

## Investigation of Students' Attitudes toward Professional Dress Code and the Level of Adherence to This Code at Kerman University of Medical Sciences, Kerman, Iran

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### Abstract

**Background and Objectives:** The attitudes to the professional dress code as well as the level of adherence to this code are of utmost importance in clinical settings. This study aimed to investigate the students' attitudes and adherence regarding the professional dress code at Kerman University of Medical Sciences, Kerman, Iran.

**Methods:** This descriptive analytical study was conducted on 368 students of medical sciences at Kerman University of Medical Sciences, Kerman, Iran. The data were collected using two researcher-made questionnaires asking for students' attitudes and adherence regarding the professional dress code. The data analysis was performed in SPSS software (version 18) through descriptive statistics and analytic tests.

**Results:** According to the results of this study, the mean scores of female and male students' attitudes and adherence regarding professional dress code were obtained at  $74.04 \pm 13.49$  and  $74.12 \pm 10.77$ , respectively. Moreover, this result indicates that students have positive attitudes toward professional dress code. In addition, the participants believed that 75% of the other students dress professionally.

**Conclusion:** Given the positive attitudes of participants regarding professional attire, and the fact that 75% of the other students adhere to this issue, it is necessary to maintain and reinforce the positive attitudes of the students to encourage the professional attire values and impress the views of patients who refer to the health care centers.

**Keywords:** Attitude, Adherence, Professional dress code, Students, Kerman, Iran.

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### Introduction

Nowadays, professional commitment in medical settings has gained much prominence and is defined as behaviors leading to building trust and confidence in the relationships among the medical staff, patient, and community (1). The

appearance and the way the medical staff dress have significant effects on the patient's first impression of the medical staff (2). It is not only the knowledge or skill that make a good and productive relationship, but also certain behavioral codes that are effective in

preserving the dignity and effectiveness of the health care providers.

The professional attire of the healthcare providers is one of the parameters which is in accordance with the culture and beliefs of each community and is influential in the medical settings (3). It should be noted that the implementation of the professional dress code should be accompanied by respecting the professional ethics which is very influential in professional behavior. The professional ethics establishes the professional behavior of individuals, which in turn, creates trust, confidence, and hope in the recipient of health care services and results in the improvement of the service quality and the related organization (4). McKenna et al. (2007) showed that professional dress code helped develop a successful doctor-patient relationship, and therefore, provided the foundation of a high-quality care service (5).

Furthermore, professional dress code is regarded as an essential part of developing successful professional communication (6). Jabbal and Porter emphasized the effect of medical students' attire on making relationships with the patients (7). The results obtained from another study also revealed the importance of the physician's dress as an effective nonverbal communication tool leading to an appropriate doctor-patient relationship (8). In addition, psychologists often highlight the importance of physical appearance and its impact on one's first perceptions and relationships (5).

Over the centuries, the long white coat has become the universal symbol of the medical profession (3) since it is not only protect the individuals against microorganisms but also symbolizes one's competence and status (9). Moreover, the patients care about the appearance and dress of the medical staff and consider it as a criterion for assessing the competence and dignity of the medical personnel (3). In the same line, Semnani and Shahpouri (2007) reported that the psychiatrist's appearance was effective in improving the physician-patient relationship (10). According to the results of another study, the participants favored formal clothing, such

as suits for male professors rather than jeans and T-shirts (11).

All care providers in any clinical settings should attempt to build proper communication with the patients and help them get rid of their tiredness as a result of their disease. In this regard, the professional attire and behavior of the students in clinical centers should be in line with those of physicians, nurses, and paramedics. This accordance protects patient's privacy, respects customary, religious and social standards, develops a positive professional image, and adheres to the standards of infection control (12). Given the fact that the hospital environment is an educational setting, it requires freedom from issues related to ethical issues. Universities in different countries have their own dress codes in the clinical settings, and Iranian Medical Universities are no exception.

However, it should be noted that despite the presence of the dress codes in universities, some students do not adhere to them. Moreover, to the best of our knowledge, there is a dearth of research in this regard; therefore, this study aimed to investigate the students' attitudes regarding the professional dress code and the level of adherence to this code at Kerman University of Medical Sciences, Kerman, Iran

## Methods

This descriptive cross sectional study was conducted to investigate the students' attitudes regarding the professional dress code and the level of adherence to this code at Kerman University of Medical Sciences, Kerman, Iran, in 2013. The study population included all students (n=5280) studying in different major and programs at Kerman University of Medical Sciences. However, the study sample was obtained at 360 people using the Cochran formula ( $N=5280$ ,  $Z=1.96$ ,  $q=p=0.05$ ,  $d=0.5$ ).

After obtaining the required permission from the Department of Student Affairs, determining the sample size in each faculty, and obtaining the written consent from the students, the researcher distributed the questionnaires randomly among the students at university and dormitory campuses. The

convenience sampling was performed and the students from all majors and programs with one semester of clinical experience from each faculty were included in this study. The participants were studying at faculties, such as Medical (n=70), Health (n=58), Paramedical (n=52), Nursing and Midwifery (n=35), Dentistry (n=30), Pharmacy (n=30), and Management (n=30), as well as Sirjan and Zand Universities of Medical Sciences (n=15 and 10, respectively), and International University (n=30).

The data collection tool was designed based on Dress and Behavior Code Guidelines for the Students of Medical Sciences in Clinical Settings. This questionnaire consists of two parts including female (18 items) and male (19 items) professional attire. The participants were asked to complete the questionnaires based on a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from completely agree (scored 5) to completely disagree (scored 1). Moreover, the instrument has a minimum and maximum scores of 18 and 90 as well as 19 and 95 for females and males professional attire, respectively.

In addition, the respondents were required to rate the level of other students' adherence (%) to professional dress code. A column was inserted in front of each questionnaire item for the participants to rate the level of other students' adherence (%). The obtained results were classified into three categories, namely the levels lower than 25%, from 25 to 75%, and higher than 75%. The validity of the male and female questionnaires was separately assessed using the content validity. In addition, 10 experts in clinical and basic sciences as well as medical ethics were asked to give their comments as totally appropriate, moderately appropriate, and inappropriate in this regard. Furthermore, 30 male and female students were asked to give their comments on the final version of questionnaire to estimate the reliability of the questionnaire. It should be noted that male and female students assessed the male and female questionnaires, respectively. Eventually the Cronbach's alpha coefficients of male and female questionnaires were obtained at 0.89 and 0.85, respectively.

The data analysis was performed in SPSS software (version18) through mean and standard deviation.

Table 1: Female students' attitudes towards professional dress code and the level of adherence to this code by other students (%)

Number	Items	Attitude		The level of adherence to professional dress code by other students (%)		
		Mean	SD	25	50	75
1	Wearing the full-face veil based on students' professional attire	1.74	0.96	43.75	70	90
2	Not wearing very tight or loose as well as short or long uniform	1.99	1.69	50	70	90
3	Not wearing very tight or short pants	1.66	0.83	50	80	95
4	Not wearing torn or patched clothing	1.70	1.02	50	87	100
5	Wearing Chador or scarf based on Islamic practices	2.30	1.25	50	62.5	90
6	Wearing simple, clean, and short-heeled shoes without annoying sound	1.87	0.99	53	80	90
7	Not wearing boots with pants tucked in, sandals or slippers in educational and clinical settings	1.83	1.06	50	80	95
8	Not wearing uniforms, pants, bags, shoes and socks with dissatisfying colors	2.18	1.20	50	75	90
9	Not wearing thin clothing, such as uniforms, pants, scarf, and socks displaying parts of body or hair	2.03	1.08	50	80	90
10	Not wearing clothing, bags, shoes, and socks with cool graphics, text or quotes, or accessories, such as headbands, wristbands, neck scarfs, necklaces, belts, and strange rings	2.25	1.22	50	80	95
11	Wearing glasses and normal jewelries, such as rings and watches	2.17	1.20	50	80	90
12	Short and clean nails without nail polish	2.14	1.20	50	70	90
13	Not wearing make-up and displayed tattoo	2.03	1.16	50	70	90
14	Wearing sharp perfumes	2.53	1.28	50	70	90
15	Wearing closed toe shoes in order to prevent infection spreading and feet hurting	2.29	1.06	50	80	90
16	Wearing socks to keep the feet healthy	1.86	1.01	60	85	97
17	Students' professional dress code in clinical and laboratory settings, such as operating room and intensive care units should be in accordance with the professional dress code guidelines and Islamic practices.	1.80	0.98	50	80	91.25
18	Wearing clean, white, and buttoned coats	1.58	0.85	57.5	90	98.28

## Result

According to the obtained results, out of 368 participants, 224 (60.9%) students were female. In addition, the mean age of the females and males were  $22.13 \pm 2.77$  and  $22.45 \pm 3.4$ , respectively.

Moreover, the mean score of female students' attitudes towards professional dress code was  $72.04 \pm 13.49$ , and the items, "Wearing sharp perfumes" and "Wearing Chador or scarf based on Islamic practices" obtained the highest mean scores. On the other hand, the item "Wearing clean, white, and buttoned coats" obtained the lowest mean score. Regarding the results obtained from the investigation of other students' level of adherence to the dress code, the majority of the female participants believed that more than 75% of the students adhere to professional dress code during their education. Moreover, the items "Wearing clean, white, and buttoned coats" and "Wearing socks to keep the feet healthy" obtained the highest and lowest level of adherence (%), respectively (Table 1).

The mean score of male students' attitudes in this study was obtained at  $74.12 \pm 10.77$ . Moreover, the items "Wearing slippers and sandals" and "Not wearing sharp perfume" obtained the highest mean scores. However, the item "Dressing should be based on students' professional attire" obtained the lowest mean score. In addition, the majority of the male respondents stated that more than 75% of the other students adhere to professional dress code. According to the male students' attitudes, the items, "Not wearing no make-up and tattoo", "Not wearing ties or bows", and "Not wearing slippers and sandals" obtained the highest level of adherence to professional dress code by other students (%). On the other hand, "Wearing socks to keep the feet healthy" and "Wearing clean and white shoes" obtained the lowest level of adherence in this regard (Table 2).

## Discussion

The results obtained from this study revealed the positive attitudes of students regarding the dress code and professional attire. In a study conducted by Lorestani (2010), the medical

Table 2. Male students' attitudes towards professional dress code and the level of adherence to this code by other students (%)

Number	Items	Attitude		The level of adherence to professional dress code by other students (%)		
		Mean	SD	25	50	75
1	Dressing should be based on students' professional attire	1.63	0.85	50	80	90
2	Not wearing short-sleeved and tight shirts	2.73	1.23	50	60	81.25
3	Not wearing tight and short pants	1.94	1.09	57	80	90
4	Not wearing patched or torn clothes	1.80	1.07	60	80	95
5	Wearing slippers and sandals	2.94	1.48	60	90	100
6	Wearing simple and clean shoes	1.72	0.85	70	80	95
7	Not wearing clothing, shoes, and socks with dissatisfying colors	2.35	1.15	60	80	90
8	Not wearing thin shirt and pants displaying the body	1.97	1.04	60	80	91.25
9	Not wearing clothes, bags, shoes, and socks with cool graphics, text or quotes, or accessories, such as strange headbands, wristbands, neck scarfs, necklaces, belts, and rings	2.26	1.27	63.75	80	95
10	Not wearing ties or bows	2.49	1.31	50	99	100
11	Wearing normal glasses or jewelries, such as ring or watch	2.30	1.17	50	70	90
12	Keeping the nails short in order not to spread the infection or hurt the people and equipment	1.70	0.90	60	80	90
13	Not wearing any make-up or displayed tattoo	1.94	1.07	60	80	100
14	Short and simple hair style	2.03	1.02	60	80	90
15	Not wearing sharp perfumes	2.83	1.31	50	70	90
16	Wearing closed toe shoes to prevent infection spreading and feet hurting	2.06	1.10	60	80	95
17	Wearing socks to keep the feet healthy	1.70	0.81	70	90	100
18	Students' professional dress code in clinical and laboratory settings, such as operating room and intensive care units should be in accordance with the professional dress code guidelines and Islamic practices.	1.66	0.81	60	80	95
19	Wearing clean, white, and buttoned coats	1.70	0.92	60	80	95

students under study reported the moderate level of adherence to the professional dress

code (3). The dressing code and professional behavior in clinical setting emphasizes that clinical students are required to wear uniforms based on the dressing codes stated by the university during their presence in health care systems.

The dressing code and appearance of individuals are of utmost importance in Iranian context in which the civil laws are based on Islamic religion and Quran. The adherence to the dressing code in educational settings not only signifies the adherence to the religious and national civil laws in Iran which make a calm environment, but also display a positive image of professional conduct and behavior.

Although the students' had positive attitudes towards professional dress code, the issue of Hijab and Chastity obtained the lowest scores in this study. The lower scores in this regard can be attributed to the Islamic nature of Iranian society in which Hijab is an inevitable part and there is no necessity to highlight it in professional dress code. However, there is a need to conduct further research in this regard. The participants stated that the majority of the students adhere to the professional dress code, and the items "Wearing white, clean, and buttoned coats" and "Not wearing make-up or tattoos" obtained the highest mean scores.

In the same line, Lorestani et al. (2010) conducted a study to compare the interns and practitioners' attitudes toward professional dress code. The results revealed that 210 (62.3%) and 58 (17.2%) medical students obtained the moderate and high scores, respectively. Moreover, 90% and 70% of the participants had positive attitudes toward "Wearing white coat and name badges" and "Wearing simple and formal clothing", respectively. On the other hand, the majority of the students reported that "Wearing jeans and sneakers" destroys the physicians' dignity (3).

Thompson et al., conducted a study to investigate the American students' attitudes regarding professional dress code. The results revealed that the majority of the students preferred wearing suit at workplace (13). In another study, most of the physicians had positive attitudes regarding wearing white

coats, name badges, shirts, and shoes; on the other hand, they were not in favor of wearing sandals, jeans and sneakers. Additionally, the older physicians preferred the conventional dress (white long coats), compared to younger ones; moreover, this study considered the physicians' attire as an important part of the doctor-patient relationship in which the patients' attitudes were positive regarding wearing the conventional physicians' attire, such as proper shoes and clothes, shirt and tie, as well as tidy and smart pants.

Furthermore, a study was conducted by Sudhir et al., to investigate the dental students' attitudes towards professional dress attire. According to the results, 42.6% and 38.7% of the female and male students preferred the casual attire, respectively. In addition, 54.1% and 34.9% of the male and female students highlighted the need for change in dental attire, respectively (14). This study suffered from some limitations, such as lack of access to the students in the study setting. Accordingly, the student were asked to complete the questionnaires when they had no classes and enough time.

## Conclusion

The results of this study showed that students had positive attitudes towards professional dress code, and they reported higher levels of other students' adherence to this issue. The identification of the students' attitudes toward professional dress code and the higher levels of adherence to this issue pave the way on the maintenance of this positive view among students and the enhancement of the students' adherence in terms of wearing clothes based on the dress code in clinical settings. Accordingly, the Islamic values and professional attire codes are respected, and the patients are impressed greatly when referring to any clinical settings.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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