THE ROLE OF REFERENCE GROUPS ON STUDENT'S CULTURAL VALUES

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study is surveying the role of reference groups on student's cultural values in Ardestan's Payam Noor University. The study has used correlation and descriptive-analytic methodologies. The statistical population included the students who were studying at Payam Noor Ardestan (PNA) in Iran (N=1773). The sampling was stratified random method. The affordable number of samples was randomly selected in terms of frequency of Students at the PNA. The estimated size samples were 258, when the Cochran formula of calculating size samples were used. A questionnaire as a research tool was initially developed according to an extensive review of literature and finalized after both the pre test and the face validity process. The questionnaire consisted of 4 separate parts. The questions were about the quality of Ethical, universal, traditional and ethnic values. Questionnaire reliability was estimated by calculating Cronbach’s Alpha (0.85) via SPSS software. In order to analyze the data resulted from collected questionnaires deductive and descriptive statistical methods are used, and to display some statistical data we used column diagram and in deductive level to test the hypothesis of the research we used Pierson correlation test (r) and to determine the meaningfulness level of (r) we used t-test and $\chi^2$. Findings show that there are significant differences between cultural values and reference groups.

Keywords: Reference groups, Cultural values, Culture, Payam Noor University

INTRODUCTION

Iran holds a unique place in the study of the modern Middle East: it is a non-Arab country, but deeply involved in the heart of the Arab world; after the removal of Saddam Hussein and the “repentance” of Mu’amar Qaddafi, it remains the only overtly radical state in the region with a proclaimed ideological anti-American agenda; it is the sole Shiite regime and the active “exporter” of Islamic radicalism and terrorism, not only to Shiite, but also to Sunnite Islamic movements; and it is actively involved in attempts to disrupt the Israeli-Arab peace process. Above all of these, Iran is worthy of special interest as a regional power capable of creating high levels of tension in the sensitive area of the Persian Gulf, and as a country with an advanced clandestine nuclear weapons program.

Despite all the above, the interaction between Iran and the West (and indeed, most of its neighbors, most of the time) is not through armed conflict, but through protracted negotiations and exhaustive bargaining. It is, therefore, worthwhile to understand the aspects of Iranian cultural behavior and mindset relevant to Iranian styles of communication, bargaining, and negotiation (Bar, 2004).
Through the study of sociology, students acquire an understanding of group interaction and its impact on individuals in order that they may have a greater awareness of the beliefs, values and behavior patterns of others. In an increasingly interdependent world, students need to recognize how group behavior affects both the individual and society.

Cultures have values that are largely shared by their members. The values of a society can often be identified by noting which people receive honor or respect. In the US, for example, professional athletes at the top levels in some sports are honored (in the form of monetary payment) more than college professors. Surveys show that voters in the United States would be reluctant to elect an atheist as a president, suggesting that belief in God is a value. There is a difference between values clarification and cognitive moral education. Values clarification is, "helping people clarify what their lives are for and what is worth working for. Students are encouraged to define their own values and understand others' values." (Santrock, 2007). Cognitive moral education is based on the belief that students should learn to value things like democracy and justice as their moral reasoning develops." (Santrock, 2007). Educationist "Chaveen Dissanayake" says personal and cultural values can be varied by the living standards of a man.

Values are related to the norms of a culture, but they are more global and abstract than norms. Norms are rules for behavior in specific situations, while values identify what should be judged as good or evil. Flying the national flag on a holiday is a norm, but it reflects the value of patriotism. Wearing dark clothing and appearing solemn are normative behaviors at a funeral. In certain cultures they reflect the values of respect and support of friends and family. Different cultures reflect different values. "Over the last three decades, traditional-age college students have shown an increased interest in personal well-being and a decreased interest in the welfare of others." (Santrock, 2007). Values seemed to have changed, affecting the beliefs, and attitudes of college students. Members take part in a culture even if each member's personal values do not entirely agree with some of the normative values sanctioned in the culture. This reflects an individual's ability to synthesize and extract aspects valuable to them from the multiple subcultures they belong to. If a group member expresses a value that is in serious conflict with the group's norms, the group's authority may carry out various ways of encouraging conformity or stigmatizing the non-conforming behavior of its members. For example, imprisonment can result from conflict with social norms that have been established as law.

Besides, Institutions in the Global Economy can genuinely respect values which are of three kinds based on a “triangle of coherence” (Pascal, 2011). On one side, it lies today within the World Trade Organization (WTO), as well as in the second side within the United Nations - particularly the Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) - providing a framework for global legitimacy through accountability. On the third side, the expertise of member-driven international organizations and civil society depends on the incorporation of flexibilities in the rules, so as to preserve the expression of identity in a globalized world. Nonetheless, in a warlike economic competition, differing visions contradicts, particularly on culture. Hence a movie is an artistic creation in Europe, and then benefits from special treatment, while it is only a mere entertainment in the U.S. whatever his own artistic performance. Even within the fragmented Europe, interventionist policies based on the notion of “cultural exception” get opposed to the policy of the “cultural specificity” on the liberal Anglo-Saxon side. Indeed, in international law, films are traditionally seen as property, and the content of television programs is defined as a service. Consequently cultural
interventionist policies get opposed to Anglo-Saxon liberal position, causing failures in international negotiations (Violaine, 2011).

The concept of "reference group" has been used in several ways, but its utility can be maximized when it signifies that group whose presumed perspective is used by an actor as the frame of reference in the organization of his perceptual field (Rose, 1995). In other words, it is People whose attitudes, behavior, beliefs, opinions, preferences, and values are used by an individual as the basis for his or her judgment. One does not have to be (or even aspire to be) a member of a reference group to be negatively or positively influenced by its characteristics (Damirchi, 2010). Reference groups provide the benchmarks and contrast needed for comparison and evaluation of group and personal characteristics. Robert K. Merton hypothesized that individuals compare themselves with reference groups of people who occupy the social role to which the individual aspires (Holton, 2004). Thus defined, it becomes apparent that all kinds of units may serve as reference groups. Attention should not be limited to organized groups that are readily identifiable. The audience for whom one performs may consist of a single person, a small handful of people with whom he is in sustained contact, a voluntary association, or some broad category of people - a social class, a profession, an ethnic group, or some community. A reference group is an audience, consisting of real or imaginary personifications, to whom certain values are imputed. It is an audience before whom a person tries to maintain or enhance his standing. The contention that men think, feel, and see things from a collective standpoint is an old one which has been emphasized repeatedly by students of anthropology and of the sociology of knowledge. Why, then, the sudden concern with reference groups during the past few decades? Interest apparently arises from the peculiar characteristics of mass societies, societies that are held together through the media of mass communication. Although a number of scholars have contended that mass societies are lacking in organization, having many of the characteristics of crowds, closer examination reveals that they are actually held together by an infinite number of personal attachments and by moral obligations in specific contexts. Mass societies are pluralistic; even under totalitarian regimes, with their centralization of political power, social control is decentralized. Special problems arise from the fact that in such complex societies men sometimes utilize the norms of groups in which they are not ostensibly participating at the moment, sometimes of groups in which they are not recognized as members, and sometimes of groups that do not exist at all. The main purpose of this study is surveying the role of reference groups on student's cultural values in Ardestan City's Payam Noor University.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is an extensive literature in which the term "reference group" designates a group with which a person compares his fate. This is another usage, and little can be gained from quarreling over the "correct" meaning of words. It is important to recognize, however, that a group which serves as a point of comparison is quite different from a group whose culture constitutes one's point of view. Any convenient group with which a person is familiar may be used in making comparisons; he can also compare himself with another individual or with an impersonal standard... of measurement, such as a yardstick. As Stem and Keller (1988) declare, however, the fact that people are aware of differences between groups does not lead them to adopt the standpoint of outsiders, even when the others are believed to be better off. Indeed, as Bott (1957) shows in her study of English families, one need not even know very much about such groups, for any stereotyped conception suffices. Some writers have gone
further and have contended that reference groups have a "comparison function" as well as a "normative function." To speak of two parallel "functions" of the same concept implies that the phenomenon is similar in all respects other than its "function." Although there are some superficial similarities, this is not the case. Are such groups formed under the same conditions? Do people acquire their norms in the same manner? Are they transformed under the same circumstances? The same label is unfortunately being used to refer to two different processes, and the attempt, to combine them only adds to the already existing confusion. Turner lists several ways in which groups may become involved in the formation of judgments, and it goes without saying that each should be labeled with a different symbol (Rose, 1995).

In 1902, in Human Nature and the Social Order, Cooley offered discussions relating closely to the concepts of reference group theory. Cooley discussed how individuals took on various mental or psychological interpretations of themselves based on how individuals thought others perceived them. He stated "In a large and interesting class of cases the social reference takes the form of a somewhat definite imagination of how one's self - that is any idea he appropriates - appears in a particular mind, and the kind of self-feeling one has is determined by the attitude towards this attributed to that other mind. A social self of this sort might be called the reflected or looking-glass self... as we see our face, figure, and dress in the glass, and are interested in them because they are ours, and pleased or otherwise with them according as they do or do not answer to what we should like them to be; so in imagination we perceive in another's mind some thought of our appearance, manners, aims, deeds, character, friends, and so on, are variously affected by It". (Cooley, 1902: 183-184)

Hence came Cooley's famous quote: 'Each to each a looking-glass reflects the other that doth pass' (p. 184). He argued that a self-idea of this sort seems to have three principle elements: the imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of his judgment of that appearance; and some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification. The comparison with a looking glass hardly suggests the second element, the imagined judgment, which is quite essential. Cooley believed that, "the thing that moves us to pride or shame is not the mere mechanical reflection of ourselves, but an imputed sentiment, the imagined effect of this reflection upon another's mind. This is evident from the fact that the character and weight of that other, in whose mind we see ourselves, makes all the difference with our feeling". (Cooley, 1902: 183-186)

In short, Cooley is saying that an individual's perception of what he or she thinks other people think about them affects in some manner the way that individual perceives or feels about him or herself. In this example, another person, or group of people, influence the individual's perception, and consequently his or her attitudes, behaviors, and norms.

In other words, how norms enter into a conceptualization of reference group theory is because the domains in which members play out their identities are driven by this collective sense that "they are on to something." Members believe that the solutions they have worked out to define and shape their world are appropriate for them, and that the decisions made by their collective view of reality provide the most certain solution to issues facing them.

In 1903, DuBois, in his famous The Souls of Black Folk, illustrated to some degree the concept of multiple reference group theories (a concept developed later in this paper). It would appear that DuBois used Cooley's 'looking-glass self' theory as a parallel to describe his experience of the dual, and sometimes conflicting, consciousness of being both a person of color and an American. By offering insight into numerous aspects of black life he states,
"...it is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness - this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others - of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels two-ness - An American, a Negro: two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body" (DuBois, 1903).

DuBois seems to indicate that the attitudes, behavior, norms of 'others', or certain groups, do play a major role in how an individual defines or feels about him or herself. Thus, in this example, the notion of reference group theory is implied. Another way to look at this theory is to address the role that significant others play in defining the life-world of group members. Defining a situation as critical, for example, is to shape whatever solutions are possible to members of that world. For instance, in using reference group theory, members of certain groups will be sensitive to issues they believe are important to them. In this case, their information behaviors will be expressed in an active manner that requires some seeking strategies. On the other hand, if members are convinced that the information is not relevant to their cause, their behaviors will reflect an indifference to that information.

Hyman (1942) advanced the conceptualization of reference group theory. He defined 'subjective status' as 'a person's conception of his own position relative to other individuals' (Hyman & Singer, 1968: 147). He was the first researcher to formally use the term 'reference group'. A year later, in 1943, Newcomb conducted a study of social attitudes among students at Bennington College in Vermont entitled Personality and Social Change - Attitude Formation in a Student Community. In 'Personality Pattern and Community Role', a chapter on personality, Newcomb reported that participants in the study, "...distributed themselves among limited roles... in accordance with already existing and currently developing personality characteristics, and that these characteristics determine which of the roles individuals will assume". (Newcomb, 1957)

He maintained that 'It is the community role which mediates between social attitudes and other personality characteristics'. Again, in this example, the attitudes, behavior, and norms of others (in this case a community group) have some impact on the public and private attitudes, behavior, and norms of individuals.

Stouffer et al. (1949) conducted an important post World War II study which advanced interest in the area of reference group theory. The study explored the concept of relative deprivation, a close cousin to the concept of comparative reference group, by examining various contradictions and feelings of satisfaction or deprivation of soldiers serving at different duty levels: veteran combat soldiers, non-combat soldiers, and replacement soldiers for combat veterans. The researchers reported that the soldiers' sense of deprivation was not dependent on any absolute service level, but was relative to the perceived level in the groups with which the soldiers compared themselves (Stouffer, et al., 1949).

Although the American Soldier was a classic study in reference group research, the concepts of the theory did not come into prominence until Merton & Kitt (1950) published the results of synthesized studies involving reference groups and offered detailed discussions on research related to the field of reference group theory, introducing a new concept, anticipatory socialization. They argued that anticipatory socialization occurred when individuals chose as a reference group, a non-membership group, and began to socialize themselves to what they perceived to be the group's norms. This type of mental socialization occurred before individuals are ever exposed to the group's real influence (Hyman & Singer, 1968: 11). Their article also touched on concepts relating to multiple reference groups.
Since the Merton & Kitt study, concepts of reference group theory have appeared and been used in studies involving such groups as farmers, scientists, drunkards, and newspapermen. The theory was also used in such areas as mental illness, formal organization, marketing, public relations, mass communication, acculturation, political behaviour, consumer behaviour, juvenile delinquency and opinion studies (Hyman, 1968: 355; Schmitt, 1972: 1). Shibutani (1955) addressed some of the problems relating to multiple reference group theory in an article entitled 'Reference Groups as Perspectives'.

In describing the five bases of group power, French & Raven (1959) touched on an unique concept related to reference group theory, referent power. They maintained that the referent power of a group has its basis in the identification of an individual with a group. Identification here means a feeling of oneness of the individual with the group, or the desire for such an identity. If a reference group is an attractive group for individuals, then the individuals will have a feeling of membership or a desire to join (French & Raven, 1959: 161). French & Raven maintained that individuals' identification with the group can only be established or maintained if individuals behave, believe, and perceive as the group does. As a result, the group has the ability to influence individuals, even though individuals may not be aware of it (the group's referent power). The study also addressed concepts of membership and non-membership reference group status, and emphasized that both groups induce a certain amount of power over individuals. Influenced by French & Raven's work, Hyman & Singer maintain that 'membership groups often have power, even when the individual does not take them as reference groups, to extract conformity in behavior through brutish means of deception, demotion, and isolation' (Hyman & Singer, 1968). ²

In more recent investigations involving reference group theory Hurado et al. (1994) conducted a study that explored how history and macro-social structures impact individual types of behavior in Mexican and Chicano immigrants. They reported that differences between immigrants and ethnic groups are due largely to changes in the immigrants' reference groups as they compare themselves to a wider population of people, who either do or do not promote acceptance of traditional American culture. Wade & Gelso (1998) conducted a study that explored the question of why men vary in their masculinity ideology, and in their conformity to certain standards of masculinity. Pendleton & Chatman (1998) alluded to abstractions of reference group theory in introducing four new theoretical concepts: social norms, world view, social types, and information behavior. In describing 'world view', a concept they reported had tremendous affects on the 'value people attached to information', Pendleton & Chatman stated, "... world view is a comprehensive philosophy... a system of shared experiences that provides an outlook or point of view. It serves as a measure to gauge one's role, position, status, etc., within a network of similar others and to assess the relevance of events, people, happenings, and so on, in the larger social world". (Pendleton & Chatman, 1968)

In this definition of worldview, reference group theory is implied because common experiences are shared by a group of people, and it if from these experiences that individuals evaluate what for them is appropriate behavior, norms, and values. As with most situations in life, we articulate those things that are important to us in light of how others will accept our explanation of what constitutes important. In the case of reference group theory, it is that which has a particular life that signifies both historical and cultural meaning. As we have attempted to convey throughout this article, information is the means in which this process happens. Even when information is ignored, there is some meaning that is shared among the small world of reference group life; namely, that this information does not add to one's social
class, ethnic, or cultural knowledge. Therefore, the information does not have a part to play in their real or symbolic world. Following this brief examination of the contextual use of information within an understanding of reference group theory, we recapitulate the following central attributes which are essential to reference group theory:

- Socially, individuals are influenced by groups they believe are important;
- Individuals use certain groups as a guide as to how they should behave (normative reference groups);
- Individuals use groups as a basis for comparing themselves to other individuals or other groups (comparative reference groups);
- Individuals can and do use more than one group as a reference guide (multiple reference groups); and
- Certain groups that individuals use as a point of reference possess the power to influence the attitudes and behavior of individuals who may or may not be members of the group.

The literature also indicates that the roots of reference group theory can be found in the field of social psychology, and that the concepts involved in this philosophical framework are from some perspectives simple, and from other viewpoints quite complex. Nonetheless, through the systematic use of reference group theory, information and predictions regarding the attitudes, behaviors, norms, and values of certain individuals and groups can be enhanced. The next section will discuss the theory further by examining the constructs of influence, power, and solidarity, and describing how they relate to concepts of reference group theory (Elfreda .et al, 2001).

METHODOLOGY

The study has used correlation and descriptive-analytic methodologies. The statistical population included the students who were studying at Payam Noor Ardestan (PNA) in Iran (N=1773). The sampling was stratified random method. The affordable number of samples was randomly selected in terms of frequency of Students at the PNA. The estimated size samples were 258 (n=258), when the Cochran formula of calculating size samples were used.

A questionnaire as a research tool was initially developed according to an extensive review of literature and finalized after both the pre test and the face validity process. Questionnaire reliability was estimated by calculating Cronbach’s Alpha (0.85) via SPSS software.

The questionnaire consisted of 4 separate parts. The questions were about the quality of Ethical, universal, traditional and ethnic values. A Likert-type scale ranged from 1(very low) to 5 (very high) was used to quantify the responses in all parts.

In order to analyze the data resulted from collected questionnaires deductive and descriptive statistical methods are used, and to display some statistical data we used column diagram and in deductive level to test the hypothesis of the research we used Pierso correlation test (r) and to determine the meaningfulness level of (r) we used t-test and $X^2$.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

1-There is a relationship between choice of reference groups and ethical values in Ardestan's Noor University
Table 1 - Comparison of scores in moral and cultural values by teacher Groups influence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Very Low</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Very High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>P*</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>76.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Frequency - ** Percentage

Table 1 shows the frequency response of no, low and very low scores on the element of moral and cultural values influence by teachers with 32 (37.6%) and frequency response of the medium, high and very high 53 (62.4%) respectively.

Table 2 - chi-square and F values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistical Indicators</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>P-Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X2</td>
<td>25.127</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.005</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0.331</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.005</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Findings show that the element of moral and cultural values scores is higher than other groups and there is significant differences element of moral and cultural values scores in influencing by teachers.

2- There is a relationship between choice of reference groups and Adherence of traditional values in Ardestan's Noor University

Table 3 - Comparison of scores in adherence of traditional values by parents and family members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Very Low</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Very High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>P*</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>P</td>
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<td>83.3</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Frequency - ** Percentage

Table 3 shows the frequency response of no, low and very low scores on the adherence of traditional values influence by parents and family members with 0 (0%) and frequency response of the medium, high and very high 74 person (100 %) respectively.

Table 4 - chi-square and F values
Findings show that the adherence of traditional values scores is higher than other groups and there is significant differences Adherence of traditional values scores in influencing by parents and family members.

3- There is a significant relationship between choice of reference groups and universal values in Ardestan's Noor University

Table 5 - Comparison of scores in universal values by teachers influence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Very Low</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Very High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F*</td>
<td>P**</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>9</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Frequency - ** Percentage

Table 6 shows the frequency response of no, low and very low scores on the universal values influence by teachers with 19 (23.2%) and frequency response of the medium, high and very high 63 person (76.8 %) respectively.

Table 6 - chi-square and F values

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Statistical Indicators</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>P-Value</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X2</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0.297</td>
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<td>0.024</td>
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</table>

Findings show that the universal values scores is higher than other groups and there is significant differences Adherence of traditional values scores in influencing by teachers.

4- There is a significant relationship between choice of reference groups and ethnic values in Ardestan's Noor University

Table 7 - Comparison of scores in ethnic values by parents and family members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Very Low</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Very High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F*</td>
<td>P**</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>77.8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7 shows the frequency response of no, low and very low scores on the ethnic values influence by parents and family members with 5 (5.6 %) and frequency response of the medium, high and very high 84 person (94.4 %) respectively.

Table 8 - chi-square and F values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistical Indicators</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>P-Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X²</td>
<td>25.227</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0.336</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.005</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings show that the ethnic values scores is higher than other groups and there is significant differences Adherence of traditional values scores in influencing by parents and family members.
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