Designing a Model for Reducing Organizational Apathy among Female Teachers in Shiraz's Education System

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Abstract

Introduction: Sensitization in organizations is recognized as one of the most important topics in organizational theory. Sensitization is the process through which managers and other members of the organization understand various issues and topics. Accordingly, apathy is a tendency to be indifferent to the organization and its issues. The aim of the present study was to design a model for reducing organizational numbness of female teachers in education.

Methodology: This research was conducted with a qualitative design and using content analysis and semi-structured interviews. The participants in the study were teachers and education managers in Shiraz. The sampling was carried out using a purposive sampling method and based on the theoretical saturation criterion. The data collection tool was in-depth interviews with twenty-four managers and teachers in relation to the phenomenon under study. In order to ensure the validity and reliability of the data, two methods of participant review and expert review were used in the study.

Findings: The results of the study showed that the model for reducing organizational numbness of female teachers includes 4 organizing themes such as individual factors, group factors, organizational factors and supra-organizational factors, and also includes 23 basic themes.

Conclusion: Therefore, it is concluded that in order to reduce organizational numbness, the education system should provide the grounds for reducing organizational numbness factors for female teachers.

Key Words: Organizational numbness, numbness, education system, female teachers

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Introduction

Education is the most fundamental educational institution and one of the largest and most extensive social organizations, playing a pivotal role in achieving a society's cultural, educational, social, and economic objectives. The prosperity or decline of any society depends on its quality of education. Thus, all educational institutions—particularly foundational education systems—form the basis of a society's independence and self-sufficiency. A society aspiring to sustainable development and optimal education must prioritize its educational system. The education system is among the most influential determinants of human capital (Wiener, Hargreaves, Ward, Bonell, Mokkdad, & Patton, 2017) and plays a crucial role in sustainable development as a hub of knowledge and innovation (Yañez, Eroglu, Moreno, & Lambrias, 2019).

Researchers argue that factors such as rigid organizational hierarchies, strict regulations, and qualitative and interpersonal barriers hinder women's professional advancement, while cultural attitudes further exacerbate these challenges (Edirisinghe, 2018; Booysen & Nkomo, 2010). Consequently, gender inequality in organizations stems not from a single factor but from the complex interplay of political, economic, legal, social, and organizational dynamics (Farahbakhsh, Nikpay, & Ghanbari, 2016). These factors may lead to organizational apathy among women in professional settings.

Neglecting human capital in the workplace can result in organizational apathy—a state of conscious disengagement and distorted perception among employees, arising from unmet expectations in their thoughts, behaviors, and performance (Aeeni, Mousavi, Sepehvand, & Nazarpouri, 2022). Apathy is a process rooted in unfulfilled expectations (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014) and manifests as emotional detachment, norm stagnation, and self-restraint, often leading to frustration, confusion, and disengagement (Hämäläinen, 2008).

Sense making, the process by which individuals and groups interpret ambiguous experiences to create shared meaning (Bertod & Miller, 2017), is disrupted in apathetic environments. Employees may respond to directives with protests or absenteeism—overt signs of dissatisfaction. However, prolonged, deep-seated discontent ultimately leads to resignation and emotional numbness (Dutton, Roberts, & Bednar, 2010). Apathy arises from selective attention, where certain elements are emphasized while others are ignored, and enabling individuals to rationalize unexpected or ambiguous events (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005).

Since emotions shape behavior and organizational dynamics (Weick, 2010), apathy can destabilize institutions, driving employees toward disorder (Weick, 2012). Thus, emotional literacy and sensemaking are critical for managers to address silent organizational chaos, reignite employee engagement, and foster commitment (Mohammadi, Bahrami, & Eidi, 2023; Jones, 2010; Moradi, Hamidi, & Eskandari, 2020). Key contributors to organizational apathy include:

Weak human resource management

Poor communication

Lack of meritocracy

Dysfunctional organizational culture

Strained manager-employee relationships.

Numerous studies have examined the phenomenon of organizational apathy, including international research by Choi (2019), Kalvård (2015), and Sandberg & Tsoukas (2015), as well as domestic studies by Zahed Bablan & Ahmadi (2022), Khameshia, Rezaei, & Mokhtari (2020), and Aeeni, Mousavi, Sepehvand, & Nazarpouri (2021).

For instance, Salehi Kuchebaghi, Rahmati, & Kiyakajouri (2023) investigated the causes and contextual factors of organizational apathy within the Iranian Red Crescent Society. Their findings suggest that reducing apathy requires: Eliminating workplace discrimination, Standardizing work procedures, implementing merit-based management strategies, Addressing structural inefficiencies.

By adopting these measures, organizations can enhance social capital, foster employee commitment, and promote organizational justice, ultimately facilitating goal achievement. Christofaro (2022) conducted a systematic review titled "Organizational Sense making: A Systematic Review and Evolutionary Model," offering an updated framework for sense making in organizations. The study identifies four new characteristics and two evolved features of sense making phenomena, introducing emotional schemas as a novel unit of analysis for individual and collective sense making processes. Similarly, Michel Hughes, Hennings, & Robertson (2022) explored "Organizational Sense making Systems as Determinants of Successful Change." Using a grounded theory approach, they demonstrated that enhancing organizational sense making improves the effectiveness of change interventions by: Strengthening situational awareness, aligning shared mental models, preparing organizations for transition. Trommershausen (2022) further highlighted sense making's role in strategic shifts, particularly in corporate social responsibility (CSR). His study, "Sense making as a Driver of CSR Strategy Change in Media," argues that CSR strategies should be viewed as continuous sense making processes that engage all organizational stakeholders. Aeeni et al. (2023) developed and validated a model of organizational insensitivity in human capital at the Kermanshah National Gas Company. Their grounded theory research identified: Causal factors: Injustice, lack of meritocracy, economic pressures, managerial neglect, Intervening conditions: Poor role modeling, disregard for employee input, Contextual factors: Flawed reward systems, conflicting organizational goals, Consequences: Reduced productivity, widespread dissatisfaction, increased misconduct.

Mohammadi et al. (2023) proposed a paradigm model for organizational apathy among physical education teachers in Kermanshah. Key findings included:

Triggers: Unfair evaluations, lack of career advancement, Mitigation strategies: Individual, organizational, and macro-level interventions, Outcomes: Improved job satisfaction, reduced burnout, higher productivity

Research Question:

Given these challenges, this study seeks to answer:
How can a conceptual model be designed to reduce organizational apathy among female teachers in Shiraz's education system?

Methodology

This research was done with a qualitative design and using content analysis and semi-structured interviews.

Participants included experienced administrators and teachers from Shiraz's Department of Education who possessed relevant expertise or work experience in the subject matter. Using purposive sampling based on specific criteria (including field of study, expertise, and relevant executive experience) and theoretical saturation technique, twenty-four key informants were selected for model development, and in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted.

The collected data were analyzed through thematic analysis and thematic network formation. The process involved: Transcription of interview recordings by the researcher, supplemented with field notes taken during interviews, Identification of 105 primary codes, Categorization of codes into similar and homogeneous groups

To ensure conformability and reliability of the developed framework, qualitative validation criteria were used, including: Conformability measures, Member checking to verify qualitative findings, Consensus validity

Research Findings

The findings of the present study revealed that the conceptual model for reducing organizational apathy among female teachers in Shiraz's education system (the overarching theme) consists of 51 basic themes and 12 organizing themes, with their interrelationships illustrated in a thematic network (Figure 1).

The study employed Attride-Sterling's (2006) thematic analysis method to identify basic, organizing, and global themes. The process followed these key steps: In-depth examination of interview transcripts and documents to extract

meaningful codes. After conducting and transcribing interviews, 137 primary codes were identified and categorized. These codes were summarized and merged under broader themes. The initial codes were reanalyzed to develop 51 basic themes, representing granular aspects of organizational apathy. Related basic themes were grouped into higher-order organizing themes, forming the structural framework of the model. The relationships between organizing themes were mapped to illustrate the conceptual model. The model highlights critical dimensions influencing organizational apathy, including: Individual factors (e.g., motivation, emotional exhaustion), Group dynamics (e.g., peer support, team cohesion), Organizational policies (e.g., fairness in promotions, workload management), Supra-organizational influences (e.g., societal expectations, policy constraints).This structured approach ensures a holistic understanding of the drivers and potential interventions for reducing apathy among female teachers:

Table 1: Sample of Interview Excerpts and Initial Codes Extracted from Key Participants

No.	Excerpts from Interviews	Participant Code	Initial Codes
1	"Discrimination by school administrators among teachers leads to apathy."	P20	Reducing workplace discrimination
2	"Lack of verbal appreciation from administrators causes apathy; even without financial resources, at least verbal recognition should be given."	P10	Verbal recognition / Financial capacity
3	"Apathetic teachers fail to provide proper feedback to students."	P2	Improving effective student feedback
4	"Improving teachers' financial status reduces their apathy."	P20	Teachers' financial well-being
5	"An apathetic teacher becomes indifferent to their core duties; efforts must be made to reduce this indifference."	P5	Organizational indifference
6	"Such individuals usually avoid teamwork."	P5	Lack of participation in teamwork
7	"Insufficient financial capacity leads to work-related apathy."	P3	Financial well-being
8	"Positive interactions, especially with administrators and colleagues, reduce apathy."	P22	Improving teacher-administrator communication
9	"Inappropriate managerial behavior and lack of warmth contribute to teacher apathy."	P17	Improving workplace relations
10	"Family issues and work-life imbalance cause apathy."	P12	Work-life imbalance
11	"Unfair salary disparities are a major factor in female teachers' apathy."	P23	Financial equity
12	"Lack of enthusiasm is a key element of detachment from teaching."	P24	Lack of motivation
13	"Apathetic teachers often lack creativity and innovative teaching methods."	P4	Encouraging creativity in teaching

14	"Preserving teachers' self-esteem and confidence is crucial in reducing apathy."	P17	Enhancing self-esteem
15	"Effective peer collaboration can reduce apathy in schools."	P24	Strengthening peer interactions
16	"Poor working conditions (lighting, classroom facilities) diminish motivation."	P11	Upgrading school infrastructure
17	"Removing bureaucratic restrictions fosters autonomy and reduces apathy."	P23	Streamlining rigid regulations
18	"A teacher's personal traits may cause apathy, often hindering problem-solving and future planning."	P1	Promoting professional ethics

Thematic Development Process

After extracting and grouping similar codes, basic themes were formed. These were further summarized under organizing themes, culminating in a global theme (presented in Table 2).

Table 2: Classification of Themes into Basic, Organizing, and Global Themes

Basic Themes	Organizing Themes	Global Theme
• Developing professional ethics & standards among teachers • Enhancing teacher self-esteem • Reducing work-family conflict • Improving motivation • Encouraging creativity, innovation, and adaptability	Individual Factors	Model for Reducing Organizational Apathy Among Female Teachers in Shiraz's Education System
• Improving organizational communication • Enhancing job satisfaction • Fostering empathy and belonging • Providing timely and constructive feedback from administrators • Reducing workplace discrimination • Decreasing workplace distrust	Group Factors	
• Decentralizing organizational hierarchy • Reducing organizational indifference • Upgrading school infrastructure and modern educational tools • Eliminating rigid	Organizational Factors	

bureaucratic policies • Improving compensation systems • Reducing organizational silence • Supporting constructive change • Developing a dynamic organizational identity	
• Reducing patriarchal workplace culture • Prioritizing career advancement for women • Cultivating openness to new perspectives • Addressing societal distrust in women's professional capabilities	Supra-Organizational Factors

Validation Process

The finalized themes were reviewed by:

1. **Interview participants** (member checking)
2. **Research committee** (expert validation)

Both groups confirmed the **content validity** of the qualitative model.

Thematic Network Structure

The resulting framework comprises:

- **1 Global Theme** (Apathy reduction model)
- **4 Organizing Themes** (Individual, Group, Organizational, Supra-Organizational)
- **23 Basic Themes** (See *Figure 1* for full network visualization)

Key Contributions

1. **Holistic Approach**: Integrates micro (individual) to macro (societal) factors.
2. **Actionable Interventions**:
   - *Individual*: Professional development programs
   - *Organizational*: Policy reforms & infrastructure upgrades
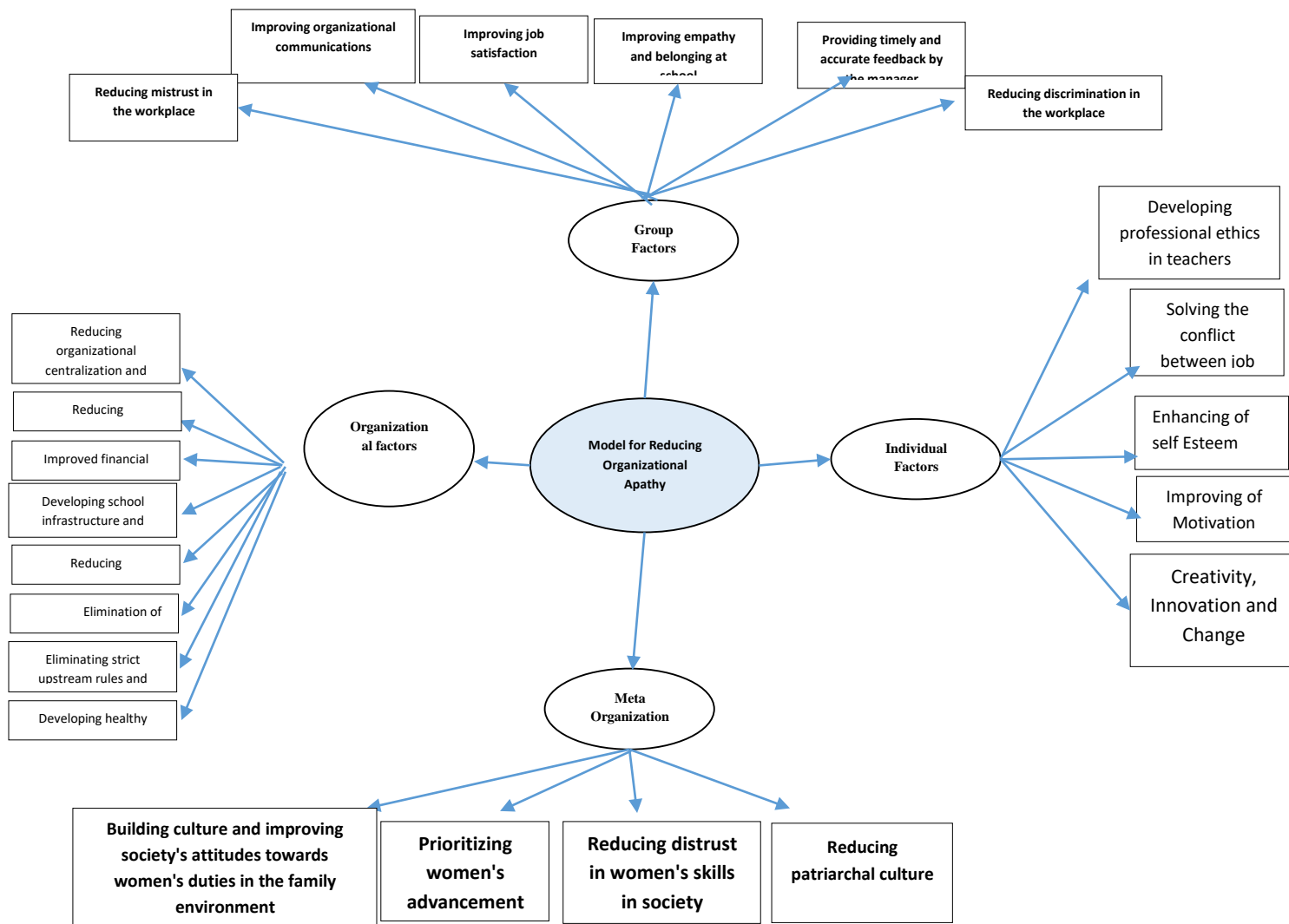   - *Cultural*: Gender equity initiatives

Figure 1: Model for reducing the indifference of female teachers of education in Shiraz

As can be seen in the figure above, the theme network of the model for reducing organizational numbness of female teachers in Shiraz has four organizing themes, which include individual factors, group factors, organizational factors, and supra-organizational factors. The individual factors component includes indicators such as developing ethics and professional standards in teachers, increasing teachers' self-esteem, reducing conflict and creating a balance between work and family, improving motivation and encouraging creativity, innovation, and change.

Another component of the aforementioned framework is group factors, which includes indicators such as improving organizational communication, improving job satisfaction, improving empathy and belonging, providing timely and accurate feedback by the manager, reducing discrimination in the

workplace, and reducing distrust in the workplace. The organizational factors component is the third important dimension of the framework for reducing organizational numbness among female teachers in education, which includes indicators such as reducing organizational centralization and reforming the organizational structure, reducing organizational indifference, developing school infrastructure and modern educational equipment, eliminating strict upper-level rules and regulations, improving the compensation system in the organization, reducing organizational silence, supporting constructive changes, and developing a dynamic organizational identity. The fourth dimension of the framework also considers extra-organizational factors, which include indicators such as reducing the culture of patriarchy, prioritizing women's progress and career advancement, creating a culture of change and accepting new ways of thinking, and reducing distrust of women's skills in society.

To examine the validity of the work steps and the results obtained, the principles of credibility were used, which included continuous observation of the research process and reviewing the research findings, and establishing appropriate and correct communication with the participants in the research. Also, the concepts revealed in the study process were carefully accepted and the interviews were reviewed by research colleagues and experts to ensure the accuracy of the work, as well as revisiting the interviewees and confirming the findings. In order to increase reliability, all interviews were recorded and recorded in writing. In addition, points of ambiguity were discussed with the participants and these ambiguities were resolved. In this regard, there were ambiguities regarding some categories that were corrected in the final categorization. Then, based on the findings of the qualitative section, a questionnaire was prepared to evaluate the components and indicators of the developed model, and its descriptive and inferential findings are analyzed and reviewed below.

Discussion and conclusion

The findings of the present study showed that the conceptual framework for reducing organizational apathy among female teachers of Shiraz Education has four key dimensions: individual factors, group factors, organizational factors, and supra-organizational factors, each of which has several indicators. One of the most important dimensions of this model is individual factors, which includes indicators such as developing ethics and professional standards in teachers, increasing teachers' self-esteem, reducing conflict and creating a balance between work and family, improving motivation, and encouraging creativity, innovation, and change.

The development of professional ethics and standards was one of the influential factors and important components in the dimension of individual factors. In this regard, it should be said that teacher professional learning is a long-term process that takes place along the way in the form of continuous in-service training (Richter, Kanter, Klassman, Lutek, & Baumert, 2011). The development of professional ethics and compliance with common professional standards for teachers includes features such as the teacher's commitment to

maximum use of his or her potential, participation in conferences and workshops held, participation in curriculum development, efforts to increase parental participation and role in the school, all of which are considered to indicate the teacher's participation in the school environment and his or her insensitivity to his or her work duties and professional obligations. Also, the willingness of teachers to participate in in-service training courses also leads to the improvement of their qualifications and professional standards, which itself is a very important factor in reducing the insensitivity of female teachers.

Another important dimension in the dimension of individual factors that, from the participants' perspective, leads to a decrease in teachers' indifference was an increase in their self-esteem. In this regard, it should be said that the social status of teachers, according to the criteria determined in each country, indicates the level of importance given to education and the level of respect for the position of teachers in that society. The importance of the issue under discussion is due to the fact that the social and professional status of teachers in teaching is directly related to the quality of education in each country (Shah, Ali, and Khan, 2012). Therefore, efforts should be made in this institution to strengthen the self-esteem of female teachers because it is considered one of the most important factors affecting their level of indifference. In other words, the self-esteem of teachers and the status of the teaching profession cannot be considered separately from the overall status of education. Therefore, addressing the issue of self-esteem and trying to improve the social status and respect for the position of teachers are considered to be among the most important factors in reducing teacher indifference in the school environment. According to the participants of the present study, receiving respect from school administrators, efforts to restore the sacred position of teachers in the educational system, and increasing the dignity and respect and honoring of the teacher's position, especially from the students' perspective, have a significant impact on their performance. Therefore, it can be expected that by respecting the position of teachers and increasing their self-esteem in the workplace, their level of indifference will decrease.

Reducing conflict and creating a balance between work and family were other important components in the individual factors dimension. Balancing women's duties at home and their work duties is more difficult. According to studies conducted in developing countries that have traditional structures for policy-making to maintain a balance between home and workplace responsibilities is less flexible, maintaining a balance between work and family is more difficult. In these societies, social and cultural values demand multiple roles from women (Greenfelder, 2013), and the division of gender roles is such that women are responsible for household and child affairs, which can lead to reduced job productivity. Therefore, creating coordination and avoiding conflict between roles are important issues in performing the duties of female teachers. In justification of this finding, it can be said that considering that female teachers have a special role and position in terms of quantity and quality of service provision in the education system, it seems that efforts to resolve potential conflicts and avoid overlapping work duties of teachers will have a

great impact on their performance and productivity, leading to continuous fatigue, burnout, indifference, and ultimately organizational apathy. From the perspective of the teachers in the present study, considering more maternity leave for women and also providing facilities to improve their financial and psychological well-being will greatly help reduce the conflict between work and family. Therefore, the human resources management of the education organization can reduce the apathy of female teachers in the workplace by considering measures to reduce the conflict between the two roles of motherhood and teaching.

Improving motivation among teachers was another influential factor in the dimension of individual factors. Teachers' motivation is one of the most important factors in their success and, on the other hand, determines the intensity and level of their performance (Jalali-Kuh-Kheili and Ghadiri-Pain-Lumuki, 1401). Efforts to improve the motivation of female teachers in the school environment by the principal and also by considering various financial and non-financial incentives were considered important from the perspective of the female teachers participating in this study. In this regard, from the perspective of teachers, encouragement and receiving positive verbal feedback from the principal and other colleagues will have a greater impact on their performance than financial issues. Also, from their perspective, the individual's intrinsic motivation and interest in the teaching profession are other issues that affect the teacher's performance and feelings of numbness beyond the organizational issues of the school. Thus, since motivation is the most important source of energy for an individual to achieve high levels of performance and overcome work obstacles (Tohidi and Jabbari, 2012); Therefore, it is expected that senior managers of the Education Organization and school principals will consider the necessary measures to increase and improve the motivation level of female teachers.

Another component among the individual factors was encouraging creativity, innovation, and change among female teachers. Teachers, as curriculum implementers, must change their teaching methods and attitudes in line with external changes, and this alignment with change has been considered an important component of reducing female teachers' apathy. In fact, considering the contexts and changes that exist in society, it is necessary for teachers to adapt to these changes and influence them, which indicates the effective participation of teachers in the school environment. Teachers are not only one of the variables that need change in order to improve educational systems, but they are also considered the most important factor in creating change. In other words, when teachers seek to learn new skills in order to improve their performance and, on the other hand, accept the changes and developments in the workplace, their apathy decreases over time. Because keeping up with the changes and trying to use creative methods in the classroom leads to improved teacher performance, and this cumulative effect leads to increased interaction and reduced apathy.

Another important dimension of this framework was group factors, which have indicators such as improving organizational communication, improving

job satisfaction, improving empathy and belonging, providing timely and correct feedback by the manager, reducing discrimination in the workplace, and reducing mistrust in the workplace. In this study, improving organizational communication is considered one of the most important elements in reducing burnout among female teachers. From the perspective of female teachers, the scope of these communications is defined as related to the manager, colleagues, students, and their parents. From the perspective of teachers, how to interact and have appropriate and effective two-way communication with the school principal is one of the most important factors affecting teacher burnout. When the school principal does not pay equal and common attention to all teachers and does not use his leadership power and influence to improve communication, teacher burnout increases. Also, according to the results of the present study in the qualitative section, the greater the amount of communication between teachers and colleagues in the workplace, the greater the satisfaction, the less absenteeism in their workplace, and the less desire to quit among female teachers. As a result, they become less apathetic towards the workplace and show a greater desire to form constructive interactions in the workplace.

The third dimension of the organizational factors model considered included indicators such as reducing organizational centralization and reforming the organizational structure, reducing organizational indifference, developing school infrastructure and modern educational equipment, eliminating strict upstream rules and regulations, improving the compensation system in the organization, reducing organizational silence, supporting constructive changes, and developing a dynamic organizational identity. One of the most important components of the organizational factors dimension is reforming the organizational structure and reducing centralization in the education structure. The organizational structure, while creating internal coordination and fit in the organization, fosters innovation and creativity, and creates the necessary conditions for creating the necessary accountability change. Therefore, how the organizational structure is designed and the components and indicators that are considered in its formulation are very important. When the organizational structure has many and high levels of hierarchy and completely formal and inflexible relationships are in place, it is not possible for the manager to delegate authority, and this leads to the formation of a feeling of organizational injustice among employees (Pong, 2018). The results of various studies have also shown that organizations whose managers manage their employees in specific and specialized structures achieve better results and achievements, and the quality of the performance of the organization's human capital is also guaranteed (Royce, 2012). Therefore, based on the findings of this section, it is suggested that in order to increase the number of female teachers in the workplace and improve their organizational performance, it is necessary to reduce the concentration in this system and also reform the structure.

Finally, in the fourth dimension of this model, extra-organizational factors are considered, which include indicators such as reducing the patriarchal culture, prioritizing women's progress and career advancement, creating a

culture of change and accepting new ways of thinking, and reducing distrust of women's skills in society. Given that the present study was conducted on female teachers, some of the factors mentioned in the qualitative interview process were related to common social perceptions regarding inequality between men and women in society. Based on the findings of the study in this section, from the perspective of female teachers in Shiraz, considering equal opportunities for the promotion of female teachers, giving importance to their capabilities and potentials, and considering gender differences and the different needs of women were important. In this regard, it can be said that most of the female teachers participating in the present study were dissatisfied with the differences made with their male colleagues and considered this factor to be a reason for their organizational insensitivity. Therefore, it is suggested that these disparities be reduced in the Education and Training Organization, as the driving force and catalyst for growth and change in the country, to ultimately lead to a reduction in organizational apathy among female teachers.

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