

**ASSOCIATION BETWEEN ETHICAL BEHAVIOR OF ACCOUNTING
PROFESSIONALS AND THE FACTORS OF AGE, EXPERIENCE AND GENDER**

by

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study is to observe and evaluate the association between the ethical behaviour of accounting professionals and the factors of gender, experience level and age. Face to face interviews were conducted with auditors to collect data regarding the ethical behaviour of accounting professionals. Quantitative approach was used to perform the study. One-hundred accounting professionals were selected as the sample. One-hundred usable responses were received. One-way ANOVA and independent sample t-test were used to analyze the collected data. The results indicate no significant difference between male accounting professionals and female accounting professionals in their ethical behaviour. Further results of this study indicate that there is a significance difference among age levels and the ethical behaviour. Accounting professionals who are in their mid and above-ages are reflecting more unethical behaviour than below 35 age group. Results indicate that there is significant difference among experience levels on ethical behaviour of accounting professionals. Early carrier accounting professionals are more likely to behave ethically than late carrier accounting professionals. There is no association between ethical behaviour of accounting professionals and the factors of age, gender and experience based on the significance of issues they involved.

Keywords: Accounting, Age, Ethical behaviour, Experience, Gender, Accounting professionals, Auditors

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Ethics and ethical behaviour

There is growing interest in ethical behaviour of accounting professionals in Sri Lankan context. Simply ethics can be defined as morals or code system that guides to distinguish between right and wrong behaviour (Banerjee & Ercetin 2014). According to Investopedia Accounting ethics refers to the standards that established on right and wrong conduct of accounting profession. (n.d). Ethical behaviour is the way that people distinguish what is right and wrong. Ethical behaviour of accounting professionals is depending on many factors. It is important to understand the

association between the ethical behaviour of accounting professionals and those factors. That understanding helps to improve the ethical conduct as well as to avoid ethical loopholes in the accounting field in Sri Lanka.

1.2. Factors affect to the ethical behavior

It is clear that Ethical behaviour of accounting professionals is affected by many factors in different ways. According to above studies it is difficult to conclude the association between, ethical behaviour and factors that affect to the behaviour of accounting professionals. All these studies related to American and European countries and it created a research gap for this study. Further those studies were conducted to identify the association between ethical behaviour and the factors of gender, age, experience level and education level. Further there are no studies to examine the association with mix of above factors. Therefore this gap was fulfilled through this study.

1.3. Data collection and analysis

Data collected through auditors (face to face interviews) regarding the ethical behaviour of accounting professionals in Sri Lanka. Accounting professionals are defined as CA, CIMA and ACCA accountants to simplify the study. One way ANOVA, independent sample t-test will be used to identify the association between ethical behaviour and gender, experience and age of accounting professionals in Sri Lanka.

1.4. Structure of the article

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. A review of the literature is presented in next section. After the literature and review research methodology, population, sample selection, analytical strategy will be discussed. Analysis of findings is discussed in the fourth section. Finally, conclusions, limitations and directions for future research are provided in section five.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

Concept of “Ethics” defined by the first section of this literature review and then discusses the ethical behaviour in accounting profession and variables affect to ethical behaviour. After that, discussion move to explain the relationship between ethical behaviour in accounting profession

and age, experience, gender and other factors. Finally, it identifies the gap in the existing literature which will be examined through this study.

2.2. Ethics

The review of literature illustrates that unavailability of generally accepted definitions on ethics and ethical behaviour. Biesecker (1994) stated that human behaviour is guided from ethics and are decided what is wrong, what is correct and what the socially rewarded behaviour is. It is a conceptualization method to assess the suitability of the behaviour. In the economy, ethics is model to shaping the ethical behaviour.

Barry and Johnston (1961) stated that ethics are related to human goals. Ethics is art of controlling human behaviour. The study has been stated business ethics is concerned primarily with the relationship of business goals and technique. Behaviour is impact to the individual, the firm, the business community, and society as a whole.

Garrett (1966) stated that ethics is not the study of moralities; it is a judgment relating to the conventionality judgments relating to the existing rules and social rules. Custom, convention, and the accepted courtesies of a society are not the foundations of ethics according to the study. The reason for this is business ethics must study existing business codes to determine whether they have a concrete foundation or the narrow consensus of a group or a sort of commercial custom.

Judith Irwin, Katherine Bradshaw, (2011) stated that ethical companies effectively engaging to their employees. Culturally ethical companies are improving their reputation and financial performance engaging with their employees. An organization should be made the culture that enables unethical behaviour to be identified and dealt with early before occurred a mess in the organization. Therefore, companies would have low costs relating to the recruitments and employee disputes and litigation.

2.3. Ethical behaviour in accounting profession and variables affect to ethical behaviour

The Accounting profession has a code of ethics that has involved over many years and still in the process of change. Self-regulation in any profession is built around this code of ethics. The growing concern over the ethics of accounting profession makes it essential to consider values of accounting profession. Accountants should be competent as well as they should maintain values as confidentiality, integrity and objectivity.

According to the Leitch (2004) moral intensity of people varied between less unethical and more unethical actions. Further that study explains actions are the outcomes of ethical behaviour. It describes the current perception on the accounting ethics among accounting students. Further this article emphasizes the importance of the ethical training. These matters further discussed by Kenneth M. Hiltebeitel and Scott K. Jones (1992, P.46). In addition to above matters Results of that research indicated that the principles on which students rely when making moral decisions were affected by ethical integration. It suggested to students to get exposed to ethical awareness and ethical reasoning in business ethics related courses and this exposure better to supplemented by discussions of these topics in various business courses. It has discussed four potential factors limiting the benefits of accounting ethics education. Complex structure, failure to recognize accounting students' ethical backgrounds of education, the overreliance on a single ethics education paradigm, instructors' over reliance on dilemma ethics, and the potential removal of restraints on behaviour by deemphasizing rules are caused to limiting benefits of accounting education on ethics. (Shaub 1994)

2.4. Relationship between ethical behaviour in accounting profession and age and experience

Ethical issues in the corporate workplace have been become more attractive to dilemmas due to adverse publicity of unethical accounting practices of corporate management (e.g. corrupt politicians, illegal practices of corporate leaders and incompetent professionals). The objective of the literature review is to provide some evidence regarding the association between ethical behaviour with age and experience of the accounting professionals. It should be noted clearly how age and experience will relate to unethical accounting practices. According to Sri Lankan education system most of the students are getting accounting stream education rather than other areas due to the attractiveness of the accounting fields. Therefore, when they enter the commercial sector as accounting professionals they may have accounting knowledge based on the educational level they have obtained. By focusing on educational level, it leads us to evaluate the experience they have collected by moving with their age. Normal presumption is that a person can be an expert in a particular field when they grow and gain more experience. Expert level leads them to do more unethical practices due to the power of knowledge and experiences accumulated with the growth of age. Accordingly, socially accepted opinion is that elder educated professionals engage in unethical accounting practice than younger accounting professionals. Therefore, several studies

were conducted in order to identify the association of age and experience of accounting professionals towards unethical accounting behaviour.

A study done by Gabriel Eweje and Margaret Brunton, Department of Management and International Business, Massey University – Albany Campus, Auckland, New Zealand (2010) identified interesting points based on eleven scenario questions and 1-3 questions, the study suggested older students are more aware about ethics than younger students. At the same time question 4 of above study produced there are no difference of ethical awareness due to age base on selected sample. Accordingly, it says less work experience respondents are less aware of ethical practices when compared with more work experienced respondents.

Terry W. Loe, Linda Ferrell and Phylis Mansfield (June 2000) have been conducted a research on “A Review of Empirical Studies Assessing Ethical Decision Making in Business” and from that they have observed eighteen previous studies on education, work experience and culture and climate. Half of the studies showed education and work experience have no influence or negligible influence on ethical decision making. Other nine studies provided mixed findings including the positive relationship between higher education level and ethical sensitivity. It is probable that when it comes to higher professional education level, those institutions responsible for the protection of the profession such as code of ethics introduced by CA Sri Lanka. Therefore, professionals who got knowledge and experiences under that kind of reputed professional institute are reluctant to involve in unethical activities to protect their membership .Because as they become more experienced with the growth of age, they understand that they won't be able to get back their membership. Accordingly, K.W.Maree ,S .Radloff ,(2007) “Factors affecting ethical judgment of South African Chartered accountants” study focused on the important of code of ethics for chartered accountants and result of such study concluded that SAICA's Code of Professional Conduct create and maintain strong ethical culture among their members. Muslumov & Aras (2004) suggest, for better ethical culture it is required continuous development. Therefore, in order to validate the code of ethics, professional institutes should have continuous development to identify the ethical issues emerge with the growth of age and experiences of their members.

Another main factor which affects ethics in accounting profession is gender. As per most studies, gender considered as the most important factor that affects to ethical behaviour. Most of the researches has done regarding this area and has bought questions such as, whether women are more ethical than man and vice versa. Different articles give different opinions regarding this

gender and ethics relationship. Some explain there is a relationship and some states no such relationship. Following articles indicates the relationship between gender and accounting ethics in detail.

Elsie C. Ameen, Daryl M. Guffey and Jeffry J. McMillan (May, 1996) have a study on “Gender differences in determining the ethical sensitivity of future accounting professionals”. This study has conducted to analyze the responses of male and female accounting students regarding their experiences with opportunities faced to engage in various unethical behaviours. Finally, the study was found that no statistically significant difference between males and females based on their overall GPA, age or classification.

2.5. Relationship between ethical behaviour in accounting profession and gender and other factors

The study conducted by Robin (2000), regarding gender affects and ethically sensitive decisions in personal or business nature. This suggests that men were less ethical regarding personal issues and more ethical on the business issues of freedom of speech than women. Further, this study identifies that differences in reactions to ethically sensitive situations of a personal nature and a business nature are similar for both male and female accountants. Furthermore, the results of the research proved false the suggestion that the ethical decision making of organizations may be enhanced as more women enter the business field.

Accordingly, Michal Betz, Lenahan O' Connel and Jon M. Shepard (1989) found that men were more interested with money and advancement; Women were more caring in relationships and helping people. Also, males were more than twice as probability to say they would engage in practices considered as unethical. They have investigated that the possible association between gender and the willingness to engage in unethical business behaviour. There are two approaches to gender and ethics were presented. Data circulated that men are more than two times as likely as women to engage in actions regarded as unethical.

2.6. Summery and Conclusion

Ethical behaviour of accounting professionals is one of main qualitative factor which affects the quality of accounting profession. Ethical behaviour of the accounting professionals is directly affects to the existence of the organization.

Accounting professionals of the companies should maintain ethical behaviour when they set and implement their strategies and taking decisions in their daily routines. Accounting professions should maintain ethical behaviour as they are the responsible persons to provide true and fair information on finance management function. On the other hand, they are the professionals who responsible for the reporting financial information to the society. Therefore, they have the responsibility to maintain ethical behaviour to emphasize the existence of the organization in current society they operate. Accountants can easily manipulate the financial statements unless they maintain ethics in self-motive. However, in current society unethical activities of accounting practice has increased day by day. As an example, Golden key, Pramuka bank, Sakwithi Group cases indicate that the accounting profession is in a huge risk in Sri Lankan context. Due to that neediness of these kinds of researches are arisen in Sri Lankan context.

According to the literature review, several studies have done relating to the ethical behaviour of various professions including Accounting Profession. They have focused their studies on various topics like consequences of ethical behaviour to the corporate sector and factors affecting to the ethical behaviour. Through the literature survey it can be identified gender, age, experience, culture, level of education and self-leaderships as the factors affect to the ethical behaviour of accounting professionals. However, in Sri Lankan context it is very rare to found the studies relating to ethical behaviour of the accounting professionals. Therefore this study identifies the above gap and focus to enhance the ethical conduct in Sri Lankan accounting profession.

3. Methodology

Research approach, Population and sample, development of questionnaire and the analytical strategies are discussed in this section.

3.1. Research approach

Quantitative approach was used to gain the relevant details from auditors on accounting professionals. As per the literature survey this approach is widely used in previous studies of this nature. Andrew (1994), Angelidis (2009) used this approach in their studies. Therefore, this approach deemed appropriate for this study to examine and evaluate the ethical behaviour of accounting professionals in Sri Lanka.

3.2. Population and sample

Population consists of CA, CIMA and ACCA accounting professionals in Sri Lanka. Auditors that contribute to obtain details on accounting professionals are selected purposively. A total of hundred details on accounting professionals were obtained through auditors.

3.2.1. Hypothesis developed

The following hypotheses were developed to examine and evaluate the association between ethical behaviour and the factors of gender, age and experience level.

01. Gender and ethical behaviour

H1: There is a significant difference between males and females in ethical behaviour of accounting professionals.

02. Age and ethical behaviour

H1: There is a significant difference among age groups in ethical behaviour of accounting professionals.

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03. Experience level and ethical behaviour

H1: There is a significant difference among experience levels of accounting professionals in their ethical Behaviour.

(Assumption 1: Other variables influencing the ethical behaviour are held constant)

3.3. Questionnaire development

Face to face interviews were used to collect data from auditors based on structured questionnaire. The questionnaire that used to get data from auditors was developed based on the literature. This kind of questionnaire was also aided to collect data in similar studies done by Augusto (2009). In order to assess the applicability and relevance of the questionnaire to the local context, the expert opinions of a Chartered Accountant were sought, and the questionnaire was amended accordingly. Thereafter, a pilot survey was conducted by getting details on accounting professionals through three selected auditors and got the further feedback on the way that data is obtained. Finally, the way interviews are conducted and the questionnaire aid to collect data was fine-tuned. (Refer Appendix 1 for the final version of questionnaire).

Data was collected through auditors on accounting professionals. Recent five audits that were engaged by the selected auditor were used as the base to collect the details on accounting professionals that in-charge of each audit. Beginning part of the interview was conducted to obtain demographic data on accounting professionals. Then concerned the ethical issues encountered in each audit that the responsibility goes to the relevant accounting professional. Details of the issues and number of issues recorded in each audit engagement against each accounting professional in-charge were collected through selected auditors. Weights were assigned to each field that issues are belongs to.

3.4. Analytical strategy

This section describes the analytical strategies used for analyzing the data collected from the face to face interviews. Basically, descriptive statistics were used to analyze the demographics. Using descriptive statistics helps to analyze the basic features of the data collected. The mean rank method was used to identify the top highest and bottom lowest means of each demographic variable. Furthermore, central tendency analysis was used to identify the behaviour of each demographic variable. Finally, t-test and ANOVA used to identify the association between each demographic variable and the ethical behaviour of accounting professionals. One-way ANOVA was used to identify whether there is significant different between age groups and experience levels on the ethical behaviour of accounting professionals. Independent sample t test was used to evaluate and examine the relationship between gender and ethical behaviour of accounting professionals. By using mean ranking method can rank the fields of accounting professionals that involved in unethical practices. Furthermore, by using descriptive statistics can identify the fields of maximum and minimum numbers of unethical practices are recorded. It can be summarized that , an association between ethical behaviour of accounting professionals and the factors of age, gender and experience level can be derived through the above analysis.

4. Findings and discussion

This section analysis the demographic variables of the sample representation and the association between ethical behaviour and the factors of gender, age, experience of accounting professionals. The statistical significance of the findings and differences among the selected demographic

characteristics will be discussed in this section. These analyses were performed using the methodology discussed in the above section three.

4.1. Descriptive statistics and differences of perception of demographics

4.1.1 Descriptive statistics

This section explains the descriptive statistics of the analysis based on the collected data from the auditors on accounting professionals. Following table summarizes the demographic variables of accounting professionals.

Table 1 – Demographic Variables

Demographics	Categories	N	%
Age	Below 35	27	27%
	35-50	44	44%
	Above 50	29	29%
	Total	100	100%
Gender	Male	65	65%
	Female	35	35%
	Total	100	100%
Qualifications	CA	47	47%
	ACCA	21	21%
	CIMA	18	18%
	CA & ACCA	3	3%
	CA & CIMA	4	4%
	CIMA & ACCA	5	5%
	CA, ACCA & CIMA	2	2%
	Total	100	100%
Experience	Below 10	29	29%
	10-20	30	30%
	Above 20	41	41%
	Total	100	100%

As shown above, 27% of the respondents were aged from below 35 and another 44% of the respondents from 35 to 50, followed by 29% in the above 50 age group. Gender-wise, 65% of the respondents were males and 35% were females. In respect of the educational and professional qualifications, 47% had a qualified in Chartered Accounting offered by ICASL, 21% had a qualified in Certified Management Accounting offered by CIMA, 18% are Chartered Certified Accountants in Association of Chartered Certified Accountants 29% of the respondents were less

than ten years experiences and 30% of the respondents were between 10 to 20 years and 41% of respondents are above 20 years' experience in the experience of accounting and audit field. The above information shows divers representation of demographic data. As per the above analysis it can be concluded that categorization of age and experience levels are reasonable for the further analysis.

Table 2: Ethical Conduct Gender wise

Ethical conduct was determined based on the no of issues identified against each accounting professional. If there is no issues recorded it considered as the behaviour of each accounting professional as ethical and vice versa.

	Ethical	%	Unethical	%	Total	%
Male	27	69%	38	62%	65	65%
Female	12	31%	23	38%	35	35%
Total	39	100%	61	100%	100	100%

Table 2 summarizes the count of ethical conduct based on each gender. This analysis is represented the relationship between the ethical behaviour and gender of accounting professionals. Out of 100 samples, 39% were ethical and 61% were unethical. Among ethical category 69% represents male and among unethical category 62% represents male. Finally, it can be concluded that there is no relationship between ethical behaviour of accounting professionals and the factor of gender. (Table 2)

Table 3: Ethical Conduct Age wise

	Ethical	%	Unethical	%	Total	%
Below 35	16	41%	11	18%	27	27%
35-50	18	46%	26	43%	44	44%
Above 50	5	13%	24	39%	29	29%
Total	39	100%	61	100%	100	100%

The above table is depicted the ethical and unethical behaviour based on the categories of age. Among ethical category 46% of belongs to 35-50 age group and among unethical category 43% belongs to that age group. Among the ethical category "above 50" accounting professionals represents 13% and among unethical category it represent 39%. Hence the results indicate that

when accounting professionals become matured, unethical Behaviour gradually gets increased. (Table 3)

Table 4: Ethical Conduct of the Experience Category wise

	Ethical	%	Unethical	%	Total	%
Below 10	14	36%	15	25%	29	29%
10-20	18	46%	12	20%	30	30%
Above 20	7	18%	34	55%	41	41%
Total	39	100%	61	100%	100	100%

According to the Table 4, both below 10(36%) and 10-20(46%) year experienced category accounting professionals more likely to be ethical compared to above 20(18%) category. However above 20 year experience accountants are more unethical compared to the other two (55%).It can be summarized that when accounting professionals get experienced it likely to behave unethically compared to the beginners and mid-experienced accounting professionals. (Table 4)

4.1.2. Analysis based on weighted number of issues

Based on the Kroll global fraud and risk report-2017/18 fields of issues are categorized and weights are given to each field based on its' significance. Issues are categorized in to twelve categories. Information theft loss or manipulate includes cyber attracts and hacking of confidential information and manipulation of financial information of the company. IP theft includes frauds related to intellectual property and mimic of financial reporting. Modern slavery includes issues related to human resource. Management conflict of interest includes issues related to personal benefits. Internal financial fraud, vendor, supplier, or procurement fraud, market collusion, corruption and bribery, regulatory or compliance breach misappropriation of company funds money laundering, modern slavery/human trafficking are considered as the categories of issues.

Table 6 – Weighted no of issues gender wise

	Issue Category	Weight	No of issues -Male	Common sized no of issues- Male	Weighted common size no of issues	No of issues Female	Common sized no of issues- Female	Weighted common size no of issues
1	Information theft, loss, or manipulation	9.45%	11	7	8	10	12	13
2	IP theft	9.29%	5	3	4	12	14	16
3	Theft of physical assets or stock	9.12%	14	9	10	11	13	14
4	Management conflict of interest	8.62%	7	5	5	2	2	3
5	Internal financial fraud	8.62%	29	19	20	24	29	31
6	Vendor, supplier, or procurement fraud	8.46%	31	20	22	11	13	14
7	Market collusion	8.29%	0	0	0	0	0	0
8	Corruption and bribery	8.29%	5	3	3	2	2	3
9	Regulatory or compliance breach	8.13%	28	18	20	4	5	5
10	Misappropriation of company funds	7.96%	17	11	12	3	4	4
11	Money laundering	7.13%	0	0	0	0	0	0
12	Modern slavery/human trafficking	6.63%	8	5	6	5	6	6
	Total	100.00%	155	100	108	84	100	109

Above table (Table 6) summarizes the gender wise common weighted no of issues recorded in each category. Results indicate that there is no difference between male and female based on the significance of issues that they involved. (Male=108, Female=109). Male accounting professionals are highly involved in issues related to vendors, suppliers, or procurement. (22).Female accounting professionals are highly involved in issues related to internal finance (31).

Table 8 – Weighted no of issues age group wise

Issue Category	Weight	No of issues-Below 35	Common sized no of issues-Below 35	Weighted common size no of issues	No of issues-35 to 50	Common sized no of issues-35 to 50	Weighted common size no of issues	No of Issues above 50	Common sized no of issues-Above 50	Weighted common size no of issues
1 Information theft, loss, or manipulation	9.45%	0	0	0	19	19	21	2	2	2
2 IP theft	9.29%	0	0	0	0	0	0	17	18	20
3 Theft of physical assets or stock	9.12%	0	0	0	11	11	12	14	15	16
4 Management conflict of interest	8.62%	0	0	0	9	9	10	0	0	0
5 Internal financial fraud	8.62%	15	31	34	16	16	18	22	24	26
6 Vendor, supplier, or procurement fraud	8.46%	14	29	32	13	13	14	15	16	18
7 Market collusion (<i>e.g., price fixing</i>)	8.29%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
8 Corruption and bribery	8.29%	0	0	0	5	5	6	2	2	2
9 Regulatory or compliance breach	8.13%	5	10	11	14	14	15	13	14	15
10 Misappropriation of company funds	7.96%	9	19	20	6	6	7	5	5	6
11 Money laundering	7.13%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
12 Modern slavery/human trafficking	6.63%	5	10	11	5	5	5	3	3	4
Total		48	100	108	98	100	109	93	100	109

Above table (Table 9) summarizes the age wise common weighted no of issues related to each field. It is clear that there is no difference among age groups in their unethical Behaviour based on the significance of issues they involved.(Below 35=108,35-50=109,Above 50=109).All three age groups are highly involved in the issues related to internal finance.

Table 9 - Weighted no of issues experience category wise

Issue Category	Weight	No of Issues (Below 10)	Common sized no of issues (Below 10)	Weighted common size no of issues	No of Issues (10-20)	Normalized Issues (10-20)	Weighted common size no of issues	No of Issues (Above 20)	Normalized Issues (Above 20)	Weighted common size no of issues
1 Information theft, loss, or manipulation	9.45%	15	26	28	0	0	0	22	16	18
2 IP theft	9.29%	8	14	15	5	11	12	7	5	6
3 Theft of physical assets or stock	9.12%	2	3	4	5	11	12	12	9	10
4 Management conflict of interest	8.62%	4	7	7	9	20	22	17	13	14
5 Internal financial fraud	8.62%	5	9	9	6	13	14	12	9	10
6 Vendor, supplier, or procurement fraud	8.46%	10	17	19	7	16	17	33	24	26
7 Market collusion (e.g., price fixing)	8.29%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
8 Corruption and bribery	8.29%	9	16	17	5	11	12	9	7	7
9 Regulatory or compliance breach	8.13%	5	9	9	3	7	7	5	4	4
10 Misappropriation of company funds	7.96%	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	7	7
11 Money laundering	7.13%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
12 Modern slavery/human trafficking	6.63%	0	0	0	5	11	12	10	7	8
	100.00%	58	100	109	45	100	108	136	100	109

Above table summarizes results of experience wise common weighted no of issues related to each field. There is no different among experience level in their unethical behaviour based on the significance of issues they involved. Accounting professionals who are in their below 10 experience category are highly involved in issues related to vendor, supplier, or procurement field. (28) Professionals who are in 10-20 experienced category highly involved in issues related to management conflict of interest and above 20 professionals are involved highly in vendor, supplier, or procurement related issues.

Gender and ethical behaviour of accounting professionals

Table 10 represents the result of the t-test analysis which examine whether there is a significant difference between males and females in their ethical behaviour. The results of analysis suggest that there is no statistically significant difference between the responses of the two genders in their ethical behaviour. ($p > .05$)($p = .483$)

Table 10 – Independent samples test

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Accountant's behaviour	Equal variances assumed	2.227	.139	-.704	98	.483	-.073	.103	-.277	.132
	Equal variances not assumed			-.710	71.611	.480	-.073	.102	-.276	.131

Mean values of ethical conduct is equal between gender. It is clear that there is no association between ethical behaviour of accounting professionals and the gender.

Table 11- Group Statistics

Group Statistics					
	Accountant's gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Accountant's Behaviour	Male	65	1.58	.497	.062
	Female	35	1.66	.482	.081

Association between age and ethical behaviour of accounting professionals

The One-way ANOVA analysis done to examine the statistically significant differences among The three age groups (Below 35 years, 35-50 years, Above 50 years) selected and the results are presented in Table 11.

According to the results there is a significant difference among age groups in their ethical Behaviour. ($p < .05$)

Table 12- ANOVA

ANOVA					
Accountant's behaviour					
	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.497	2	1.249	5.688	.005
Within Groups	21.293	97	.220		
Total	23.790	99			

Descriptives								
Accountant's behaviour								
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Below 35	27	1.41	.501	.096	1.21	1.61	1	2
35-50	44	1.59	.497	.075	1.44	1.74	1	2
Above 50	29	1.83	.384	.071	1.68	1.97	1	2
Total	100	1.61	.490	.049	1.51	1.71	1	2

Above table indicates that mean values of unethical conduct has increased with age. It is clear that there is positive association between ethical behaviour and age of accounting professionals. When accounting professionals get matured in their age it is likely to behave unethically compared to young accounting professionals.

Table 13- Multiple Comparisons**Multiple Comparisons**

Dependent Variable: Accountant's behaviour

Tukey HSD

		Mean Difference (I- J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
(I) Accountant's age	(J) Accountant's age				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Below 35	35-50	-.184	.115	.250	-.46	.09
	Above 50	-.420*	.125	.003	-.72	-.12
35-50	Below 35	.184	.115	.250	-.09	.46
	Above 50	-.237	.112	.093	-.50	.03
Above 50	Below 35	.420*	.125	.003	.12	.72
	35-50	.237	.112	.093	-.03	.50

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

There was a statistically significant difference between age groups as determined by one-way ANOVA. ($F(2, 97) = 5.688, P=.005$) It can be concluded that a Turkey post hoc test reviewed that there is a statistically significant difference between age group of below 35 and above 50. There is no statistically significant difference between age group of 35-50 and above 50 and furthermore between below 35 and 35 to 50. (Table 13)

Association between experience level and ethical behaviour of accounting professionals

One-way ANOVA results obtained to examine the difference among experience level and the ethical behaviour of accounting professionals. (Below 10 years, 10-20 years, above 20 years) According to the results (Table 4) indicates that there are statistical differences among levels of experience and the ethical behaviour of accounting professionals. ($p<.05$)

Table 14 - ANOVA

Accountant's behaviour

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3.544	2	1.772	8.489	.000
Within Groups	20.246	97	.209		
Total	23.790	99			

Descriptives

Accountant's behaviour

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Below 10	29	1.52	.509	.094	1.32	1.71	1	2
10-20	30	1.40	.498	.091	1.21	1.59	1	2
Above 20	41	1.83	.381	.059	1.71	1.95	1	2
Total	100	1.61	.490	.049	1.51	1.71	1	2

According to the descriptive statistics accounting professionals who has completed more than 20 years in their carrier likely to behave unethically compared to other to categories. Further accounting professionals of 10-20 experienced category likely to behave ethically compared to the below 10 experienced category.

Table 15 – Multiple comparison*

Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: Accountant's behaviour

Tukey HSD

(I) Accountant's experience level	(J) Accountant's experience level	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Below 10	10-20	.117	.119	.588	-.17	.40
	Above 20	-.312 [*]	.111	.016	-.58	-.05
10-20	Below 10	-.117	.119	.588	-.40	.17
	Above 20	-.429 [*]	.110	.000	-.69	-.17
Above 20	Below 10	.312 [*]	.111	.016	.05	.58
	10-20	.429 [*]	.110	.000	.17	.69

There was a statistically significant difference between age groups as determine by one -way ANOVA. ($F(2, 97) = 8.489, P=.000$). It can be concluded that the turkey post hoc test reviewed, there is a statistically significant difference between experience category of below 10 and above 20 and also 10-20 experience category and above 20. There is no statistically significant difference between experience category of 10-20 and below 10. (Table 15)

4.2 Discussion

Key findings of the analysis performed and consistencies and inconsistencies with previous studies are discussed in this section. It is very important to examine and evaluate the association between ethical behaviour and gender, age and experience level of accounting professionals. It may add value to Sri Lankan accounting professionals as well as to firms that they worked for.

This study first describes the nature of demographic variables that the study specifically focused. Such as gender, age and experience level. Based on findings the categorization of age groups and experience level is reasonable and can be used for the further analysis. The reliability of the questionnaire was tested through cronbach alpha. Since the cronbach alpha is greater than 0.7 ($\alpha=0.73$) questionnaire was reliable to collect the data. Then data analyzed to identify whether there is a significant association between each factor and the ethical behaviour. Findings indicate that there is no significant difference found between male and female in their ethical behaviour. Previous studies done by Elsie C. Ameen, Daryl M. Guffey and Jeffry J. McMillan (May, 1996) derived the same results as above. Further it indicated that there is a significant difference among age groups in their ethical behaviour. Accounting professionals that belongs to above 50, are reflecting more unethical behaviour than young aged group. It can be concluded that there is a positive association between unethical behaviour of accounting professionals and the factor of age. It may be an adverse indicator on ethical perception on future accounting professionals. Further it indicates that more ethical training and controls should be implemented on accounting professionals who are in becoming matured.

It represents a significant difference between experience level and the ethical behaviour of accounting professionals. The results summarized that late career accounting professionals are more likely to behave unethically compared to other experienced categories. As per the literature review, many studies reflected that result such as studies of Terry W. Loe, Linda Ferrell and Phyllis Mansfield (June, 2000). Finally, It can be concluded that based on the significance of the issues involved by accounting professionals, there is no association between unethical behaviour of accounting professionals and the factors of gender, age and experience level.

5. Conclusion

Ethical behaviour of accounting professionals represents the value system or the cultural background of a particular society. It is very valuable to examine and evaluate the factors that

affect to that ethical behaviour. By controlling those factors can make the accounting profession more ethical.

Every people in the accounting profession do not follow the same ethical practices, also most engage in unethical practices. Therefore, it indicates that several factors can be direct the ethical conduct of the accounting professional bodies. Most people believe that experience, age of people, gender, culture, religion and followers are directly affecting to the ethical conducts of the professional bodies (Angelidis 2009).Based on the literature and review found that the studies focused to identify whether there is an association between ethical behaviour of accounting professionals and the factors of gender, age and experience level is an timely and appropriate effort in Sri Lankan context.

Findings of the study concluded that there is no association between ethical behaviour of accounting professionals and the gender. However there is a significant difference between ethical behaviour of accounting professionals based on their age .The results indicated that there is a positive association between unethical Behaviour of accounting professional and the factor of age. Further results indicated that there is a significant difference between experience level and the ethical behaviour of accounting professionals. Accounting professionals who completed 20 years in their carrier indicated unethical behaviour compared to other categories. There is no association between unethical behaviour of accounting professionals and the factors of gender, age and experience level based on the significance of the issues they have involved.

However, few limitations are found regarding the study. There is a question on trustworthiness of the data collected through auditors. The whole study is depending on a major assumption that auditors are independent and they provide accurate information on accounting professionals that relates to each audit engagement. Further it can be recommended to increment the sample size in future studies. It may generate more accurate findings compared to the current study. Furthermore, by expanding the independent variables such as qualifications of accounting professionals, education level may create a descriptive analysis on behaviour of accounting professionals than the current study.

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