

Psychometric Assessment of the Persian Version of Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale (ELICSES)

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Abstract

Aim: The Ethical and Legal Issues Self-Efficacy in Counseling (ELICSES) has been developed to evaluate counselors' and psychologists' self-efficacy in ethical and legal issues. Psychometric properties of the ELICSES in Iranian counselors and psychologists remain a largely unexplored realm. The present study, therefore, seeks to translate the scale from English to Persian while also investigating the psychometric properties of the Persian version of the ELICSES. **Method:** Online sampling was utilized to collect data from four hundred and forty-seven counselors, psychologists, and trainees who participated in the study. Ethical and Legal Issues in the Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale and Marlowe–Crowne Social Desirability Scale were used in the study. **Finding:** The results of face (all items earned greater than 1.5 except one item (1.2)), content (overall CVI > 0.79, CVR > 0.62), and construct validity (CMIN=3.65, CFI=0.922, RMSE=0.45; also AVE > .5 and CR > .7) indicated that the ELICSES held appropriate validity and reliability. **Results:** The results of the confirmatory factor analysis confirm the three factors of the ELICSES among Iranian counselors, psychologists, and trainees. These results suggested the validity and reliability of the ELICSES in evaluating self-efficacy when it comes to ethical and legal issues among Iranian counselors, psychologists, and trainees.

Keywords: counselor, evaluation, validation, ethics, self-efficacy.

Introduction

The counselors and psychologists' profession is steered by ethical and legal issues (Baird & Mollen, 2023; Wheeler & Bertram, 2019) and counselors and psychologists' Self-efficacy affects their actions in ambiguous conditions such as ethical dilemmas (Mullen et al., 2014). A counselor or psychologist with a high level of moral and legal self-efficacy believes he/she enjoys a high level of competency to direct and figure out ethical and legal issues (Mullen et al., 2016). It is, therefore, necessary to conduct a psychometric study to measure the self-efficacy of counselors and psychologists in the face of legal and ethical issues.

Ethical and legal self-efficacy is the belief in the ability a counselor or psychologist holds to handle and make a decision on moral and legal issues (Mullen et al., 2014). Such a definition is based on self-efficacy theory, which refers to people's belief about their capability to accomplish a specific task (Bandura, 1977; Moradi & AzizMohammadi 2015). Arbitrations and expectations regarding skills, behavioral abilities, and the potential to cope with environmental challenges determine the initiation and maintenance of behavior (Bandura, 2010; Maddux, 2013). Belief, action, and cognitive skills of trainees along with the environment do manage potently their accomplishment (Gavarkovs et al., 2023; Nakayoshi et al., 2021; Sawyer et al., 2013; Mirzaeian et al., 2016). The higher self-efficacy, the greater the expectation to obtain favorite outcomes, and the lower self-efficacy, the smaller the expectations to gain positive outcomes despite efforts made (Gunawan & Shieh, 2023; Reeve, 2014). Individuals with a weak sense of self-efficacy may use avoidance or anxious behavior in the face of threatening or ambiguous conditions and diminish their efforts, which in turn, disturb the level of performance. In contrast, people with a strong sense of self-efficacy take control over stressors in a threatening situation (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). Finally, self-efficacy as a motivational variable activates, guides, and motivates behavior toward the goal (McGeown et al., 2014).

The present study aims to measure the psychometric properties of the ELICSES developed to evaluate counselors' and psychologists' self-efficacy in ethical and legal issues. ELICSES is a measure based on the self-efficacy theory, the scale involves three factors labeled as general ethical and legal issues self-efficacy; suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect self-efficacy; and counselor development and wellness self-efficacy (Mullen et al., 2014). General ethical and legal self-efficacy means confidence in applying knowledge toward resolving ethical and legal issues; suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect self-efficacy reflects the ability to distinguish appropriate time to report suicide, abuse, and violence cases; counselor and psychologist development and wellness self-efficacy refers to the counselors and psychologists' capability to recognize burnout within them and conduct their wellness (Azizmohammadi, 2013; Mullen et al., 2014).

Researchers have constructed seven instruments to assess self-efficacy in counselors and psychologists: The Counseling Self-Estimate Inventory (Larson et al., 1992), the Counselor Activity Self-Efficacy Scale (Lent et al., 2003), the School Counselor Self-Efficacy Scale (Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2005; Mirkamali et al., 2013), the counselor self-efficacy scale (COSE)--using an Israeli sample (Israelashvili & Socher, 2007; Barfi et al., 2015), the elementary School Counselor Self-Efficacy (Can, 2010), the Psychologist and

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Counselor Self-Efficacy (Watt et al., 2019), and the Ethical and Legal Issues In Counseling Self-Efficacy (ELICSES) (Mullen et al., 2014). Similarly, two measures have been developed to evaluate counselors' and psychologists' knowledge and ability in ethical issues: the Ethical Decision-Making Scale-Revised (EDMS-R) (Dufrene & Glosoff, 2004), and the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Questionnaire (ELICQ) (Lambie et al., 2010). However, among the instruments, the ELICSES measures the counselors', psychologists', and trainees' self-assurance to implement ethical and legal knowledge and to assess the three factors mentioned. The other six scales focus on counselors' and psychologists' performance in particular domains. Also, two psychometric studies have backed up ELICSES (Mullen et al., 2014; Subarimaniam & Zakaria, 2019). In line with that, the present study aims to investigate the psychometric properties of the ELICSES among Iranian counselors, psychologists, and trainees.

Mullen and colleagues (2014) developed the original version of Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy with 23 items. The psychometric properties study was conducted among 584 counselors, psychologists, and trainees in the United States (487 counselors and psychologists and 97 trainees). This study covers various ethnic groups, who live in the United States with the inclusion of both genders. The exploratory factor analysis showed the Scale consists of three factors, Cronbach's alpha for internal consistency for overall score, and three factors (general ethics and legal issues in self-efficacy; suicide, violence, and neglect self-efficacy; and counselor development and wellness self-efficacy) has been reported orderly .96, .95, .94, and .85. Evaluating the convergent validity marked a positive correlation between ELICSES and MCSDS. Subarimaniam and Zakaria (2019) conducted a reliability analysis for the ELICSES among Malaysian master's students in counseling. The results of the study showed an internal consistency coefficient for the full scale and three subscales were .91, .87, .84, and .88.

To come up with a meticulous evaluation of ethical and legal issues of self-efficacy in counseling, the validation of a measure with appropriate psychometric properties is helpful. Nevertheless, there is no measure to assess ethical and legal issues of self-efficacy in counseling in Persian. Furthermore, legal differences across cultures and countries may qualify the scale usability in different cultures. Iran, a Muslim country with diverse cultures, has a different legal structure than the United States. Thus, to evaluate the psychometric properties of a Persian version of ELICSES, it is essential to take such a factor into account. To evaluate the validity of the Persian version of the ELICSES for the present study, we considered the social desirability scale the same way as in previous studies. We hypothesize that the ELICSES scale would serve as a valid and reliable for assessing the Iranian counselors and psychologists' efficacy in ethical and legal issues. To assess the convergent validity, we hypothesized that the score of social desirability would positively correlate with ethical and legal issues of self-efficacy in the counseling scale.

Methods

Participants

In this study, the sample size was considered 20:1 (20 participants per item) (447 samples), which is a highly strong ratio of items to participants (Kellar & Kelvin, 2013). Participants [a2] nts were 447 counselors, psychologists, and trainees, covering 128 men (28.6%) and 319 women (71.4%), whose age range stood between 27 and 69. As for education, 64.4% (n=288) held master's degrees, 15% (n=67) were PhD graduates, and 20.6% (n=92) were doing PhD programs. In terms of work experience, 39.1% (n=175) of the participants had 1-3 years of background, 24.2% (n=108) had worked for 3-6 years, and 39.7% (n=164) were seniors with above 6 years in the field.

Procedures

After receiving approval from the Ethical Committee of the Department of Counseling, Alzahra University, data were accumulated utilizing online sampling because of the prevailing conditions of COVID-19. The Telegram platform was chosen for data collection. Large groups of counselors, psychologists, and trainees attend in Telegram. The consent form of participation in the study was passed on to social media groups, in which counselors, psychologists, and trainees were members. Individuals expressed their consent to participate in the research by responding to the consent form and sending it back to the researchers before receiving the questionnaire link. Before data collection, the participants were informed about the average 15-minute time to complete the questionnaire, to which 449 responded. Two individuals had to be excluded from the study due to outlier data. The data collection period lasted from May 17 to July 1, 2022.

Measures

Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale (ELICES) (Mullen et al., 2014) is an instrument with 23 items and 3 factors of general ethical and legal issues in counseling self-efficacy (factor 1), suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect self-efficacy (factor 2), and counselor development and wellness self-efficacy (factor 3). The score represents counselors' and psychologists' self-efficacy regarding ethical and legal issues. Factor 1 has 13 items (5, 6, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 21, 22, 23), factor 2 has 7 items (1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10, 19), while factor 3 has 3 items (2, 15, 20). The items are scored on a rating from Cannot Do at All, Moderately Certain Can Do, and Highly Certain Can Do (ranging from 0 to 100). A higher score indicates a high level of self-efficacy in ethical and legal issues. Cronbach's alpha of the ELICES was reported 0.96 (Mullen et al., 2014).

To make inferences about the quality of the translation (Brislin, 1970), the Brislin method was used to compare the English and the back-translated version of ELICES. Therefore, two translators, with proven proficiency in both Persian and English, carried out the separate translations. First, one translator rendered the English version of ELICES into Persian, followed by the second, who was kept uninformed about the first translation and was asked to back-translate the first translation (Persian version) into English. Eventually,

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two versions of ELICSES were compared by three translators. The review found no differences in terms of content between the original version and the Persian version of ELICSES.

Marlowe–Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Strahan & Gerbasi, 1972) is an instrument made up of 10 items, with true and false responses. Reliability in the short form was between .49 to .75. The scale has been translated and validated in Iran, where the internal consistency for the scale, based on Kuder-Richardson (KR20) has been reported as 0.51 (Azimpour et al., 2012).

Statistical analysis

Two software, SPSS 24 and AMOS 24, were used in the current study to analyze the data. With the use of SPSS 24 the mean, standard deviation, Cronbach's Alpha, correlation, and Z score were all calculated.

Furthermore, AMOS software (version 24) was used to assess the construct validity, construct reliability, and discriminant validity of confirmatory factor analysis. The impact score was used to measure face validity, and the Content Validity Ratio (CVR) and Content Validity Index (CVI) were used. The model-data fit of the structural equation model (SEM) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were assessed using a variety of approximate fit indices, such as the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) with a confidence interval of lower and upper limits, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and the Incremental Fit Index (IFI).

To screen the missing data, the regression imputation method was used in version 24 of the AMOS software. The missing value analysis detected no amount of missing data. An investigation of normality analysis in the AMOS software placed the skewness range between -1.34 and -.75, with the kurtosis standing between -.02 and 5.26, both an indication that the data were distributed abnormally as acceptable ranges fluctuate between ± 2 and ± 5 (Tabachnick et al., 2012). The Mahalanobis in assessing the outliers in the AMOS software showed that the large values in the dataset were 141.73 and 134.58. Obtained results utilizing the Mahalanobis formula were greater than 4 (Tabachnick et al., 2012). Therefore, 2 outliers were detected and omitted from the dataset, leaving a final sample size of 447. After the omission of the outliers, the skewness moved to the range -1.68 and -.75, and similarly, the kurtosis changed behavior, standing between -.03 and 3.78. The fresh results marked a normal distribution.

Results

Face Validity

To evaluate the qualitative face validity, the scale was sent to 5 counselors and psychologists, whose comments on the difficulty, appropriateness, ambiguity, and relevance, led to a review of some items. Afterward, to assess the quantitative face validity, 10 counselors and psychologists were asked to set the importance of the items based on the 5-point Likert scale from 1 (not important) to 5 (completely important). The items that earn equal to or greater than 1.5 are suitable and remain on the scale (Hajizadeh & Asghari, 2011). The impact score for item 16 was 1.2.

Content Validity

To assess the qualitative content validity, 10 experts (counselors and psychologists) were asked for their opinions. Based on their comments on correct grammar and suitable wording and phrases, some slight alteration was made. Then, to evaluate the quantitative content validity, the Content Validity Index (CVI), and Content Validity Ratio (CVR) (Cook & Beckman, 2006) were calculated. To measure CVI and CVR, 10 experts were asked to rate 3 features of clarity, simplicity, and relevance on the 4 points Likert scale (1: not relevant at all, 2: somewhat relevant, 3: quite relevant, and 4: highly relevant) and the same was for essentiality on the 3- point Likert scale (1: not essential, 2: useful but not essential, and 3: essential) for all items. For each item, a CVI and an overall CVI were calculated. A CVI value greater than .79 is acceptable (Polit et al., 2007). The results indicate that the CVI values for item 16 in clarity and relevancy are .6 and .7 in simplicity (less than .79) and also overall CVI was greater than .79. Therefore, item 16 (I understand the discriminatory rules and ethics that apply to my clients and students) has been omitted (see table 1). Also, the acceptable value for CVR is greater than .62 for 10 experts (LAWSHE, 1975). The results in Table 1 indicated that all items carried suitable CVR values.

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Table 1.
CVI and CVR for the items of ELICSES

No	Items	CVI			CVR
		Clarity (1-4)	Simplicity (1-4)	Relevance (1-4)	Essentiality (1-3)
1	As a counselor, I can determine when I should report abused cases.	0.9	1	1	1
2	In order to perform well as a counselor, I try to maintain my physical and mental health.	0.9	0.8	0.9	1
3	I can determine whether the client-counselor interaction has exceeded its borders.	1	1	1	1
4	I have the ability to diagnose and report the neglect my clients in a timely manner.	1	0.9	1	1
5	I have the ability to recognize the current concerns of clients.	0.9	0.9	0.7	0.8
6	I know the definition of ethical and legal terms (e.g., subpoenas, due date and confidentiality).	0.9	1	1	1
7	I can recognize signs of abuse and/or neglect (in clients).	1	0.9	1	1
8	I have a good accountability for clients who are likely to commit suicide.	0.8	1	1	1
9	I have the ability to interpret a diagnosis of mental or emotional disorder.	0.9	1	1	1
10	I take appropriate measures for clients, who are likely to commit suicide.	1	1	1	1
11	I can manage the negative dual relationships.	0.9	1	1	1
12	I know the steps I have to take when faced with ethical dilemma.	1	0.9	1	1
13	I am aware of civil rights laws relating to clients.	0.8	1	1	1
14	I can explain the professional role of a counselor.	1	1	1	1
15	To support my physical and mental health as a counselor, I try to develop appropriate behaviors.	0.8	0.9	1	1
16	I understand the discriminatory rules and ethics that apply to my clients and students.	0.6	0.7	0.6	0.8
17	I can explain to clients the rules regarding an issue or situation.	0.8	1	0.9	0.8
18	I can solve an ethical dilemma.	0.9	1	1	1
19	I can identify the probable symptoms of abuse or neglect in my clients.	1	1	1	1
20	I am aware of the possible feelings of burnout within myself.	1	1	1	1
21	I can recognize the appropriate multiple relationships (safe).	0.9	0.9	0.9	1
22	I can accomplish, evaluate and report the tests effectively.	0.9	0.9	1	1
23	I am accountable to a subpoena for the records	0.9	1	0.9	0.8
	Overall	0.9	0.95	0.94	0.97

Construct Validity

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

In the AMOS software, the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) with maximum likelihood estimation was carried out to assess the structural validity of the three factors

of the ELICSES We examined the factor loading of items in the ELICSES, the results of which showed that 22 items remained in the ELICSES (previously, 1 item was omitted because of low score in CVI) as all factor loadings ranged between .5 and 1, and were not negative (Byrne, 2010) (see Figure 1). Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations for the items.

Table 2.
Means and standard deviations of the items

No	Items	Mean	Std deviation
1	As a counselor, I can determine when I should report abused cases.	3.69	1.20
2	In order to perform well as a counselor, I try to maintain my physical and mental health.	4.33	.64
3	I can determine whether the client-counselor interaction has exceeded its borders.	4.35	.70
4	I have the ability to diagnose and report the neglect my clients in a timely manners.	3.92	.83
5	I have the ability to recognize the current concerns of clients.	4.22	.64
6	I know the definition of ethical and legal terms (e.g., subpoenas, due date and confidentiality).	4.01	.93
7	I can recognize signs of abuse and/or neglect (in clients).	3.97	.76
8	I have a good accountability for clients, who are likely to commit suicide.	3.81	.90
9	I have the ability to interpret a diagnosis of mental or emotional disorder.	3.87	.85
10	I take appropriate measures for clients, who are likely to commit suicide.	3.85	.93
11	I can manage the negative dual relationships.	3.92	.79
12	I know the steps I have to take when faced with ethical dilemma.	3.90	.84
13	I am aware of civil rights laws relating to clients.	3.60	1.03
14	I can explain the professional role of a counselor.	4.16	.79
15	To support my physical and mental health as a counselor, I try to develop appropriate behaviors.	4.42	.59
16	I can explain to clients the rules regarding an issue or situation.	4.05	.80
17	I can solve an ethical dilemma.	3.95	.79
18	I can identify the probable symptoms of abuse or neglect in my clients.	3.87	.80
19	I am aware of the possible feelings of burnout within myself.	4.23	.73
20	I can recognize the appropriate multiple relationships (safe).	3.98	.74
21	I can accomplish, evaluate and report the tests effectively.	3.73	.99
22	I am accountable to a subpoena for the records.	3.39	1.32

The data were examined for the measurement fit indices. CMIN/df was below 5 (3.73, $p < .01$) (Bentler, 1990), CFI, TLI and IFI stood above .9 (CFI=.918, TLI=.906, IFI=.918) (Kline, 2005). Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation was between .03 and 0.08 (RMSEA=.078) (Ho, 2013). Such results showed that the three factors of ELICSES fitted the data appropriately.

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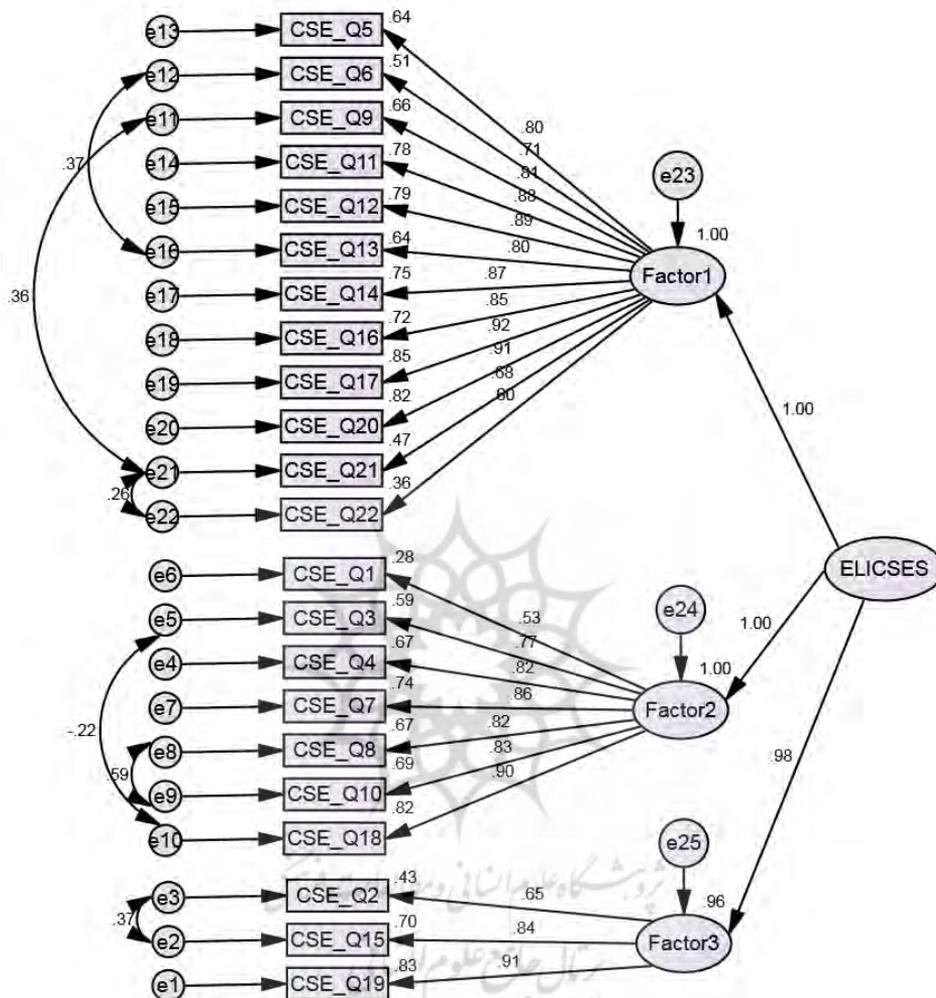


FIGURE 1. Confirmatory factor analysis with factor loadings for the ELICES ($p < .001$)

The multi-group analysis was employed for a gender-based comparison. The resulting analysis identified no statistically significant differences between men and women. Factor loadings for both genders were equal. Model fit indices in the unconstrained and measurement residual were nearby (unconstrained: CMIN/DF=3.650, CFI=.922, RMSEA=.045, and Measurement residuals: CMIN/DF=2.931, CFI=.929,

RMSEA=.038). Intercepts unconstrained for men and women were significant ($p < .001$), meaning that the ELICSES can be used for men and women both.

To examine convergent validity, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was employed. The acceptable AVE value is above .5. Using Cronbach's alpha coefficient and Composite Reliability (CR), we evaluated the internal consistency and the reliability of the three factors of ELICSES. Acceptable values for Cronbach's alpha and CR are above .7 (Tabachnick et al., 2012). As shown in Table 3, the three factors of ELICSES demonstrated adequate CR and convergent validity.

Table 3. AVE, CR, and Cronbach's alpha of three factors of ELICSES

	AVE	CR	Cronbach's alpha
Factor 1	.66	.95	.88
Factor 2	.64	.91	.79
Factor 3	.65	.89	.63
Total	.65	.97	.93

Convergent Validity

To address the concurrent validity, ELICSES has a positive correlation with the Marlow-Crown Social Desirability Scale ($r = .216, p < .01$). Furthermore, as shown in Table 4, an examination of the correlation between the three factors of ELICSES and social desirability indicated significant relationships ($p < .01$) between all factors and social desirability. Because of the high correlation between factors 1 and 2, the correlation between the questions of these two factors was checked and moderate positive correlation (.5 – .7) were found between items 11, 12, 14, 17, and 20 of factor 1 and items 3, 4, 7, 8, 10, and 18 of factor 2. (see Table 4).

Table 4. Correlation between factors of ELICSES and Social Desirability

	1	2	3	4	5
1. ELICSES_factor1	1				
2. ELICSES_factor2	.862**	1			
3. ELICSES_factor3	.730**	.734**	1		
4. ELICSES total	.980**	.936**	.796**	1	
5. Social Desirability	.196**	.211**	.229**	.216**	1

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Discussion

The present study set out to offer a Persian version of ELICSES and investigate its psychometric properties in a sample community of Iranian counselors, psychologists, and trainees. The results showed that translating the measure from English to Persian has been carried out with success and compatibility. Moreover, the analysis of content validity in both qualitative and quantitative manners suggested that in evaluating the ELICSES, overall items held an acceptable content validity, except for item 16 (I understand the discriminatory rules and ethics that apply to my clients and students). Therefore, item 16 was removed from the items pool while 22 items maintained their places in ELICSES. Hence, one of the differences between the present study and the original study is the

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removal of this item, the reason for which is the existence of the rules related to racial discriminant in the country of the author of the original study and the unfamiliarity of dual rules for different people in Iran. Another difference was that in the original study, counselors and psychologists were studied by classifying their specialized fields, however, because most Iranian counselors and psychologists work in most fields, such a classification was impossible. In consonant with the theoretical framework of the ELICSES (Mullen et al., 2014) and based on confirmatory factor analysis, it was demonstrated that the ELICSES items include the three factors of general ethics and legal issues in self-efficacy; suicide, violence, and neglect self-efficacy; and counselor development and wellness self-efficacy. Factor loadings for all items were above .5 (.53 to .92). As a result, all items in ELICSES remained intact. For the investigation of the internal consistency, the CR and Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all three factors were considered acceptable. The AVE coefficient for the three factors illustrated an inter-indicator correlation in each factor. Furthermore, the result of a multi-group analysis marked no gender sensitivity within the responses given to the ELICSES items.

In examining the correlation between the variables, the results of Pearson's correlation analysis indicated that factor 1, general ethics and legal issues in self-efficacy, confidence in applying knowledge to resolve ethical and legal issues; factor 2, suicide, violence and neglect self-efficacy, ability to distinguish appropriate time to report suicide, abuse and violence cases; and factor 3, counselor development and wellness self-efficacy, counselors capability to recognize burnout within them and conduct their wellness, all related positively with social desirability. These findings are in keeping with a previous study (Mullen et al., 2014), which indicated that counselors and psychologists who evaluate and find themselves at high levels of efficacy in ethical and legal issues tend to assess themselves highly in social desirability, in other words, remarkable levels in whatever is accepted within society.

Implications and Limitations of This Research

Taking into account the appropriateness of psychometric properties in the Persian version of ELICSES, this study strengthens the idea that this scale could be employed in educational, research, and clinical settings. As for the educational environment, counseling and psychology educators can assess the initial level and the progress rate of students in courses on ethics, meaning that researchers can use the tool in the area of ethics. Also, in a clinical context, The ELICSES can be employed to measure counselors' and psychologists' self-efficacy when it comes to ethical and legal issues. Similarly, supervisors will be able to measure trainee counselors' and psychologists' self-efficacy, the results of which will serve as a helping hand to identify the factors that trainee counselors and psychologists need for more in-depth knowledge and exercise. And still, thanks to gender insensitivity the ELICSES can be used for men and women both.

Finally, several limitations need to be taken into consideration, one of which has to do with online sampling, a matter that can be taken up in future research through conducting random sampling. Another limitation was the impossibility of separating the different areas of expertise of the counselors and psychologists as typically most Iranian counselors and psychologists do not work in one specialized field but rather tend to focus on multiple arenas.

Conclusion

In this research, the aim was to assess the psychometric properties of the Persian version of ELICSES in Iranian samples, where the confirmatory factor analysis revealed three factors in the Persian version of the ELICSES structure. Picking up on that, counselors and psychologists seem to be able to use the same scale to measure ethical and legal self-efficacy.

Disclosure Statements

The Authors have no conflict of Interests.

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