

## Reducing Organizational Cynicism in Health Promoting Girls' Schools: A Grounded Theory Approach

Fateme Karimi , Behnam Talebi \* 

Department of Educational Administration, School of Educational Sciences, Tabriz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tabriz, Iran

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#### Corresponding Author:

Behnam Talebi

btalebi1972@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Organizational cynicism is a negative attitude toward the organization. The design of health promoting schools (HPSs), one of the indicators of which is the creation of mental health for school staff, can reduce cynicism.

**Methods:** The present study used a qualitative approach and the grounded theory (GT) method. The statistical population included all managers and assistants of secondary HPSs in Tabriz. The purposive sampling method was used, and the data collection tool was a semi-structured interview.

**Results:** This research aimed to identify a model for reducing organizational cynicism in HPSs in Tabriz. According to the inclusion criteria and to reach data saturation, a semi-structured interview was conducted with eight people. Data analysis was performed based on Strauss and Corbin's continuous comparison strategy. The findings identified individuals, groups, and environments as factors affecting organizational cynicism (causative conditions). The basis and background of organizational cynicism is the internal and external environment of HPSs, which are also affected by the implementation barriers of HPS programs.

**Conclusion:** The best strategy for solving this problem is to build confidence in the design of the HPSs to attract cooperation in its implementation and create coordination between the activities of different organizations, which can lead to sustainable psychological outcomes and the success of HPSs programs.

**Keywords:** Organizational Cynicism, Health Promoting Schools, Grounded Theory

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## Introduction

Today's society is an organizational society. The atmosphere of the organization shapes the perception and behavior of the employees. One of the characteristics of a healthy organization is emphasizing the physical and mental health of its employees as much as productivity. Along with the increasing value of employees in organizations in recent decades, their psychological security and mental health have become more important for researchers (1). The World Health Organization (WHO) (2001) defines health as "complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not just the absence of disease or infirmity." Work pressure in the form of long working hours and sensitive responsibilities causes significant stress and affects mental health (2).

In this case, since 2001, the WHO has started a school-based care program in a multilateral interaction with international stakeholders. This program was also started in Iran with the cooperation of the Ministry of Health, Treatment and Medical Education and the Ministry of Education at the country level in February 2007. Health Promoting Schools (HPS) provide programs to achieve a healthy environment with mutual confidence and the possibility of equal access to educational and health opportunities using the participation of teachers, students, and parents closely related to the school.

Lack of confidence is one of the items that affect employees' mental health. Although organizational cynicism is a new concept in organizational behavior and organizational psychology, the tendency to cynicism and belief in the worthlessness of life has always existed in human history (3).

In religion, suspicion is a state of bewilderment that no rational and acceptable proof can be established on either side, as mentioned in the Qur'an: "O you who believe, avoid much suspicion, for some suspicion is a sin" (Hujrat 12). Avoiding suspicion does not refer to avoiding suspicion itself, since suspicion is a kind of self-perception. Humans cannot prevent the entry of suspicion; the verse means it is forbidden to accept

evil suspicions. The word "many" is indefinite, which means avoiding many suspicions, both those you know are sins and those you do not understand (4). In addition to the verses, many hadiths about suspicion include: the Prophet (PBUH) said God has respected a Muslim's blood, property, and honor and has prohibited suspicion of a Muslim. In condemning the suspicion of people, it is enough that the Prophet has stated it along with killing and violating the believer's honor (5). The Prophet also said: "Seek an excuse for your brother's words and deeds, and excuse him if you do not find one" (5).

Researchers define cynicism as a general belief about human nature that other people cannot be trusted. Cynical people tend to believe that humans are selfish and deceitful and take advantage of others as much as possible. These people's negative beliefs about human nature and the world provide a cognitive framework to guide their observations and thinking about their organization (6). The cynicism of employees toward their organization is such that they believe that justice and confidence have been sacrificed to managers' personal interests (7). When employees find that their contract has been violated to their detriment, they are more likely to believe that the organization lacks honesty (6).

The factors that create different motivations in people or are effective in maintaining them can be divided into three groups. A group of factors is related to the individual personality of employees and the characteristics that people have. Another group of factors is related to the organization, which includes job conditions, promotion of rights and management, and dealing with employees. Another group of factors is environmental factors outside the organization, including the society and governing conditions (8).

Organizational factors that contribute to operational failures include inappropriate workplace (29%), poor process design (23%), lack of integration in internal supply chains (23%), and inappropriate space or infrastructure for doing work (9). Low social support, insufficient promotion compared to the level of competition,

increasing organizational complexity, distribution of power, and procedural injustice are predictive factors of cynicism (10). Previous studies have reported organizational factors influential in cynicism including organization size, top management support, expected profit, age, human capital level, environment, and organization size (11). According to the identified factors, it can be claimed that such a problem can be solved in the organization by controlling the factors influential in cynicism.

This research investigated the model of reducing cynicism in HPSs, one of the indicators of which is to create mental health for the organization employees. The study aimed to identify the model for reducing organizational cynicism in HPSs in Tabriz to find the barriers and solutions to minimize cynicism by identifying the factors that cause cynicism.

## Methods

The current research was conducted with a qualitative approach and the grounded theory (GT) research method. GT is a general, inductive, and interpretive research strategy created in 1967 by Glaser and Strauss. The theory formation process in this strategy is moving from part to whole (12). The GT allows the researcher to develop a new theory instead of using predefined theories in cases where it is impossible to formulate a hypothesis (13).

In this analysis method, two basic operations are necessary. The first step is to find fundamental research questions. In this method, basic questions are directed in a direction that advances understanding of theoretical issues. Continuous comparison and especially having theoretical sensitivity is the basis of work in this method. Every event is always compared with similar and different events. As soon as the concepts are connected with the sentences expressing the relationship in an explanatory framework, the research findings go beyond the stage of conceptual order and turn into a theory (14).

The research statistical population included all principals and assistants of HPSs in Tabriz

education districts. Managers and assistants involved in the HPSs programs with more than 30 staff members were selected by purposive sampling, and interviews were conducted and continued with eight people until theoretical saturation. The inclusion criteria consisted of at least ten years of teaching experience, at least three years of executive work experience in education, at least a master's degree, at least three years of service in HPSs, at least 30 hours of training in mental health, participation in health promotion meetings, only women and only executive staff, and the number of employees and teachers of schools in the service area should not be less than 30 people.

With proper context (previous coordination was done to avoid wasting the participants' time and the interviews were recorded with the participants' permission. The participants were allowed to withdraw from the research at any time. Some other ethical points were also mentioned in this research, such as keeping the privacy and comfort of the interview place, confidentiality of the information, deleting the file of the interviews, and, if desired, informing the participants of the general results of the interview. During the interview, it was tried to push the interviewee to express cynicism dimensions. These interviews continued until the data were repetitive and saturated for the researchers. At the same time as collecting the data, the researchers recorded their thoughts and interpretation of the interaction with the data, a continuous process was done with note-taking. The researchers had to continue collecting data until the saturation point was reached. Encountering repetitive data was one of the signs of reaching the saturation point (15).

Some interview questions are as follows:

“To your idea, what is organizational cynicism in an educational environment?” “Is the level of organizational cynicism in HPSs and school health programs different from other aspects of the educational environment? If so, what are the differences?” “How can organizational cynicism be reduced or prevented in HPSs?” “What is the social, economic, and cultural role of the external

environment and outside the educational system in increasing or decreasing organizational cynicism in HPSs?” “What programs can be designed to reduce organizational cynicism?” “What are the consequences of organizational cynicism in HPS?”

**Discussion**

In data analysis, the text of the interviews was coded based on the Strauss and Corbin analysis method (16). Data coding included three stages including open, axial, and selective coding. Open coding was done in two steps including primary coding and secondary coding. Primary coding was done by coding the data line by line, phrase by phrase, or paragraph by paragraph. A concept or code was attached to each of them. In secondary coding, similar and common items were placed in a single category by comparing concepts. Therefore, the amount of data (codes - concepts) was reduced to a specific and limited number of major categories. Then, these categories were placed next to each other and related. In axial coding, a category of open coding stage was selected and placed in the center of the process

being investigated (as the central phenomenon), and other categories were related to it. The categories were "causal conditions," "strategies," "contextual and intervening conditions", and "outcomes". A "coding pattern" diagram was drawn in this step. This model contained six boxes (or categories) of information. Axial category is a mental form of a phenomenon that is the basis of the process. Causal conditions are categories built around the axial category and specify what factors cause the central phenomenon. Contextual conditions are special conditions under which strategies manage the phenomenon. Intervening factors are general conditions that act as facilitators and limiters of strategies. Strategies provide solutions to face the studied phenomenon, which aim to manage the studied phenomenon. The outcomes of employing strategies are the results that emerge from strategies (17).

In selective coding, explanations are given that connect the classes of the model or form a story. In the advanced mode, the researcher ends the work by presenting the situation matrix (18).

**Table 1.** Open codes and categories related to causal conditions

Selective coding	Axial coding (categories)	Open coding (concepts)
	Individual factors	Negativity Self-hypnotic
Causal conditions	Environmental factors	perception of surrounding behaviors Negative experiences
	Group	Perception of an unbalanced distribution Negative highlighting

Examples of expressions mentioned by respondents for causal conditions: Interviewee 1: “There are a lot of jealousy and negative reactions to each other's success at work. The manager's goal is to strike.” Interviewee 4: “We blame ourselves for our jobs; we don't make progress and consider ourselves weak and unworthy.” Interviewee 2: “Morning traffic and even the weather affect cynicism.” Interviewee 7: “The feeling that the staffs don’t work and teachers work hard in the classroom, summer work of staff and vacation for

teachers, and feeling that sports teachers don’t work.” Interviewee 8: “It highlights the negative characteristics of others. Low communication time causes cynicism. The entertainment time is low.”

An axial phenomenon is the main incident or event with a series of actions/interactions to control or manage and is related to it (17). The axial phenomenon studied in this research is the reduction of organizational cynicism, according to health promotion programs in HPSs, whose characteristics are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Open codes and categories related to the axial phenomenon

Selective coding	Axial coding (categories)	Open coding (primary concepts)
Reducing organizational cynicism	Negative feelings about individual ethics	Distrust of others Self-distrust
	Ambiguity in relationships	Failure to correctly define relationships Lack of attention to relationships
	Negative perception	Disregard for equality Unbalanced distribution

Examples of expressions mentioned by the respondents to reduce organizational cynicism: Interviewee 3: “Greed and envy of each other's success and grudge of their incompetence.” Interviewee 4: “Lack of understanding of each other's conditions and different perceptions.” Interviewee 5: “There is non-cooperation initially due to a lack of knowledge, hasty judgment and reaction, and reminding by name in meetings.” Interviewee 6: “In joint work, without informing the colleague, even minor work causes resentment. Some people's work is not valued. The presence or absence of people at work is not important. Low

social support. Unbalanced distribution of points. Ignorance of some decisions.”

Contextual conditions show a series of special characteristics that indicate a phenomenon. In other words, it is the location of incidents or events related to a phenomenon along a dimension where action is taken to control, manage, and respond to the phenomenon (17). The contextual conditions in this research included the environment inside the organization and the environment outside the organization. The mentioned conditions are described in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Open codes and categories related to context or contextual variables

Selective coding	Axial coding (categories)	Open coding (concepts)
Context (contextual variables)	The environment inside the organization	Leadership style and decision-making Social atmosphere and organizational culture
	The environment outside the organization	Economic-social situation Mistrust in society

Examples of phrases mentioned by the respondents for the environment inside the organization: Interviewee 2: Many directives, bureaucracy and requesting excessive and useless work of staff from teachers.” Interviewee 6: “Lack of trust in the administration and asking for an illustrated report on everything. Learning is forgotten, and they ask us to work against the goals.” Interviewee 7: The administration's job is to look at our reports and prepare them. Managers follow the dictates of the administration.” Interviewee 8: “Lack of transparency and lack of opportunity to express opinions.”

respondents for the environment outside the organization: Interviewee 3: “The skyrocketing inflation affects mistrust.” Interviewee 4: “Although suicide is condemned in Islam, there is a culture of slander.” Interviewee 7: “Most of them attribute unpleasant faults to others.”

Mediating or intervening conditions are general and broad and affect the way of action/interaction (17). Based on the analysis of the content of the interviews, the current research identified three components including barriers to public implementation, barriers to the implementation of all items, and lack of coordination, as described in Table 4.

Examples of expressions mentioned by the



**Table 4.** Open codes and categories related to mediator conditions (intervenor)

Selective coding	Axial coding (categories)	Open coding (concepts)
Interfering factors	Barriers to the implementation of the program	Barriers to public implementation Barriers to the implementation of all items Lack of coordination

Examples of expressions mentioned by the respondents for obstacles to implement program: Interviewee 1: “The programs are not continuous and are brought up only once in the teachers' council.” Interviewee 5: “Most cases of physical health are considered and emphasized, and mental health is not considered.” Interviewee 8: “Most people don't even know they are among HPSs, and

some have little knowledge.”

Strategies: The desired strategies in the GT refer to providing solutions to face the phenomenon under study, managing it, dealing with it, and showing sensitivity to it (17). This study proposes two basic strategies to achieve the desired cooperation and confidence-building situation, as described in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Open codes and related categories of strategies

Selective coding	Axial coding (categories)	Open coding (concepts)
Strategies	Confidence building	Assessing needs and preventing useless work Flexibility and empathy
	Cooperation	Intragroup communication Outgroup communication

Examples of expressions mentioned by the respondents for confidence building: Interviewee 1: “Each teacher should take the class as a project and improve it in his style.” Interviewee 3: “Officials should change when traveling to countries.” Interviewee 4: “Using elite experts working on managers and communicating with experts.” Interviewee 6: “The school should welcome colleagues and make them feel useful. The sensitivity to the issues increases by informing the teacher because the teacher has the greatest impact on the student as a liaison. A colleague is the best expert in providing solutions to problems.”

Examples of expressions mentioned by the respondents for cooperation: Interviewee 2: “In-person and out-of-person service courses are held, and camps should be held for mental relaxation. They participated in organizations such as municipalities, radio and television, welfare, and Red Crescent with related conferences.”

Outcomes are the results that emerge as a result of strategies. Outcomes result from actions and reactions to the conditions that exist regarding the phenomenon (17). The outcomes of these strategies have two categories (invisible effect and visible effect), which are given in Table 6.

**Table 6.** Open codes and categories related to outcomes

Selective coding	Axial coding (categories)	Axial coding
Outcomes	Invisible effect	Psychological effects Effective reaction
	Visible effect	Lasting effects Program success

Examples of expressions mentioned by the respondents for invisible effect: Interviewee 3: “Security feeling is the reduction of misunderstanding, feeling inner satisfaction, and the reduction of absenteeism.” Interviewee 5: “A

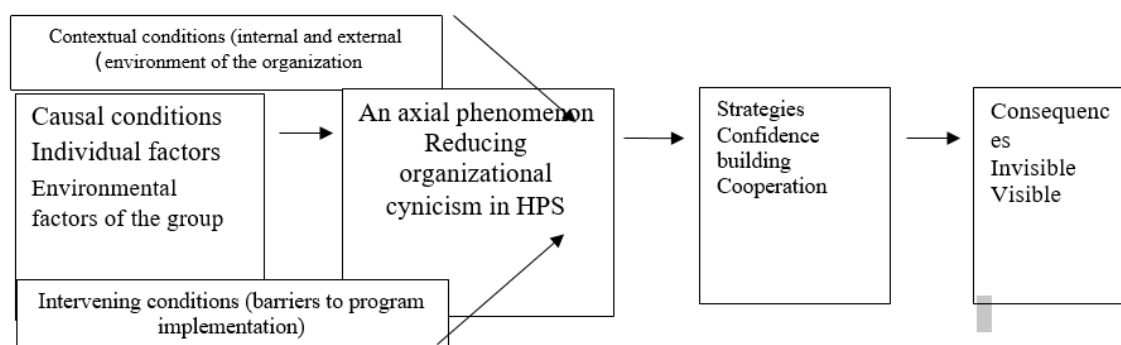
decreased sense of revenge and skepticism, the spirit of innovation.” Interviewee 6: “Resolving hidden aggressions and stubbornness.”

Examples of expressions mentioned by the respondents for visible effect: Interviewee 1: “The

discussions about the issues show the effect of the content; we even transfer it to the family.” Interviewee 2: “I was motivated to work when the director said that my health is important, and I forgot everything and moved all my classes to the ground floor and warned busy children that my teacher's condition was critical.” Interviewee 3:

“The support of top management, evaluation of the existing system, and hiring consultants are effective.”

2. A suitable conceptual model for reducing organizational cynicism in HPS: Figure 1 reflects the model for reducing organizational cynicism in HPSs based on the systematic design of the GT.



**Figure 1.** Paradigmatic model of reducing organizational cynicism in HPS

In the design of the organizational cynicism reduction model in HPSs, it is realized as a central factor based on causal conditions (individual, environmental, group), and using confidence-building and cooperation strategies will guarantee the program success.

Validation of GT: Some qualitative researchers consider the reliability and validity of data and research results to be traditionally related to quantitative research (19), but the fact is that in qualitative research, the validity and reliability of data and findings are an important part of the research process (20). There are different methods for GT. This research used two member checking methods and external audit methods. After receiving corrective comments and consultation with a specialist professor, the necessary editing and final model were presented. In this research, the following operations were carried out. The basic questions were directed to advance the understanding of theoretical issues (the interviewee was led to express the dimensions of cynicism). Continuous comparison and especially theoretical sensitivity were the basis of its work. Concepts were linked with sentences expressing the relationship as an explanatory framework. The

researchers recorded their thoughts and interpretations of the interaction with the data while collecting the data. Data coding consisted of three stages. Open coding was done in two stages including primary coding and secondary coding. Primary coding was done by coding the data line by line, phrase by phrase, or paragraph by paragraph. A concept or code was attached to each of them. In secondary coding, similar and common items were placed in a single category format by comparing concepts. In axial coding, the open coding stage category was chosen and placed in the center of the process being investigated (as the central phenomenon). Then, other categories were related to it ("causal conditions," "strategies," "contextual and intervening conditions," and "outcomes"). In the selective coding, explanations were given that linked the classes of the model to each other.

### Conclusion

In response to the model of organizational cynicism in HPSs, eight managers and assistants involved in this plan were interviewed. The primary concepts were extracted after carrying out eight interviews, implementing the text of the

interviews on paper, and reading them repeatedly. About 17 major categories were obtained by categorizing them in open coding, which was determined in the axial coding stage of 5 core categories. By analyzing them, the modeling was presented in an integrated way. The model shows the factors and their relationship and pays attention to the interaction of these factors and solutions and consequences.

Research data were reviewed and analyzed regarding the components of organizational cynicism and the strategies and consequences of reducing organizational cynicism in HPSs. In addition, the results obtained for reducing organizational cynicism in HPSs were compared with those conducted in this field.

As observed in the diagrammatic model, the components of organizational cynicism are as follows. Axial category: reducing organizational cynicism in HPSs. Causal conditions: individual factors (negativity and low self-esteem), environmental factors (perception of surrounding behaviors, negative experiences), group factors (perception of unbalanced distribution, negative emphasis) that cause the central phenomenon (organizational cynicism), emphasizing the negative feeling in individual ethics, ambiguity in relationships, and negative perception. Contextual conditions: strategies based on the internal environment of the organization (leadership and decision-making style, social environment, and organizational culture) and the external environment (economic-social situation and mistrust in the society) manage organizational cynicism. Intervening factors: barriers to the implementation of the program (barriers to universal implementation, barriers to the implementation of all items, lack of coordination) are limiting factors of strategies. Strategies: confidence building (assessing needs and preventing useless work, flexibility, and empathy) and cooperation (in-group communication, outgroup communication) are solutions to face organizational cynicism. Outcomes: Invisible effects (psychological effects, effective reaction) and visible effects (sustainable effects, success of

the program) are the results of employing strategies.

Effective factors in the model to reduce cynicism are consistent with the results of research by Sheikhul Islami (2006) and Garcia et al. (2016) (11). One of the duties of HPSs is to create mental health for the school staff. Therefore, the plan implementers must pay attention to individual, environmental, and group factors of cynicism and know that these factors play an important role in reducing organizational cynicism.

The axial phenomenon in this research is the reduction of organizational cynicism in HPSs, which is consistent with the results of Metes' study (2013) (3).

The contextual variables of the internal and external environment of the organization are consistent with the findings of Chiaburu et al. (2013) and Yasin, Khalid (2015) (21). In this study, two strategies to reach the desired situation (trust building and cooperation) are suggested based on the analysis of the interviews, which are consistent with the findings of Çınara (2014) to reduce cynicism. The outcomes related to the reduction of organizational cynicism (invisible effect and visible effect) are consistent with the findings of Yıldız & Şaylıkay (2013)(22).

Generally, the implementation of the HPS and its effect on reducing cynicism did not have much effect on reducing organizational cynicism due to the lack of coordination in implementing the whole program of HPSs, especially in the mental health department of employees. The best way to solve this problem is to build confidence in the health promotion plan, cooperation in its implementation, and coordination of different organizations' activities in this direction. The effects will be sustainable when the activities are continuous, leading to continuous success.

The health promoter's plan can have the best performance to reduce organizational cynicism, which is one of the components of the mental health of the organization's employees. Training and workshops regarding organizational cynicism are necessary to improve the training status of health promoter trainers. Therefore, the continuous



evaluation of the activities carried out, their application, effort, and attention to complying with the training should be considered to achieve the program goals.

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This article is a class research for doctoral research method and it is not possible to receive an ethical code.

### Conflicts of interest

There is no conflict of interest to declare.

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### Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles are considered in this

article. The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and its implementation steps. They could also leave the study at any time.

### Code of Ethics

This article is a class research for doctoral research method and it is not possible to receive an ethical code.

### Authors' contributions

F. k, contributed to the design and implementation of the research; B. T, contributed to guidance at all stages.

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