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Developing a Model of Organizational Inclusion in Multicultural Environments: Evidence from Government Organizations in Kermanshah Province, Iran

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ABSTRACT

Growing cultural diversity within public organizations has made organizational inclusion a strategic necessity rather than a symbolic commitment. In multicultural settings, inclusion refers to the creation of a fair, participatory, and respectful environment in which employees from different cultural and social backgrounds can contribute fully, access opportunities equitably, and experience genuine belonging. Kermanshah Province in western Iran offers an important empirical setting for examining this issue because of its substantial ethnic and cultural diversity and the managerial challenges this diversity can create in government institutions. This developmental-applied study used an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design. In the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 managers, specialists, and key employees from government organizations in Kermanshah Province. Interview data were analyzed through inductive thematic analysis following the approach of Braun and Clarke. In the quantitative phase, the emergent model was tested using a researcher-made questionnaire administered to 384 employees selected by stratified random sampling from a population of 71,500 government employees. Instrument reliability was supported by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.906, and the quantitative model was examined using confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling. The final model comprised four overarching dimensions and twelve components. The first dimension, an organizational culture of diversity acceptance, included institutionalizing diversity acceptance, establishing an anti-discrimination system, strengthening psychological safety, and promoting intercultural convergence. The second dimension, inclusion-oriented leadership, included exemplary inclusive leadership, transparent and fair decision-making governance, institutional support for marginalized employees, and systematic management of cultural and generational conflicts. The third dimension, transparent technologies and processes, included organizational feedback and participation systems and transparent evaluation mechanisms. The fourth dimension, training and skill development, included intercultural training and development and equality in access to resources and information. Qualitative coding yielded 295 initial codes, which were refined into 53 basic themes, 12 organizing themes, and 4 overarching themes. In the quantitative phase, all factor loadings exceeded 0.50. The highest second-order loading was observed for training and skill development (0.80), followed closely by organizational culture of diversity acceptance (0.79), while inclusion-oriented leadership and transparent technologies and processes showed loadings of 0.64 and 0.62, respectively. The proposed model demonstrated acceptable fit and can serve as a practical framework for strengthening organizational inclusion in multicultural public-sector environments. The findings suggest that inclusion in government organizations is most effectively advanced when cultural acceptance, inclusive leadership, transparent procedures, and equitable learning opportunities are addressed as mutually reinforcing organizational conditions.

Keywords: organizational inclusion; multicultural environments; organizational culture; inclusive leadership; government organizations

Introduction

Across the world, diversity and inclusion have moved from the margins of management discourse to the center of organizational strategy. This shift is especially visible in the public sector, where organizations are expected not only to perform efficiently but also to represent social justice, impartiality, and equal treatment in both internal administration and external service delivery (Holmes et al., 2023; Riccucci, 2018). Public organizations increasingly operate in environments characterized by cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and social heterogeneity. As a result, they must respond to a dual challenge: they must serve diverse publics fairly, and they must also create internal work environments in which employees from different backgrounds experience dignity, respect, voice, and equal opportunity. Recent public administration scholarship has emphasized that inclusion is now a core concern for theory and practice in public workplaces rather than a peripheral human-resources issue (Holmes et al., 2023). Holmes, Elias, and D'Agostino (2023) describe inclusion in public-sector workplaces as a necessary framework for understanding how institutions can move beyond formal representation toward everyday practices that shape belonging, fairness, and participation (Holmes et al., 2023). Ding and Riccucci (2022) likewise show that diversity in public organizations does not automatically improve outcomes; its benefits depend on the organizational conditions that enable effective collaboration and reduce the negative effects of categorization and exclusion (Ding & Riccucci, 2022). In organizational research, inclusion is generally understood as the quality of employees' lived experience within diverse settings. Diversity describes the presence of differences; inclusion concerns what organizations do with those differences (Shore et al., 2011). A workplace may be diverse in demographic or cultural terms and still remain exclusionary if employees feel silenced, stigmatized, or blocked from advancement. Shore, Cleveland, and Sanchez (2018) argue that inclusive workplaces are those in which employees simultaneously experience belongingness and uniqueness (Shore et al., 2018). This conceptualization is especially relevant to multicultural public organizations because such organizations must balance a common institutional identity with respect for cultural difference. When that balance is achieved, inclusion can contribute to psychological safety, trust, collaboration, innovation, and organizational commitment (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006; Shore et al., 2018). When it is not achieved, the same diversity that could enrich public service may instead produce misunderstanding, distrust, perceived injustice, and hidden conflict. The question of organizational inclusion becomes even more urgent in regions where cultural diversity is a salient social reality. Kermanshah Province represents such a context. The province contains significant ethnic, linguistic, and cultural variation, and government organizations there operate at the intersection of national administrative rules and local multicultural realities. In such settings, universal administrative procedures may not be sufficient to ensure a genuinely inclusive workplace. Employees may encounter unequal access to information, under-recognition of cultural identities, informal barriers to advancement, or limited opportunities to participate in decision-making. When organizations lack explicit, context-sensitive inclusion policies, perceptions of marginalization may become embedded in everyday routines (Roberson, 2006). This problem is not only interpersonal; it can also weaken organizational cohesion, reduce motivation, undermine confidence in management, and constrain the public sector's capacity to respond effectively to the needs of a diverse society (Ding & Riccucci, 2022). The present study addresses this gap by developing and validating a model of organizational inclusion for multicultural environments, with particular emphasis on government organizations in Kermanshah Province. This study contributes to theory by proposing an integrated, contextually grounded model of inclusion in an Iranian public-sector setting. It also has practical significance by offering a framework for managers and policymakers to improve organizational climate and fairness. Finally, it responds to broader governance concerns regarding social cohesion and equity in public institutions (Riccucci, 2018).

Literature Review

The literature consistently shows that inclusion is not reducible to workforce composition. Organizations may recruit individuals from varied backgrounds without creating an environment in which those individuals can participate meaningfully. Inclusion therefore involves both structural and relational dimensions (Shore et al., 2011). Holmes et al. (2023) emphasize that inclusion in public organizations must be examined as a lived organizational condition shaped by

policy, management, and institutional culture (Holmes et al., 2023). Ding and Riccucci (2022) demonstrate that diversity can enhance performance only when supported by appropriate organizational conditions (Ding & Riccucci, 2022). Steele and Derven (2015) argue that diversity and inclusion can generate a virtuous cycle with innovation by improving the flow of ideas and enabling diverse perspectives to be utilized effectively (Steele & Derven, 2015). Leadership is another critical factor. Inclusive leadership has been linked to employee voice, organizational citizenship behavior, and engagement (Kuknor et al., 2023). Dalessandro and Lovell (2024) also highlight the importance of leader and coworker support in sustaining inclusion initiatives (Dalessandro & Lovell, 2024). Multicultural environments introduce additional complexity. Debbag and Fidan (2020) show that multicultural attitudes influence interaction patterns and authority perceptions, while Sonmez and Gokmenoglu (2023) demonstrate the role of leadership in shaping social justice and multicultural awareness (Debbag & Fidan, 2020; Sonmez & Gokmenoglu, 2023).

Methodology

Research design

This study was developmental-applied in purpose and used a mixed-methods design with an exploratory sequential structure. The qualitative phase was inductive and sought to identify the dimensions and components of organizational inclusion in multicultural public organizations. The quantitative phase was deductive and tested the resulting model. Field data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and a researcher-made questionnaire. This combination allowed the study to move from contextual understanding to empirical validation.

Qualitative phase

The qualitative phase involved semi-structured interviews with 16 participants selected through purposive sampling from government organizations in Kermanshah Province. Participants included senior managers, deputies, human-resource specialists, university faculty members, and organizational development experts from a wide range of public institutions, including the governor's office, education, taxation, welfare, labor and social affairs, medical sciences, culture and guidance, roads and urban development, agriculture, economic affairs, sports and youth, environmental protection, and rural affairs. The sampling strategy was designed to ensure access to individuals with deep knowledge of diversity and inclusion in public workplaces. The qualitative data were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's approach. After the initial coding stage, 295 primary codes were identified. Through elimination of overlap and conceptual consolidation, these were refined into 53 basic themes, 12 organizing themes, and 4 overarching themes. The study continued interviewing until theoretical saturation was achieved. Credibility and trustworthiness were strengthened through criteria such as participation, consensus, plurality, acceptability, and dependability, as reported in the source manuscript. Illustrative qualitative evidence showed recurring concern with conflict management, fairness, transparency of human-resource policies, cultural sensitivity in scheduling and planning, and employee perceptions of unequal promotion opportunities. Interviewees emphasized that where human-resource processes were not transparent, cultural sensitivities became more visible and more difficult to manage. They also described the need to adapt organizational practices to differences in expectations and background.

Quantitative phase

The quantitative population consisted of 71,500 employees working in government organizations in Kermanshah Province. Sample size was calculated using Cochran's formula, resulting in 384 respondents selected through stratified random sampling. A researcher-made questionnaire was developed on the basis of the qualitative findings. Content validity

was assessed, and internal consistency was supported by a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.906. Data were analyzed using SPSS and LISREL through confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling. The source manuscript reported that convergent and discriminant validity were acceptable because factor loadings exceeded 0.50 and relevant average indicators also exceeded the threshold of 0.50. In addition, Cronbach's alpha values for the questionnaire and its dimensions were above 0.70, indicating satisfactory internal coherence of the measures. The study therefore treated the model as psychometrically acceptable for testing the proposed structure of organizational inclusion.

Research Findings

Following the initial coding of the interviews, 295 initial codes were identified. After removing repetitive and overlapping concepts, these were refined into 53 basic themes, which were further classified into 12 organizing themes and 4 overarching dimensions. The extracted dimensions, components, and indicators are presented in Tables 1–4. The first dimension was Diversity-Accepting Organizational Culture, which included four components: Institutionalization of Diversity Acceptance, Establishment of an Organizational Anti-Discrimination System, Strengthening Psychological Safety, and Intercultural Convergence. As shown in Table 1, this dimension reflects the extent to which organizational values, norms, and practices support the recognition of diversity and create a respectful and inclusive workplace.

Table 1. Dimensions and Components of Diversity-Accepting Organizational Culture in Multicultural Public Organizations

Dimension	Component	Indicators
Diversity-Accepting Organizational Culture	Institutionalization of Diversity Acceptance	Recognition of ethnic and linguistic differences; practical respect for cultural and linguistic differences; recognition of diversity in official programs; an organizational culture receptive to diversity and difference; respect for local customs
Diversity-Accepting Organizational Culture	Establishment of an Organizational Anti-Discrimination System	Fair reward system; meritocracy and competence orientation; transparent and non-discriminatory human resource processes; impartial managerial behavior; respect for diversity of viewpoints
Diversity-Accepting Organizational Culture	Strengthening Psychological Safety	A respect-based organizational culture receptive to diversity; strengthening psychological safety; organizational trust; supportive leadership in respecting diversity; enhancing employees' sense of worth
Diversity-Accepting Organizational Culture	Intercultural Convergence	Intercultural training and empowerment for managers and employees; institutionalization of cultural sensitivity; reduction of stereotypes in organizational programs and interactions; cultural awareness in multicultural organizations

The second dimension was Inclusive Leadership, comprising Inclusive Role-Model Leadership, Transparent and Fair Decision-Making Governance, Institutional Support for Marginalized Employees, and Systematic Management of Cultural and Generational Conflicts. As presented in Table 2, leadership was identified as a central mechanism for promoting inclusion through fairness, transparency, and active support for diverse employees.

Table 2. Dimensions and Components of Inclusive Leadership in Multicultural Public Organizations

Dimension	Component	Indicators
Inclusive Leadership	Inclusive Role-Model Leadership	Managers' behavior based on justice, impartiality, and revision of preconceived assumptions; neutral behavior and reduction of bias and prejudice; modeling organizational values; role modeling for desirable behaviors; fair decision-making independent of personal affiliations
Inclusive Leadership	Transparent and Fair Decision-Making Governance	Transparency of policies and organizational decision-making processes; transparency of objective criteria in recruitment and promotion; justice and meritocracy in evaluation and reward; use of technology to ensure transparency and equal access; strengthening trust and willingness to participate as an outcome of transparency
Inclusive Leadership	Institutional Support for Marginalized Employees	Human resource policies adapted to differences; active and genuine support for marginalized employees and minorities; avoiding psychological distance and marginalization of employees
Inclusive Leadership	Systematic Management of Cultural and Generational Conflicts	Managing and resolving interpersonal and organizational conflicts; managing cultural and generational differences; forming multicultural and multigenerational teams; training in intercultural skills and conflict resolution to improve teamwork; training in effective interaction with generational and cultural differences

The third dimension, Technology and Transparent Processes, included two components: Feedback and Organizational Participation Systems and Transparent Evaluation Mechanisms. As shown in Table 3, these findings suggest that transparent digital and administrative systems can strengthen inclusion by enhancing participation, reducing ambiguity, and limiting the possibility of hidden discrimination.

Table 3. Dimensions and Components of Technology and Transparent Processes in Multicultural Public Organizations

Dimension	Component	Indicators
Technology and Transparent Processes	Feedback and Organizational Participation Systems	Establishing internal survey systems; suggestion systems for collecting viewpoints; digital systems for employee feedback; employee participation in decision-making; continuous and transparent feedback
Technology and Transparent Processes	Transparent Evaluation Mechanisms	Transparency in processes related to recruitment, promotion, and skills development; appointments based on objective criteria; ensuring fairness in promotion and distribution of opportunities; evaluation based on objective indicators and criteria; use of digital systems and tools for performance monitoring

The fourth dimension was Training and Skills Development, consisting of Intercultural Training and Development and Equality in Access to Resources and Information. As reported in Table 4, this dimension emphasizes the role of learning opportunities in strengthening intercultural competence, reducing bias, and promoting equal professional development.

Table 4. Dimensions and Components of Training and Skills Development in Multicultural Public Organizations

Dimension	Component	Indicators
Training and Skills Development	Intercultural Training and Development	Inclusion training within the organization; training in interaction and teamwork skills; use of practical training and skill development programs
Training and Skills Development	Equality in Access to Resources and Information	Equal access to information and resources; equal opportunities for learning and skills development; creating an equal environment for occupational growth and career advancement

After identifying the qualitative dimensions and themes, the extracted structure was assessed quantitatively. The results showed that all factor loadings were above 0.50, and the average extracted indicators also exceeded 0.50, supporting the convergent and discriminant validity of the model. In addition, the questionnaire demonstrated satisfactory reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.906. As presented in Table 5, the second-order factor loadings for the four main dimensions were acceptable. Among the four dimensions, Training and Skills Development had the highest factor loading (0.80), followed by Diversity-Accepting Organizational Culture (0.79), Inclusive Leadership (0.64), and Technology and Transparent Processes (0.62). At the component level, the factor loadings ranged from 0.56 to 0.89. The highest factor loading was observed for Inclusive Role-Model Leadership (0.89) and Institutional Support for Marginalized Employees (0.88), whereas the lowest loading was related to Intercultural Training and Development (0.56). The significance coefficients were above the acceptable threshold, supporting the adequacy of the measurement model.

Table 5. Factor Loadings and Significance Coefficients of the Dimensions of Inclusion Promotion in Multicultural Public Organizations

Variable	Factor Loading	Significance Coefficient
Diversity-Accepting Organizational Culture	0.79	7.79
Institutionalization of Diversity Acceptance	0.72	—
Establishment of an Organizational Anti-Discrimination System	0.64	6.64
Strengthening Psychological Safety	0.81	3.83
Intercultural Convergence	0.75	6.75
Inclusive Leadership	0.64	7.64
Inclusive Role-Model Leadership	0.89	—
Transparent and Fair Decision-Making Governance	0.78	7.78
Institutional Support for Marginalized Employees	0.88	7.88
Systematic Management of Cultural and Generational Conflicts	0.77	5.77
Technology and Transparent Processes	0.62	10.55
Feedback and Organizational Participation Systems	0.72	—
Transparent Evaluation Mechanisms	0.62	6.62
Training and Skills Development	0.80	8.80
Intercultural Training and Development	0.56	—
Equality in Access to Resources and Information	0.78	7.78

The results of the second-order confirmatory factor analysis also supported the adequacy of the proposed model. As illustrated in Figure 1, all four dimensions loaded meaningfully on the higher-order construct of inclusion promotion in multicultural public organizations. Overall, the findings indicate that the proposed model has acceptable validity and fit and provides a coherent framework for understanding and promoting organizational inclusion in multicultural public organizations.

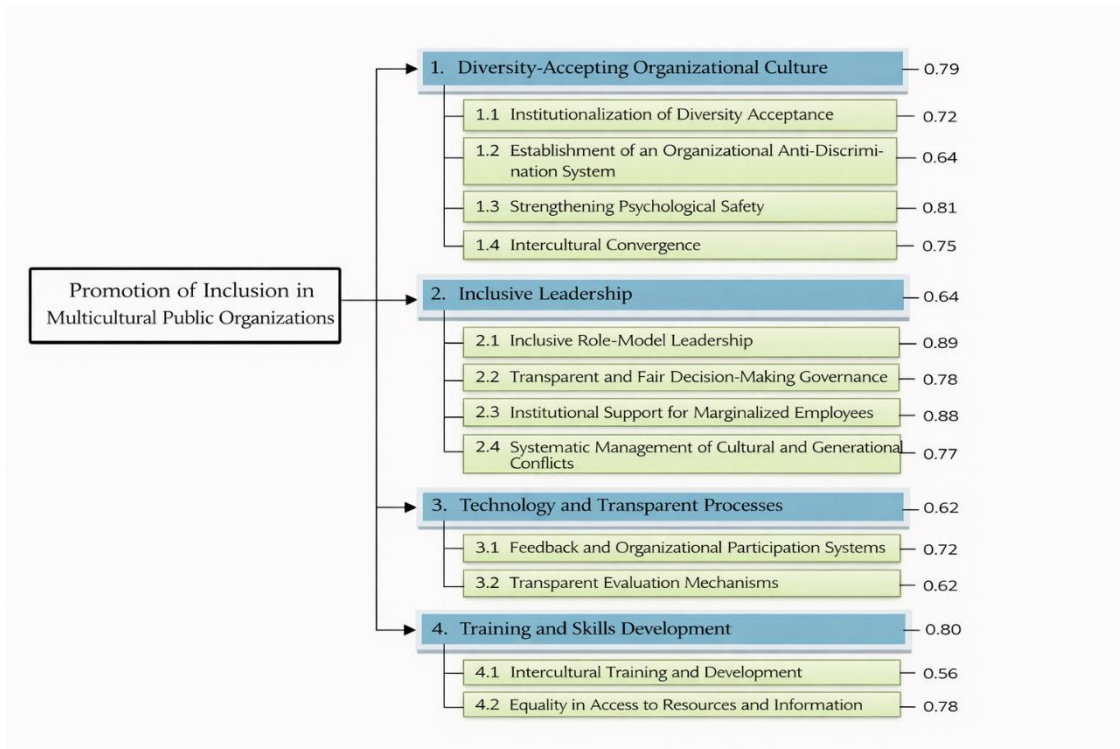


Figure 1. Second-Order Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Inclusion Promotion in Multicultural Public Organizations Based on Factor Loadings

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings show that organizational inclusion in multicultural government organizations is best understood as a multidimensional and systemic phenomenon. Inclusion is not created by a single intervention or department; rather, it emerges when organizational culture, leadership practices, procedural systems, and developmental opportunities align to reduce exclusion and strengthen belonging. This interpretation is consistent with broader scholarship emphasizing that inclusive workplaces integrate structural fairness with relational inclusion (Roberson, 2006; Shore et al., 2011). The present study extends this literature by demonstrating how these conditions cluster empirically within a multicultural public-sector context. One of the most important findings is the central role of a diversity-accepting organizational culture. The evidence suggests that inclusion begins at the level of fundamental organizational assumptions: whether differences are recognized as legitimate, whether anti-discrimination commitments are embedded in daily systems, whether employees feel psychologically safe, and whether intercultural understanding is actively encouraged. This finding strongly aligns with Shore et al.'s argument that inclusion depends on employees experiencing both belongingness and uniqueness (Shore et al., 2018). In the present study, psychological safety emerged as a particularly strong component, reinforcing prior research identifying it as essential for employee participation and learning (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). These results indicate that inclusion is not merely procedural but deeply experiential, requiring employees to feel able to participate authentically. The second major finding concerns inclusion-oriented leadership. The study indicates that leaders play a decisive role in translating inclusive values into organizational reality. This is consistent with prior research showing that inclusive leadership strengthens the positive effects of inclusion on employee behavior and engagement (Kuknor et al., 2023). In the current model, exemplary leadership and support for marginalized employees were among the strongest components. This

suggests that in multicultural public organizations, formal neutrality is insufficient; leaders must actively model fairness, mitigate bias, and support employees who may otherwise remain excluded from informal networks of influence and information. Transparent and fair decision-making also emerged as a critical factor, reinforcing the idea that trust in leadership is inseparable from trust in organizational procedures, as emphasized in public administration research (Ricucci, 2018). The significance of transparent technologies and processes represents another key contribution. Inclusion is often discussed in cultural or interpersonal terms; however, the findings demonstrate that organizational systems are equally important. Feedback systems, participation mechanisms, and transparent evaluation procedures reduce uncertainty and make inclusion visible in practice. This aligns with the public administration literature suggesting that diversity improves outcomes only when organizations establish enabling institutional conditions (Ding & Ricucci, 2022). In this study, technology is not conceptualized merely as a technical tool but as a mechanism for reducing bias, enhancing participation, and ensuring equitable access to decision-making and evaluation processes. Training and skill development formed the fourth dimension and had the highest second-order loading among the main dimensions. This does not imply that training alone is sufficient; rather, it suggests that employees and experts perceive capability-building and equitable access to knowledge as central to sustaining inclusion over time. Intercultural competence, teamwork skills, and equal access to information can reduce informal inequalities that often persist even in formally standardized bureaucracies (Roberson, 2006). Notably, the stronger loading for equality in access to resources and information compared with training itself indicates that employees evaluate inclusion not only based on what organizations teach, but also on how fairly opportunities and information are distributed. Taken together, the results suggest that multicultural public organizations require a layered and integrated inclusion strategy. Anti-discrimination policies are necessary but insufficient without psychological safety. Leadership support is essential but must be reinforced by transparent procedures. Training initiatives are important but must be accompanied by equitable access to opportunities and resources. This integrated interpretation represents one of the key strengths of the model developed in this study. The proposed model offers a concrete framework for public-sector reform in multicultural settings. Government organizations in Kermanshah and similar contexts can use the model as a guide for diagnosis, planning, and evaluation. At the cultural level, organizations can formalize commitments to diversity acceptance through inclusion charters and visible anti-discrimination policies. At the leadership level, managers can be evaluated not only based on performance outcomes but also on fairness, support for marginalized employees, and conflict management effectiveness (Kuknor et al., 2023). At the procedural level, organizations can implement confidential digital feedback systems, transparent promotion criteria, and standardized evaluation mechanisms to enhance trust and fairness (Ding & Ricucci, 2022). At the developmental level, targeted intercultural training and equal access to learning opportunities should be ensured to prevent the reproduction of informal inequalities (Roberson, 2006). These implications are particularly relevant for public organizations, where inclusion is closely tied to institutional legitimacy and equitable service delivery (Ricucci, 2018). This study should be interpreted in light of its contextual boundaries. The model was developed and tested within government organizations in a single Iranian province, and contextual factors may influence the relative importance of specific dimensions. In addition, the quantitative phase relied on self-report questionnaire data, which may introduce common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Future research could test the model across different regions, sectors, or cross-national public-sector contexts. Researchers may also examine the relationship between inclusion and outcomes such as organizational commitment, employee voice, innovation, turnover intention, and service quality

(Shore et al., 2018). Longitudinal studies would be particularly valuable in assessing whether inclusion-focused interventions produce sustained organizational change.

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Authors' Contributions

Conceptualization and original study design: Javad Hooshmand, Kamran Nazari, and Naser Feghhi Farahmand. Data collection and primary investigation: Javad Hooshmand. Supervision and scholarly review: Kamran Nazari and Naser Feghhi Farahmand. English manuscript preparation and final revision: all authors. This statement should be adjusted if the authors prefer a different contribution allocation.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

AI Use Statement

Artificial intelligence was used only for translation, language refinement, and manuscript drafting support in preparing this English version. No AI tool was used to generate the study data, conduct the interviews, perform the statistical analyses, or determine the results. The authors remain fully responsible for the accuracy, interpretation, and final content of the manuscript.

Ethical Considerations

This article is based on the empirical study reported in the source manuscript. The source manuscript indicates that data were collected from human participants through semi-structured interviews and questionnaires and that participation was voluntary. Confidentiality of participants and organizations should be maintained in dissemination and publication. No institutional ethics approval code was reported in the source manuscript; therefore, none is claimed here. The authors are responsible for ensuring that publication complies with the ethics requirements of the target journal and institution.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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