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An Overview of Empirical Ethics Research in Turkish Medical Ethics Literature

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ability of the environment to sustain both human and non-human flourishing, exacerbates rather than overcomes social inequalities both within and between cultures, and fails to achieve genuine human well-being for all but a wealthy minority. An alternative bioregional global ethic is proposed which seeks to maximize ecological sustainability, social justice, and human well-being through the creation of economically self-sufficient and politically decentralized communities delinked from the global market but confederated at appropriate levels to address problems that transcend cultural borders. Such an ethic is based on a transactional view of the relationship between self, society, and nature, which attempts to create more symbiotic and less conflictual modes of interaction between human cultures and natural environments, while promoting the flourishing of both. Instead of a single monolithic global ethic (even if it was possible), bioregionalism suggests that there should be sufficient convergence between cultures to allow for the successful resolution of mutual problems, but also sufficient divergence to enable the continued evolution of both biological and cultural diversity on a global scale.

Contents are:

Part I: A Bioregional Perspective on Global Ethics
1: Bioregionalism and the Dominant Development Paradigm
2: Cross-Cultural Dialogue on a Global Ethic
Part II: A Transactional Framework for Bioregional Ethics
3: Transactionalism and Bioregional Ethics
4: The Coevolution of Nature and Society
5: The Social Construction of Nature
Part III: Harmonizing Self, Society, And Nature
6: Beyond Anthropocentrism and Ecocentrism
7: Communicative Ethics and Moral Considerability
8: Cross-Cultural Dialogue on a Land Ethic
Part IV: A Bioregional Paradigm for Global Ethics
9: Bioregionalism and Ecological Sustainability
10: Bioregionalism and Social Justice
11: Bioregionalism and Human Well-Being
Part V: Bioregionalism in a Global Context
12: Preserving Biocultural Diversity
13: Bringing the Economy Home
14: Acting Locally, Interacting Globally
Part VI: Globalism in its Place
15: Global Ethics Revisited
16: Transitions to a Bioregional "World Order"
Bibliography
Index

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- Funda Gülay Kadıoğlu, DDS,
Assistant Professor, Cukurova University Faculty of Medicine, Dept. of Medical Ethics/Faculty of Dentistry, Dept. of Orthodontics, Cukurova University School of Dentistry, Dept. of Orthodontics,
Balcali 01330 Saricam Adana, Turkey
Email: fgkadioglu@cu.edu.tr

- Selim Kadıoğlu, MD, PhD
Assistant Professor, Cukurova University Faculty of Medicine, Department of Medical Ethics,
Balcali 01330 Saricam Adana, Turkey

Abstract

Objective: The aim of this study was to evaluate empirical research in Turkish medical ethics literature.

Method: Data were collected from different sources representing Turkish medical ethics literature. This retrospective and descriptive study included only the medical ethics research reports. All research reports were classified by publication source and year, study topics and samples.

Results: A total of 1205 articles were published in Turkish medical ethics literature. The study was performed on 161 empirical researches published between January 1994 and December 2009. The most investigated study topic was patient rights (11.2%) and the most frequent participant group was physicians (16.8%).

Conclusion: Empirical studies in Turkish medical ethics literature have become more noticeable as in general medical ethics literature. Among the most studied three subjects in both ethics literature, informed consent was the common topic. Patients, physicians, nurses and students were the most commonly studied samples of both these literatures.

Key words: Medical ethics literature, Turkish medical ethics literature, Empirical ethics research.

Introduction

Conceptual studies and case analyses dominating the medical ethics literature in the 1970s tended to be replaced by a new study type especially in the field of clinical ethics in the 1990s. This study method is “empirical research” originating from social science methodology and based on qualitative and quantitative data[1,2]. In their series of papers on clinical ethics,[3-5] Singer, Siegler and Pellegrino defined clinical ethics research, presented their taxonomy for them, and reported that clinical ethics researches could be separated into two subdivisions as theoretical and empirical. In the subsequent period, many studies (6-13) were published evaluating empirical ethics research in the fields of bioethics, medical ethics and clinical ethics and emphasizing that this research together with normative ethics studies would make significant contributions to the field of medical ethics. In empirical ethics studies, data are collected and analyzed by research methods of clinical epidemiology or social sciences. The main objectives of empirical ethics studies are to introduce ethical problems that result from clinical applications, to determine the adoption of ethical principles by health professionals and to evaluate the contributions of ethics education to medical applications (1,2,4,8,13). Within the framework of the present study, two significant studies investigating the empirical researches in medical ethics literature in detail were taken as references.

The first study belongs to Sugarman et al. (14) who scanned a total of 19.486 ethics researches published in Bioethicsline between 1980 and 1989 and determined

that 663 (3.4%) of them used empirical research methods; furthermore, 88% of these empirical researches were published in 251 different journals, while the rest appeared in book chapters. The second study belongs to Borry et al.15 who investigated publications between 1990 and 2003 and determined that 453 empirical researches were published in 9 medical ethics journals. These journals are as follows: *Nursing Ethics, Journal of Medical Ethics, Journal Clinical Ethics, Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics, Bioethics, Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics, Hastings Center Report* and *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal.* Borry et al. found no empirical study published in *Christian Bioethics*. Both Sugarman et al. and Borry et al. investigated the number and percentage of empirical research as well as the subjects and participants. Based on these two studies, we planned to evaluate empirical research published in Turkish medical ethics literature. We determined the objectives of the present study as to introduce Turkish medical ethics literature, to determine subjects and participants of the empirical ethics researches in literature and to compare the study findings with the results of the previous studies.

Material and Methods

Data Source

In the study, data were collected from 5 different databases (a journal, congress books, and annual publications) representing the Turkish medical ethics literature. This retrospective and descriptive study included only the medical ethics research reports. Case reports, review studies and letters to editor were omitted. Medical history studies in the databases were completely excluded (In Turkey, medical ethics and medical history were institutionalized as one academic discipline with two components). Among databases, on-line access is only available for the *Journal of Turkish Medical Ethics, Law and History.* Therefore, hand-searching method was used for the articles in other sources. All research reports were investigated and classified by the publication source, publication year, study topics and study samples.

Study Limitations

In Turkey, studies on medical ethics are not only published in medical ethics periodicals, but also in the periodicals of different medical disciplines. However, because the present study aims to introduce the Turkish medical ethics literature, articles on medical ethics published in other medical periodicals were omitted. Empirical research conducted in Turkey but published in the journals of other countries were also excluded. Therefore, the study database was limited to empirical research in Turkish medical ethics literature.

Reliability

The study criteria for "empirical ethics study" were that the study should investigate a specific problem in ethics, collect qualitative or quantitative data by a method of clinical epidemiology origin and lastly analyze and interpret the obtained data. The full texts of 161 articles included in the study were evaluated by both researchers in accordance with the previously prepared control list. Researchers classified each study report according to study subject and material. Kappa statistics were used to determine inter- and intra-researcher reliability; accordingly, intra-researcher agreement was found quite good (0.90) and inter-researcher agreement was good (0.77).

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics, frequency and percentage were used for the distribution of research reports by years and sources, as well as for study subject and material.

Findings

A total of 1205 articles were published in Turkish medical ethics literature in the databases examined in the study. The study was performed on 161 empirical research papers consistent with inclusion criteria and published between January 1994 and December 2009.

Distribution of empirical research papers published in Turkish medical ethics literature is given by their subjects in Table 1. These subjects could be summarized under 27 titles. Certain subjects were extensively studied, while there was only one study on some other subjects. The five most investigated subjects were patient rights (11.2%), transplantation (9.9%), informed consent (8.7%), euthanasia (8.1%) and malpractice (5.6%). On the other hand, the five least investigated subjects were autonomy (1.2%), Hippocratic Oath (0.6%), health news (0.6%), veterinary ethics (0.6%) and “Do not resuscitation” instruction (0.6%). There was one study for each of the last four subjects.

Distribution of empirical research in Turkish medical ethics literature by participants and materials is given in Table 2. There are 22 participant groups and 4 material groups. The five most extensively studied participants groups were physicians (16.8%), medical students (13.7%), nurses (11.8%), patients (10.6%) and health professionals in general (8.7%). The least studied subjects were patient relatives, veterinary physicians, editors of medical journals, jurists and students other than medical faculty. There is one empirical research for each of these participants. The most investigated materials were ethics literature with three papers (1.9%), medical ethics curriculum (0.6%), medical ethics articles (0.6%) and newspaper reports (0.6%) each with one study.

Table 1: Prevalence of empirical research by topic in Turkish medical ethics literature

Research Topics	**f**	**%**
Patients' rights	18	11.2
Transplantation	16	9.9
Informed consent	14	8.7
Euthanasia	13	8.1
Malpractice	9	5.6
Clinical ethics	8	5.0
Ethical sensitivity	7	4.3
Professional responsibility	7	4.3
Ethics education	6	3.7
Drug industry	6	3.7
Telling the truth	6	3.7
Ethics committee	5	3.1
Physician-patient relationship	5	3.1
Nursing ethics	5	3.1
Death	5	3.1
Allocation of healthcare resources	5	3.1
Pharmacy ethics	4	2.5
Empathy	4	2.5
Research ethics	3	1.9
Futility treatment	3	1.9
Alternative medicine	3	1.9
Medical ethics literature	3	1.9
Autonomy	2	1.2
Hippocratic Oath	1	0.6
Health news	1	0.6
Veterinary ethics	1	0.6
DNR	1	0.6
Total	161	100.0

Table 2. Prevalence of different subjects in empirical research in Turkish medical ethics literature

Subjects	**f**	**%**
Physicians	27	16.8
Medical students	22	13.7
Nurses	19	11.8
Patients	17	10.6
Health professionals	14	8.7
Patient records	14	8.7
Pharmacists	6	3.7
Physician vs. patients	5	3.1
Woman	5	3.1
Lay person	5	3.1
Hospital workers	3	1.9
Medical student vs. non-medical student	3	1.9
Literature	3	1.9
Dentists	2	1.2
Health professional vs. lay person	2	1.2
Members of ethics committee	2	1.2
Representative of drug companies	2	1.2
Alternative medicine practitioners	2	1.2
Relatives of patients	1	0.6
Veterinarian	1	0.6
Medical journal editor	1	0.6
Jurist	1	0.6
Non-medical student	1	0.6
Medical ethics curriculum	1	0.6
Medical ethics articles	1	0.6
Newspaper	1	0.6
Total	161	100.0

Table 3. Comparison of results of studies

	Sugarman's study (1992)			Borry's study (2006)			Present study		
Years	1980-1989			1990-2003			1994-2009		
Data bases	Bioethicsline			General medical ethics literature			Turkish medical ethics literature		
Empirical research	663			435			161		
		f	%		f	%		f	%
The most studied topics	Informed consent	109	16.4	Prolongation of life and euthanasia	68	15.6	Patients' rights	18	11.2
	Research ethics	69	10.4	Ethics and bioethics	58	13.3	Transplantation	16	9.9
	Mental health	58	8.7	Informed consent	42	9.6	Informed consent	14	8.7
The most studied subjects	Patients	234	35.4	Nurses	98	22.5	Physicians	27	16.8
	Physicians	192	28.9	Patients	97	22.3	Students	22	13.7
	Nurses	72	10.8	Physicians	92	21.1	Nurses	19	11.8

Discussion

In this section, results obtained from the present study were compared to findings of previous studies in literature (Table 3) and a general assessment was made for empirical studies in Turkish medical ethics literature.

In the study by Sugarman et al., the first study on this subject in medical ethics literature, the most focused subjects were informed consent (16.4%), research ethics (10.4%) and mental health (8.7%), respectively. In the study by Borry et al., the second study on this subject, the most investigated subjects were prolongation of life and euthanasia (15.6%), theoretical perspectives of ethics and bioethics (13.3%), informed consent and patient participation in decision process (9.6%), respectively. The three most examined subjects in the present study were patient rights (11.2%), organ

transplantation (9.9%) and informed consent (8.7%). The most common investigated subject of three studies is informed consent.

The three most investigated participant groups in the study by Sugarman et al. were patients (35.4%), physicians (28.9%), and nurses (10.8%), respectively. On the other hand, the three most investigated participant groups in the study by Borry et al. were nurses (22.5%), patients (22.3%), and physicians (21.1%). The three most investigated participant groups in the present study were physicians (16.8%), students (13.7%), and nurses (11.8%), respectively. The student group ranked fifth in the study by Sugarman et al., and fourth in the study by Borry et al.; in addition, the patient group ranked fourth in the present study. Accordingly, we can say that patient-physician-nurse-students groups were the most studied groups in the three studies.

Studies on medical ethics in Turkey was performed as a literature review or case analysis until 1990. As of 1990, empirical studies started to take place in academic field of Turkey in parallel with the general trend in world medical ethics literature. *The Journal of Turkish Medical Ethics, Law and History* was regularly issued on medical ethics in Turkey and only 36.6% of empirical studies were published in this journal. This journal contained history and judicial discipline in addition to ethics discipline, which could be the reason for low number of ethical articles in the content.

The majority (59%) of the empirical studies in Turkish medical ethics literature were published in full texts of conference-symposium books. Meanwhile, publishing the full text of presented or to be presented papers just before or after the symposium and conferences especially on ethics field is a common application in Turkey. The findings of the present study indicated that the majority of the clinical ethics studies were presented in these meetings and these studies are published on congress books rather than journals.

Conclusion

Empirical studies gain increasing importance in medical ethics literature. Empirical studies in Turkish medical ethics literature have become more noticeable like in the general medical ethics literature in the last 20 years. There is a wide scale of empirical study subjects in Turkish literature, changing from informed consent to newspaper reports on medical ethics and from organ transplantation to Hippocratic Oath. Informed consent is a frequent subject of empirical medical ethics studies both in Turkey and globally. The most commonly studied groups are patients, physicians, nurses and students in both Turkish and world medical ethics literature.

The availability and recognition of studies in Turkish medical ethics literature is limited, because there is only one source with on-line access (*Journal of Turkish Medical Ethics, Law and History*) and the majority of the studies are published in congress books than the journal.

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Fight for Water

- A. J. Thatheyus
P.G & Research Department of Zoology, The American College , Madurai-625002, Tamil Nadu, India
Email: jthatheyus@yahoo.co.in
- Delphin Prema Dhanaseeli
PG & Research Department of History, Jayaraj Annapackiam College for Women, Periakulam- 625 601, Tamil Nadu, India
Email: prema.jac@gmail.com

Water, as a marvelous substance exhibits flowing, rippling, swirling, seeping, dripping, trickling and constantly moving from rivers to sea and back again. It plays the key role in sculpting the earth's surface, moderating climate and diluting pollutants. Without water, life could not exist and hence it becomes the elixir of life. About 60% of our body is formed of water. It acts as the medium, in which all living processes occur, dissolves nutrients and distributes them to cells, regulates body temperature, supports structures and helps in the removal of wastes. One could survive only a few days without water.