Int J Ethics Soc 2026; ( ):

10.22034/ijethics.414.1

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF Ethics & Society

Narrative Review Article

The Study of Professional Ethics in Criminal Proceedings and Its Role in Safeguarding the Rights of the Accused during Judicial Processes in Iran

Fatemeh Keyhani [1*], Ehsan Amirkhani [2]

1. Department of Law, Sonqor Center, Payame Noor University, Kermanshah, Iran.
2. Department of Law, Kermanshah Branch, Islamic Azad University, Kermanshah, Iran.

Corresponding Author: Fatemeh Keyhani, Department of Law, Sonqor Center, Payame Noor University, Kermanshah, Iran. E-mail: keyhanifatemeh.lawyer@gmail.com

Received Accepted Online Published

Abstract

Introduction: Professional ethics in criminal proceedings is among the most critical elements ensuring justice and protecting the rights of the accused. In Iran's judicial system, despite legal advancements in safeguarding defendants' rights, adherence to professional ethics still faces numerous challenges that can affect both the quality of proceedings and the legitimacy of the judicial system. The purpose of this study is to examine the concept of professional ethics, its theoretical and philosophical foundations, its place in various stages of criminal proceedings, and its role in ensuring the rights of the accused.
Material and Methods: This paper employs a descriptive-analytical approach to explore the topic. It also examines existing challenges within Iran's judicial system and compares them with the experiences of other countries in the field of professional ethics through a comparative analysis.
Conclusion: The findings indicate that professional ethics-beyond legal requirements-can ensure the rights of the accused throughout all stages of criminal proceedings, including investigation, prosecution, trial, and execution of judgment, by reinforcing impartiality, independence, honesty, and respect for human dignity. Conversely, the lack of continuous training, the absence of effective oversight mechanisms, and external pressures constitute the main obstacles to the realization of professional ethics in Iran. This study emphasizes that adopting measures such as developing binding ethical charters, providing continuous education, promoting organizational culture, strengthening supervision, and utilizing international experiences can institutionalize professional ethics and ensure the practical protection of defendants' rights. Ultimately, professional ethics should be regarded not only as an instrument for observing the rights of the accused but also as a fundamental pillar of legitimacy and public trust in the criminal justice system.
Keywords: *Professional Ethics, Criminal Procedure, Rights of the Accused, Impartiality, Judicial Legitimacy.*

How to Cite: Keyhani F, Amirkhani E. The Study of Professional Ethics in Criminal Proceedings and Its Role in Safeguarding the Rights of the Accused during Judicial Processes in Iran, Int J Ethics Soc. 2026; ( ): . doi: 10.22034/ijethics.414.1

INTRODUCTION

In the criminal justice systems of all countries, the process of adjudication is not merely a means of uncovering the truth and enforcing punishment; it is also a sphere in which the fundamental principles of human rights, criminal justice, and professional ethics are tested. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, the enactment of the 2013 Code of Criminal Procedure established a new framework for criminal proceedings that paid particular attention to the rights of the accused at every stage of adjudication [1]. However, the mere existence of legal provisions is insufficient; adherence to judicial professional ethics -from the investigation stage to the issuance and execution of judgment- is a decisive factor in

Copyright © 2026 Keyhani F & Amirkhani E. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License(http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

genuinely safeguarding the rights of the accused and enhancing public confidence in the judiciary. Professional ethics in criminal proceedings refers to the set of norms, values, and practices that judicial officers, law enforcement agents, attorneys, judges, and other actors in the criminal process must observe in order to ensure fair, transparent, and equitable proceedings. Research shows a direct relationship between adherence to ethics in judicial processes and the realization of defendants' rights, particularly concerning the right to silence, the right to counsel, the prohibition of using unlawfully obtained evidence, and the presumption of innocence. For example, in examining the ethical challenges related to the accused's right to silence in Iran, scholars have noted that despite the legal recognition of this right, the lack of legal culture and judicial ethics has hindered its effective implementation [2]. Another study titled "Ethics and Fair Trial in Light of the Predictability of Procedural Rules" explores the relationship between procedural transparency, ethical conduct, and the protection of fundamental procedural rights [3].

In Iran, the rights of the accused at different stages of criminal proceedings-from investigation and prosecution to trial and execution of sentence-include the right to confrontation, the right to counsel, the right to silence, the presumption of innocence, the prohibition of arbitrary detention, and the right to an effective defense [4]. However, the mere codification of these rights does not guarantee their practical observance. Therefore, examining the role of professional ethics in the course of criminal proceedings and its impact on safeguarding the rights of the accused is of growing importance.

The objective of this study is to explore the theoretical foundations of professional ethics in criminal proceedings, clarify its role in various stages of the judicial process in Iran, and analyze its effect on the protection of defendants' rights. From this perspective, the central research questions are as follows:

1. What specific components constitute professional ethics in criminal proceedings?
2. At which stages of criminal adjudication does it play a decisive role?
3. How can the adherence to professional ethics in protecting the rights of the accused contribute to ensuring fair trial standards in Iran?

It is hoped that through this examination-by identifying existing shortcomings and proposing practical solutions-this research will make a meaningful contribution to improving the efficiency of Iran's criminal justice system in guaranteeing the rights of the accused.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This paper employs a descriptive-analytical approach to explore the topic. It also examines existing challenges within Iran's judicial system and compares them with the experiences of other countries in the field of professional ethics through a comparative analysis.

DISCUSSION

Conceptualization of "Professional Ethics" in Criminal Proceedings

In the realm of criminal adjudication, professional ethics refers to a set of values, norms, and behavioral standards that, as supra-legal principles, guide the conduct of judges, law enforcement officers, attorneys, and other actors in the criminal process to ensure a fair and dignity-oriented proceeding. Although this concept is linked to statutory regulations (such as substantive and procedural laws and executive by-laws), it essentially possesses a behavioral nature that extends beyond merely legal obligations-that is, it pertains to what ought to be, not merely what is prescribed by law. In this sense, professional ethics in criminal proceedings

encompass three key components: justice, impartiality, and human dignity.

Justice as the Core of Professional Ethics

Justice constitutes one of the most fundamental values of professional ethics in the criminal sphere. In criminal proceedings, the process must conform not only to the law but also to ethical standards to maintain public trust in the judiciary. A study entitled "The Role of Lawyers in Promoting Justice and Professional Legal Practice" emphasizes that continuous adherence to professional and ethical principles by lawyers is "an essential prerequisite for the realization of criminal justice and the protection of citizens' fundamental rights." From this perspective, professional ethics entail the preservation of justice not only in the substance of judgments but also throughout the procedural course of adjudication [5].

Impartiality and Professional Independence

Impartiality and professional independence constitute another core dimension of professional ethics within criminal procedure. International judicial ethical codes emphasize that judges must act with integrity, respect for confidentiality, and clear signs of impartiality. Portions of the Code of Judicial Ethics published by the International Criminal Court highlight adherence to independence, impartiality, and professional integrity. These principles hold particular significance in criminal proceedings, where defendants-facing the coercive power of the state—require ethical assurance that judges and law enforcement officers act on the basis of professional ethics rather than motivations extraneous to justice [6].

Human Dignity and Respect for the Rights of the Accused

The third key element of professional ethics in this domain is respect for human dignity and the rights of the accused. A study entitled "Ethics in Criminal Law: Respect for Personal Liberty and the Collection of Evidence in Imami Jurisprudence and Iranian Criminal Law" demonstrates that, from an ethical standpoint, the collection of evidence must align with respect for individual liberty and the prohibition of torture [7]. Professional ethics in criminal proceedings therefore require that law enforcement officers, judges, and other judicial actors, in implementing the law and seeking truth, refrain from exceeding legal and moral boundaries and preserve the dignity of the accused.

Although many ethical norms in criminal proceedings are also reflected in statutory provisions, professional ethics go beyond what the law dictates. As observed in legal practice, adherence to ethical principles such as confidentiality, honesty, and loyalty remains independent of legal guarantees [8]. In other words, while the law may prescribe minimum standards of conduct, professional ethics demand a higher standard of professional behavior that transcends legal requirements.

The sources of professional ethics in this context can be classified into several categories: religious and cultural teachings (many aspects of Iranian judicial and criminal jurisprudence emphasize human dignity, the presumption of innocence, and the prohibition of torture); international human rights instruments (the global legal system recognizes fair trial standards as part of professional ethics); customary and domestic professional charters (for example, the Charter of Professional Ethics and Conduct of Iranian Attorneys, which mandates values such as honesty, confidentiality, and respect for clients); and practical experiences and judicial precedents, which shape professional conduct [2, 9].

In summary, the concept of professional ethics in criminal proceedings constitutes an ethical framework that ensures that the actors in the criminal process-throughout the stages of investigation, prosecution, trial, and enforcement-act not only in accordance with the

law but also with the values of justice, impartiality, and human dignity. Understanding this concept is the first step toward analyzing the role that professional ethics can play in safeguarding the rights of the accused.

Theoretical and Philosophical Foundations of Professional Ethics in Criminal Adjudication

The theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of professional ethics in criminal proceedings lie at the intersection of moral philosophy, criminal law, and theories of justice. When we speak of judicial professional ethics, we refer to a set of values, norms, duties, and professional virtues that the actors of criminal adjudication-such as judges, law enforcement officials, and attorneys-must observe in performing their roles so that not only the law is enforced but justice is achieved and the rights of the accused are properly protected.

At the philosophical level, three major ethical schools provide the foundational basis for this domain: utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics. Each of these perspectives distinctly influences the formation of common ethical norms in criminal adjudication. Utilitarianism emphasizes that judicial actions should aim to maximize the public good; thus, judicial professional ethics, under this approach, serve as a criterion for adopting practices that yield greater justice, security, and legitimacy within the criminal justice system. In contrast, deontology underscores the moral obligation to observe stable rules and principles: judges and judicial officers must act out of duty and respect for the accused as a person, rather than merely for the desirability of outcomes. This approach elevates judicial independence, impartiality, and respect for human dignity as fundamental imperatives of professional ethics. Finally, virtue ethics focuses on the moral character and personal virtues of judicial actors-asking what kind of character and disposition judges or lawyers must possess for professional ethics to be genuinely realized-traits such as fairness, honesty, humility, and moral courage [10].

When these theoretical foundations are applied to the process of criminal adjudication, they provide ethical guidance at three distinct levels: individual, professional, and institutional. At the individual level, virtue ethics requires that judges or defense attorneys cultivate professional character and demeanor-for instance, in dealing with defendants, they must not only adhere to the law but also uphold the individual's human dignity. At the professional level, deontology becomes salient, emphasizing that the conduct of proceedings must rest on principles such as judicial independence, effective defense, the right to silence, and the presumption of innocence-since these are professional moral obligations, not merely legal rights. Finally, at the institutional level, consequentialism takes precedence: if the adjudicative system fails to adhere to professional ethics, public confidence in criminal justice diminishes, procedural efficiency declines, and the protection of defendants' rights is endangered. From this perspective, professional ethics are not merely an individual or occupational concern but a central factor in the legitimacy and effectiveness of the criminal justice system [11].

Specifically, within the context of criminal proceedings, these theoretical foundations help elucidate key ethical imperatives: impartiality and independence as manifestations of deontology; respect for the human dignity of the accused as derived from virtue ethics; and promotion of public trust and realization of justice as expressions of consequentialism. Studies in criminal justice further indicate that the absence of professional ethics can lead to violations of defendants' rights, increased public mistrust, and diminished legitimacy of adjudication [12].

Therefore, a philosophical examination of professional ethics in Iran's criminal adjudication

implies that the criminal justice system must not only be legally disciplined but also ethically structured and culturally grounded, such that its actors-aware of their moral responsibilities-conduct themselves with professional integrity and a sense of the broader implications of their behavior for judicial legitimacy. This philosophical emphasis, in addition to legal necessity, provides a foundation for articulating the practical components of professional ethics and serves as a basis for analyzing their role in safeguarding the rights of the accused.

In sum, the theoretical and philosophical foundations of professional ethics in criminal proceedings not only furnish a framework for analyzing ethical values and norms but also serve as the starting point for designing policies, procedural codes, professional training programs, and institutional mechanisms aimed at institutionalizing professional ethics and thereby ensuring the protection of defendants' rights.

The Place of Professional Ethics in the Stages of Criminal Proceedings

In the criminal process, professional ethics play a functional and decisive role at every stage of adjudication. In other words, adherence to ethical norms-from the detection of crime to the execution of judgment-is not merely a personal virtue but a guarantee of the fundamental rights of the accused and a factor in strengthening the legitimacy of the criminal justice system. This section analyzes the position of professional ethics at various stages of criminal proceedings in Iran.

At the stage of crime detection and preliminary investigation, which includes the duties of law enforcement officers and investigative authorities such as examining magistrates, compliance with professional ethics is imperative. At this stage, the accused is still in a "suspect" position, and his rights-including the right to be informed of the reasons for arrest, the right to counsel, the right to remain silent, and the prohibition of torture-must receive special protection. For example, under Article 189 of the Iranian Code of Criminal Procedure, detaining an accused beyond the prescribed period without initiating an investigation may constitute arbitrary detention. If investigative officers lack professional ethics-manifested in acts such as humiliation of the suspect, coercion, or extracting confessions under duress-the fundamental rights of the accused will be violated, thereby undermining public trust in the judicial process [13].

At the stage of prosecution and indictment, when judicial authorities (the prosecutor or his representative) gather evidence and decide to bring a case before the court, professional ethics assume significance in the form of impartiality, transparency, and respect for the human dignity of the accused. For instance, the presumption of innocence and the prosecutor's burden of proof carry ethical preconditions: prosecutors must refrain from prejudgment and must operate within the framework of "innocent until proven guilty." In the absence of such ethical discipline, the prosecution process may encroach upon the defendant's right to an effective defense, placing the accused in an unequal position [14].

During the trial stage, where the judge and the court evaluate evidence, hear the arguments of both parties, and issue a verdict, professional ethics require that judges act with independence, impartiality, and integrity. Article 366 of the Iranian Code of Criminal Procedure allows the court to conduct supplementary investigations to discover the truth. Although this power is legally granted, its exercise also depends on judicial professional ethics to prevent bias, haste, or unjust decisions. Likewise, defense counsel, by observing professional ethics-such as confidentiality, loyalty to the client, and lawful use of defense tools-plays a pivotal role in safeguarding the defendant's rights [15].

Finally, at the stage of judgment enforcement and post-trial supervision, professional ethics among the executors of justice (such as enforcement authorities and prison officials) are of vital importance. Even after conviction, respect for the human dignity of prisoners, access to medical care, the right to appeal or seek review, and oversight of the conditions of sentence execution are all integral elements of professional ethics. If this stage is carried out without adherence to ethical standards, not only the rights of the accused (or convicted person) but also public confidence in criminal justice will be compromised [2].

In summary, the position of professional ethics at each stage of criminal proceedings is closely linked to the protection of the defendant's rights-from the investigative phase, where the risk of rights violations is greatest, to the trial, where judicial decisions are made, and finally to the execution of judgments, which reflects the ultimate function of justice. Institutionalizing professional ethics at these stages not only reinforces legal compliance but also enhances legitimacy, public trust, and the quality of justice and adjudication.

The Role of Professional Ethics in Safeguarding the Rights of the Accused

In the criminal justice system, the rights of the accused are not guaranteed solely through statutory provisions; the professional ethics of judicial actors play an equally crucial role in ensuring their actual protection. This section analyzes how adherence to professional ethics by judges, law enforcement officers, lawyers, and judicial institutions creates the necessary framework for guaranteeing defendants' rights.

It should first be noted that the rights of the accused-such as the right to remain silent, the right to an effective defense, the right to counsel, the presumption of innocence, the right to a fair confrontation, the prohibition of arbitrary detention, and the inadmissibility of unlawfully obtained evidence-are legal obligations recognized in both domestic regulations and international instruments. However, the mere existence of these rights in the text of the law does not ensure their effective implementation. What truly guarantees the point at which law is realized in practice is the ethical and professional behavior of individuals and institutions involved in adjudication.

Professional ethics in this context primarily promote impartiality, independence, and integrity in judicial conduct. If judges, prosecutors, or lawyers act with bias, haste, unlawful coercion, or undue external influence, the rights of the accused are endangered. For example, a document on prosecutorial ethics states: "The primary duty of a prosecutor is not merely to secure a conviction but to ensure that justice is done" [16]. It is evident that if a prosecutor is pressured solely to obtain a conviction, the defendant's right to a fair defense is inevitably compromised. Moreover, professional ethics are closely tied to transparency, accountability, and respect for human dignity, all of which are intrinsically linked to the rights of the accused. For instance, criminal justice standards emphasize that "members of the profession must uphold the respect, dignity, and value of every individual, including the accused or convicted person" [17]

In practical terms, the role of professional ethics can be examined through several key dimensions [18]:

1. Supporting the Right to an Effective Defense and Access to Counsel: When lawyers adhere to ethical principles-such as confidentiality, loyalty to the client, and avoidance of conflicts of interest-the defendant's ability to exercise the right to defense is significantly strengthened. Research indicates that ethically committed attorneys, while respecting their clients, contribute to enhancing the fairness of

the proceedings. When defense counsel acts as a genuine partner to the accused with honesty and diligence, the defendant's procedural opportunities are effectively realized.

2. Preventing Procedural Abuses: Ethical conduct by law enforcement officers and judges minimizes risks such as arbitrary detention, use of illegal evidence, coercion of defendants, or prejudgment. When judicial actors act in accordance with ethical standards - such as non-discrimination, respect for dignity, and compliance with lawful procedures - the likelihood of rights violations diminishes. Scholars have noted that "ethical professional conduct is one of the principal pillars for preserving justice, fairness, and the rights of the accused in the criminal justice system."
3. Enhancing Judicial Legitimacy and Public Trust: When the actors of the justice system are ethically credible, public trust in the judiciary increases, and defendants approach proceedings with greater confidence that the process will be fair. Conversely, the absence of professional ethics can foster perceptions of injustice, reduce public participation, and deepen skepticism toward the judiciary - factors that ultimately hinder the realization of defendants' rights. In such circumstances, the justice system ceases to function as a mechanism of justice for those who seek it most.
4. Reforming Institutional Structures and Procedures: Professional ethics are not confined to individual behavior but must also be embedded in institutional structures, regulations, professional training, and oversight mechanisms. For example, the development of ethical charters, continuous training on professional ethics, the establishment of mechanisms for reporting and investigating professional misconduct-all constitute practical measures for safeguarding the rights of the accused through the institutionalization of ethics.

A key point is that professional ethics, deontological duty, and virtue ethics do not replace the legal rights of the accused but rather reinforce them. That is, the laws that prescribe the right to defense and justice become more effectively implemented through ethical professional conduct. From this perspective, professional ethics function as the "operational framework" for the rights of the accused-rights that would otherwise remain merely theoretical or "on paper" without ethical professional practice.

In conclusion, the role of professional ethics in guaranteeing defendants' rights constitutes a precondition for the effective realization of those rights. Without professional ethics, the rights of the accused may be formally observed but not substantively fulfilled, leading to deficiencies in criminal justice. Therefore, it is recommended that the Iranian judiciary-beyond emphasizing legal guarantees of defendants' rights-should promote professional ethics among judicial actors through training, supervision, reform of disciplinary regulations, and the cultivation of an internal culture of ethical conduct.

Challenges of Professional Ethics in the Iranian Criminal Justice System

Despite significant legal progress toward safeguarding the rights of the accused, the Iranian criminal justice system continues to face numerous challenges in the realm of professional ethics. These challenges not only affect the quality of judicial proceedings but may also lead to violations of defendants' rights and a decline in public trust in the judiciary. The major ethical challenges within Iran's criminal justice system include the following [2]:

Lack of Clearly Defined Ethical Standards for Judicial Actors

In Iran's criminal justice system, comprehensive and codified ethical standards for various judicial actors-such as judges, lawyers, and law enforcement officers-have not been systematically developed. This absence of clear ethical guidelines can result in divergent interpretations of ethical principles and, consequently, unprofessional conduct at different stages of the proceedings. Research indicates that the lack of explicit ethical frameworks contributes to unethical practices within the judiciary [19].

External Pressures and Their Impact on Judicial Independence

One of the principal challenges in the Iranian criminal process is the existence of external pressures that may compromise judicial independence. Such pressures may originate from governmental, security, or even public sources. These influences can lead to biased or unjust decisions and, ultimately, to the violation of defendants' rights.

Lack of Continuous Education on Professional Ethics

In Iran, ongoing and systematic training programs on professional ethics for judicial actors are not regularly provided. This deficiency can lead to ignorance or negligence of ethical principles during judicial proceedings. Studies demonstrate that ethical education significantly contributes to improving the professional conduct of judges and other actors in the justice system [20].

Conflict Between Public Interest and Individual Rights of the Accused

In certain cases, the emphasis on public interest may conflict with the individual rights of the accused. This tension can result in decisions that disregard the defendant's rights. Some studies note that within Iran's criminal justice system, the protection of public interest is sometimes prioritized over individual rights, thereby compromising the fairness of the process [21].

Absence of Effective Oversight Mechanisms

The existence of effective supervisory mechanisms is essential for strengthening professional ethics in the criminal justice system. At present, oversight of the professional behavior of judicial actors in Iran is neither comprehensive nor effective. This shortcoming may lead to ethical violations and a decline in the overall quality of judicial proceedings.

In sum, the ethical challenges within Iran's criminal justice system require particular attention and fundamental reform. The formulation of clear ethical standards, provision of continuous education, reinforcement of judicial independence, balancing of public and individual interests, and establishment of effective monitoring mechanisms can collectively enhance professional ethics and, consequently, improve the overall quality of criminal adjudication in Iran.

A Comparative Analysis of Professional Ethics in Iran and Other Criminal Justice Systems

Professional ethics in criminal proceedings, as a set of behavioral principles and standards, play a vital role in ensuring justice, safeguarding defendants' rights, and maintaining the credibility of the judiciary. Comparative analysis of different systems provides valuable insight into existing strengths and weaknesses and offers potential avenues for improvement.

International organizations such as the United Nations and the European Union have established ethical standards governing professional conduct within judicial systems. For instance, the UN Code of Conduct for Judicial Officers emphasizes principles such as independence, impartiality, integrity, and respect for human rights. These standards aim to promote transparency and integrity within judicial institutions.

The Judicial System of the United States

In the United States, professional ethics in criminal proceedings are regulated through ethical codes such as the Model Rules of Professional Conduct for attorneys and the Criminal Justice Standards of the American Bar Association. These codes emphasize honesty, fairness, respect for defendants' rights, and the avoidance of conflicts of interest. Nevertheless, challenges such as political pressure, systemic racism, and inequality in access to defense counsel persist in certain contexts [22].

Judicial Systems of European Countries

Within the European Union, member states are obligated to adhere to common standards regarding human rights and fair trial guarantees. The European Code of Police Ethics underscores principles such as respect for human dignity, proportional use of force, and non-discrimination. These standards aim to enhance public confidence and transparency in the functioning of judicial and law enforcement institutions [23].

Judicial Systems of Asian Countries

In several Asian jurisdictions-such as China and India-professional ethics in criminal proceedings are shaped by unique legal and cultural traditions. In China, the justice system emphasizes the preservation of social order and collective interests, which may sometimes result in the infringement of individual rights of defendants. In India, despite the existence of ethical codes, persistent challenges such as corruption, procedural delays, and inequality in access to justice continue to undermine ethical conduct in practice [24].

A comparative examination of criminal justice systems across various countries demonstrates that adherence to professional ethical principles not only enhances justice and the protection of defendants' rights but also strengthens public confidence in the judiciary. Therefore, attention to international ethical standards-coupled with their contextual adaptation to each nation's cultural and legal framework-is of paramount importance for the advancement of justice and the integrity of judicial institutions.

Strategies for Strengthening Professional Ethics in Ensuring the Rights of the Accused

Enhancing professional ethics within Iran's criminal justice system is an indispensable necessity for guaranteeing the rights of the accused and reinforcing judicial legitimacy. The first step in this direction is the institutionalization of professional ethics education at all levels of the judiciary. Holding continuous training programs for judges, lawyers, law enforcement officers, and legal experts can increase their awareness of ethical principles and defendants' rights, transforming professional conduct into an organizational habit. These training programs should not remain merely theoretical but should include practical exercises, case simulations, and the examination of real instances of ethical violations to ensure effective and applicable learning [2, 18].

In addition to education, revising and updating internal regulations and procedural rules to clarify ethical standards is essential. The drafting of a Code of Professional Ethics, containing specific provisions regarding defendants' rights, judicial conduct, and the duties of defense attorneys, can provide a clear framework for the activities of all judicial actors. Such documents should be approved by competent judicial authorities and be legally binding to prevent arbitrary practices and violations of defendants' rights [1, 3].

Independent supervisory bodies also play a significant role in promoting professional ethics. The establishment of oversight committees for monitoring the conduct of judges and lawyers, reviewing public complaints, and continuously assessing the performance of judicial personnel can enhance accountability and reduce instances of misconduct. Transparent mechanisms for

addressing ethical breaches must be accompanied by enforceable guarantees so that they have a genuine impact on professional behavior, rather than remaining merely symbolic [1].

Organizational culture-building constitutes another crucial approach to strengthening professional ethics. Creating a working environment in which values such as honesty, respect for human dignity, professional independence, and impartiality are actively encouraged helps transform ethical behavior into a shared organizational norm. This cultural development can be fostered through ethical performance incentives, continuous feedback, and the recognition of conduct consistent with ethical standards.

Finally, enhancing international cooperation and drawing upon successful experiences from other countries can contribute to improving professional ethics in Iran's criminal justice system. Comparative studies have shown that the localization of international ethical standards-adapted to domestic legal culture-can enhance the legitimacy of the judiciary and improve the quality of case adjudication. Accordingly, a simultaneous focus on education, regulation, supervision, organizational culture, and international experience provides a comprehensive and effective path toward strengthening professional ethics and safeguarding the rights of the accused.

CONCLUSION

The present study demonstrated that professional ethics in criminal proceedings play a fundamental and indispensable role in ensuring the rights of the accused and enhancing the legitimacy of the judicial system. The theoretical and philosophical foundations of professional ethics-including justice, impartiality, honesty, and respect for human dignity-form the essential basis of the professional conduct of judges, lawyers, and law enforcement officers, and, beyond legal obligations, provide a moral framework for implementing fair trials.

The analysis of the role of professional ethics at different stages of the criminal process revealed that adherence to ethical norms during investigation, prosecution, trial, and execution of judgment not only guarantees defendants' rights but also strengthens public trust and judicial legitimacy.

At the same time, the existing challenges within Iran's criminal justice system-such as the absence of clear ethical standards, external pressures, lack of continuous education, and weak oversight mechanisms - indicate that the full realization of professional ethics is not possible without structural and cultural reforms. Comparative analysis with other criminal justice systems further underscores that drawing upon international experiences and localizing ethical standards can effectively improve judicial performance and the protection of defendants' rights.

The proposed strategies include institutionalizing ethical education, formulating binding codes of ethics, strengthening supervision and accountability, fostering ethical organizational culture, and utilizing international best practices. Collectively, these measures can transform the criminal justice system into one that is ethics-oriented, transparent, and just - a system in which the rights of the accused are effectively guaranteed not only at the legal level but also in practice.

In conclusion, professional ethics should be regarded not merely as a means of ensuring justice and defendants' rights, but as the cornerstone of legitimacy, public trust, and the overall efficiency of the criminal justice process in Iran.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical issues (such as plagiarism, conscious satisfaction, misleading, making and or forging

data, publishing or sending to two places, redundancy and etc.) have been fully considered by the writers.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests.

FUNDING DECLARATION

This research did not receive any grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or non-profit sectors.

REFERENCES

1. Kousha J, Pakniat M. The balance between the rights of the accused and the victim in criminal procedure code 2013 and international instruments. The Judiciary Law Journal, 2017; 81(97): 29-52. https://doi.org/10.22106/jlj.2017.25898
2. Mousavi S A, Ghasemi M, Jafari M J. Investigating the ethical challenges of the defendant's right to remain silent in the Iranian legal system. Journal of Ethical Research, 2020; 4(10): 235-254. https://dorl.net/dor/20.1001.1.23833279.1399.10.40.14.8
3. Ghanavati J, Mandani E. Ethics and fair trial in light of the predictability of procedural rules. Journal of Ethical Research, 2018; 31(8): 159-183.
4. Khalili R, Esmaeili M, Hajitabar H. Ethics in criminal law: respect for the freedom of individuals and the study of reason in Imami Jurisprudence and Iranian Criminal Law. Ethics in Science and Technology 2022; 16 (4) :14-20. https://dor.isc.ac/dor/20.1001.1.22517634.1400.16.4.3.2
5. Zarafiu A. Judicial procedure in criminal matters: legal provisions and practical issues. Societas et Iurisprudentia. 2021; 9: 21-37. https://doi.org/10.31262/1339-5467/2021/9/1/21-37
6. Lumopa F, Arifin Z. Judges' code of ethics in deciding cases. Edunity Kajian Ilmu Sosial dan Pendidikan. 2024; 3(12): 1169-1179. https://doi.org/10.57096/edunity.v3i12.339
7. Holder R, Dearing A. Human dignity, rights and victim participation in criminal justice. International Criminology. 2024; 4(1): 1-12. https://doi.org/10.1007/s43576-024-00119-3
8. Aliakbari R, SHakeri Y. Principles and rules governing professional ethics in the legal profession. Fares Law Research, 2022; 4(9): 199-216. https://doi.org/10.22034/lc.2022.134644
9. Kazemzadeh A, Feiz Z. Principles governing a fair trial under Islamic jurisprudence and international law. International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding, 2021; 8(2). http://dx.doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v8i2.2359
10. Albanese J S. Professional ethics in criminal justice: Being ethics when no one is looking. 5th ed. Pearson. 2024.
11. Banks C. Criminal justice ethics: theory and practice. 5th ed. Sage Publications. 2023.
12. Braswell MC, McCarthy BR, McCarthy BJ. Justice, crime, and ethics. 9th ed. Routledge. 2017. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315455853.
13. Mahra N, Mahmoudian Esfahani K. An analysis of detection of crime in Iranian legal system in lights of the requirements of international human rights Law. Public Law Studies Quarterly, 2017; 47(2): 329-356. https://doi.org/10.22059/jplsq.2017.63101
14. Forouzandeh P, Mohseni F. A criticism of the inserting accused criminal record in the indictment (the subject of clause "c" of Article 279 of The Code of Criminal Procedure 2013). The Judiciarys Law Journal, 2022; 86(120): 161-178. https://doi.org/10.22106/jlj.2022.540888.4479
15. Salehi Taeblo F, Tavassoli Naeini M, Ghamami M M. Defendant's rights in the Iranian high disciplinary court of judges and human rights instruments. Criminal Law Research, 2020; 10(2): 113-136. https://doi.org/10.22124/jol.2019.9179.1434
16. Kravchuk V. Tasks of professional ethics of prosecutors. Journal of the National Prosecution Academy of Ukraine. 2019; (3). https://doi.org/10.34285/visnyknapu2019.03.050
17. Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS). Code of ethics. ACJS. 2025. Available at: https://www.acjs.org/code-of-ethics/
18. Sutasir Z. The role of ethics in criminal law: justice, fairness, and moral considerations. Journal of the International Academy for Case Studies, 2025; 31(1): 1-3
19. Moradi A. A comparative study of the quality of criminal regulations, with a look at Iranian law and the knowledge of ethics, literature and linguistics. Journal of Research and Development in Comparative Law, 2024; 6(21): 139-186. https://doi.org/10.22034/law.2024.2001199.1273
20. Yousefi Y, Nasr Esfahani A, Kazemi A. The status of compliance human aspect of professional ethics in the judicial system. Ethics in Science and Technology 2018; 13 (2) :39-51. https://dor.isc.ac/dor/20.1001.1.22517634.1397.13.2.5.9
21. Sheidaeian M, Eshaghi S J. Effects of public interest in criminal procedure and its challenge to individual rights. The Quarterly Journal of Judicial Law Views, 2023; 25(89): 101-120.
22. Nomuulin O, Narangerel S. Legal and judicial ethics: issues of professional responsibility and integrity. Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal. 2025; 12(9): 299-304. https://doi.org/10.14738/assrj.1209.19437
23. Bocaniala T. The European code of police ethics and community police. Administratio, 2010; 1(2).
24. Dressel B. Courts and governance in Asia: exploring variations and effects. Hong Kong Law Journal, 2012; 42(1).