients, and organizations play an important role in decreasing these issues. Therapists should continue to take ethical courses and workshops about ethics and try to be a moral agent. Organizations also need to implement

policies to facilitate ethical practices and maintain enough supervision on a therapist's work. In educational programs for occupational therapy, students should emphasize on ethics and resolving ethical issues. An increased level of patient awareness on their rights, such as with social media, is another factor that can facilitate ethical practices.

Since ethics can be affected by the environment, culture, and religion, it is suggested that this concept be studied in terms of the viewpoint of occupational therapists and clients in respect to their cultural and religious conditions. Evaluating, studying, and explaining the views of clients can result in the generation of knowledge about the different needs of patients with various and special conditions. Investigators can help create an appropriate learning platform by conducting these extensive studies, evaluating ethical views, and explaining the ethical views of students. These studies can provide a basis for ensuring that the needs of clients in occupational therapy are met. Moreover, in regards to the various aspects of ethics in occupational therapy, it is essential that investigators in this area increase their focus on this issue. Finally, the dimensions should be examined from the viewpoint of therapists and clients.

### **Conclusion**

Ethics is an important issue in the various scientific fields, including occupational therapy. However, the lack of sufficient studies in the field of ethics in occupational therapy showed that it doesn't play an important role in this area of research. Therefore, this scoping review revealed the need to conduct extensive studies and further research in this area. Future research can focus on finding ethical issues in occupational therapy practice in Iran, especially in the field of mental health and old age. Researchers could also investigate the level of client knowledge about occupational therapy and its patient rights, and the relationships between this knowledge and the level of satisfactions of interventions. Additionally, other quantitative studies are needed to find the types of occupational therapist reasons when interfering with an ethical dilemma and the development of valid, reliable, and culturally suitable instruments to assess the

different dimensions of ethics in practice.

### Acknowledgement

The authors would like to express gratitude towards all who helped in the improvement of this paper.

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### Conflict of Interest Statement

Authors declared no conflict of interest.

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## اخلاق در مطالعات کاردرمانی در ایران: یک مرور حیطه‌ای

مسلم چراغی فرد<sup>۱</sup>، آریان شمیلی<sup>۱</sup>، فاطمه مطهری نژاد<sup>۱</sup>، ثریا قره باغی<sup>۱</sup>، نرگس شفارودی<sup>۲\*</sup> 

۱. دانشجوی دکترای تخصصی کاردرمانی، دانشکده توانبخشی، دانشگاه علوم پزشکی ایران، تهران، ایران

۲. دکترای تخصصی کاردرمانی، دانشکده توانبخشی، دانشگاه علوم پزشکی ایران، تهران، ایران

اطلاعات مقاله	چکیده
تاریخ وصول: ۱۳۹۷/۰۲/۲۳	<p><b>زمینه و هدف:</b> اخلاق یک مسئله مهم در علوم مختلف از جمله توانبخشی و کاردرمانی است. از آن جایی که اخلاق می تواند تحت تاثیر عوامل مختلفی از جمله شرایط محیطی، فرهنگی و اعتقادی قرار گیرد، نیاز به انجام مطالعه ای جهت بررسی نظام مند شواهد موجود پیرامون اخلاق در کاردرمانی ایران وجود داشته است. این مطالعه مرور حیطه ای با هدف بررسی، یافتن، خلاصه کردن و توصیف شواهد موجود پیرامون اخلاق در مطالعات کاردرمانی در ایران صورت پذیرفت.</p> <p><b>روش کار:</b> این پژوهش بر اساس روش پنج مرحله ای Arksey و O'Malley برای مطالعات مرور حیطه ای انجام شد. دو پژوهشگر به صورت مجزا پایگاه های اطلاعاتی دراخلی و خارجی را با استفاده از کلید واژه های مرتبط جهت یافتن شواهد موجود بین سال های ۲۰۰۰ تا ۲۰۱۹ مورد جستجو قرار دادند.</p> <p><b>یافته ها:</b> بعد از بررسی مقالات یافته شده و مقایسه با معیار های ورود ۷ مقاله جهت بررسی نهایی انتخاب شدند. از بین مقالات انتخاب شده سه مقاله به روش کمی و چهار مقاله به روش کیفی انجام شده بود.</p> <p><b>نتیجه گیری:</b> تعداد کم مطالعات انجام شده نشان دهنده این بود که اخلاق به عنوان یک مسئله مهم در حیطه تحقیقات کاردرمانی مورد توجه قرار نگرفته است. این مطالعه مرور حیطه ای نیاز به انجام مطالعات بیشتر در این زمینه را نشان داده است.</p> <p><b>واژه های کلیدی:</b> کاردرمانی، اخلاق، مرور</p>
تاریخ پذیرش: ۱۳۹۷/۰۵/۱۹	
انتشار آنلاین: ۱۳۹۷/۰۷/۰۵	
<p><b>نویسنده مسئول:</b>  <b>نرگس شفارودی</b>  دکترای تخصصی کاردرمانی،  دانشکده توانبخشی، دانشگاه  علوم پزشکی ایران، تهران، ایران</p> <p><b>پست الکترونیک:</b>  shafarodi.n@iums.ac.ir</p> <p><b>تلفن:</b>  +۹۸-۲۱-۲۲۲۲۸۰۵۱</p>	