Abstract

Ethics, as the basis of human life, is the observance of moral law and duties, which gives value to human life. It is a code composed of moral principles and values that direct the behavior of an individual or group towards respecting what is right or wrong. Ethical responsibilities should primarily be directed at us, and then toward others, by striving for ideas and values, through which life would be thoughtful and dignified for all. Ethics sets the standards of what is good or bad in leading and decision-making. It is present in all spheres of human life and can be found in different areas. From a professional point of view, ethics is present in the field of education and in this case we will pay attention to ethics in the social worker's profession and its challenges in modern society. Everyone who has opted for the profession of a social worker has ethical responsibilities, which will be discussed further in the paper. The principles and responsibilities of the worker in social work are written in a codex, which is a document with clearly defined values and ethical standards, which serve as a guide in this profession. They often appear in organizations and professions such as medicine, law, public accounting, social work, etc. The purpose of ethical codes is to ensure the appropriate behavior of the individual in one activity. Ethics always refers to decision-making; therefore its significance is emphasized, specifically in the field of social work.

Keywords: ethics, education, standards, principles, social work

1. Introduction

During the earliest years of the profession's history, social workers' attention was focused primarily on cultivating a set of values upon which the mission of the profession could be based. But, more recently, social workers' understanding of professional values and ethics has matured considerably. Social workers have developed comprehensive ethical standards to guide practitioners and decision-making frameworks that are useful when practitioners face difficult ethical dilemmas. Today's social workers also have a better understanding of the relationship between their ethical decisions and potential misconduct risks (Reame, 2013).

Ethics is an essential component of any profession, but it is of particular importance for professions related to health and human services. For students who have chosen social work for a future profession, the ethical code plays an important role. It is a set of guiding principles and by studying and following them, it can be of great help to students who are faced with situations of morally ambiguous issues (Achen, 2013). The code of ethics

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1 Specialized paper
determines ethical standards that guide and support all social workers in the real world of every day work. By establishing the interconnection of these values, principles and standards, the code of ethics provides social workers with a guide to appropriate professional directions. Key ethical topics, such as confidentiality and self-determination, acquire depth, meaning and power when they are connected to the core values and mission of the profession. The importance of ethics in social work practice extends far beyond mere compliance with requirements and the position of ethical attentiveness is integral to all aspects of professional activities. Social work is a mission-driven and value-based profession, and the code of ethics builds the bridge between them, in the function of social work (Committee, 2008).

2. Definition and mission of the social work

Social work can be defined as a profession that promotes social change, solves problems in interpersonal relationships and encourages the process of liberating people in the direction of improving well-being. Implementation of the human rights principles and social justice, theories of human behavior and social systems are fundamental to social work. Social work is based on respect for the inherent worth and dignity of all people, as well as, the rights that follow from this. Social workers should support and defend each person’s physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual integrity and well-being. They have a responsibility to promote social justice, in relation to society and in relation to the people with whom they work and to act in accordance with the ethical code current in their country (IFSW, 2012). Most often, social workers use the basic code of ethics in their profession (as an example: National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics), but many other social workers use more than one code of ethics or standard in their practice, depending on their specialty (Barsky, 2016).

The fundamental mission of the social work profession is to increase human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular consideration to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty. In fact, the definitive feature of social work is the profession's focus on the individual well-being in a social context and the well-being of the society. The basic point of social work is attention to the environmental forces that create, contribute to, and address problems in everyday life. Social workers promote social justice and social change with and on behalf of clients. The term "Clients" is equally applicable to individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities (NASW, 2017).

Social work education prepares students to be committed to social justice, to serving and strengthening individuals, families and the community. This is crucial for further development and spreading of social work knowledge and skills, as well as confirmation of professional values and ethics. In the mission of social work the following goals are included:

- Preparing competent and effective social workers who will be able, in their profession, to apply skills for professional and critical thinking, will contribute within an individual group, family and community strengthening.
- Preparing professionals who will affirm and use social work values and ethics.
- Preparing professionals who will understand the forms and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination that lead to racism, sexism, classism, poverty, religious oppression, and who will therefore advocate for social, economic, and cultural justice.
- Preparing professionals who will understand and respect social and cultural diversity at the local, national, and international level.
• Contributing to the development of social work knowledge by promoting student and faculty research in general, and, more particularly, research relevant to the social problems, related to national and international communities.
• Preparing professionals who will be ready to serve the citizens through the dissemination of professional knowledge and cooperative partnerships with schools, neighborhoods, communities and social services agencies (ASU).

In that direction, education for social work places emphasis on students' commitment to become professional social workers by developing professional values and ethics, judgment and skills that equip them for a life-long critical analysis of their practice, social services and the context of social, economic and political structures in society. Success will be unavoidable if more attention is paid to advanced research methods with focus on the individuals and families, groups, communities, and organizations and the practice of social policy. In the overall process of social work education students should have the opportunity to shape their practice through valuation the human diversity, working for human rights and against oppression and discrimination, preventing and alleviating the effects of violence and poverty, particularly in urban centers, and advocating for improved social policies and services, locally and globally (UCONN, 2011).

3. **Main points of the social work code of ethics**

Social workers encounter complex situations on a daily basis that involve ethical and legal issues. The social work profession serves many populations on different levels and whenever people are involved, ethical dilemmas are certain to arise. The code of ethics is a guide to a social worker's professional conduct designed to protect the client (LSY, 2015). The code of ethics is composed of thematic units, which emphasize the responsibility of the social worker towards clients, colleagues, employers, and the profession in general. The code envisions and focuses on the following objectives:

1. Determining the basic values upon which the social work profession is based.
2. Creating specific ethical standards for guiding the practice of social work and reflecting the core values.
3. Providing assistance to social workers in order to maintain professional considerations and commitments, in case of ethical insecurity.
4. Providing ethical standards with which this profession will be considered as responsible and committed.
5. Inclusion of new social workers in the mission of this profession, its values, ethical principles and standards.
6. Creating such standards in the profession, through which the unethical behavior of the social worker can be clearly assessed (Ingrao, 2015).

Every social worker who has committed to adhere to the social work code, it is necessary to cooperate, implement the code and respect the disciplinary decisions based on it. In the sequel, we will focus exclusively on the points of the sections, which are closely related to the professionalism of the social worker and his responsibility to his clients.

As each profession has standards for professionalism in the work, behavior and improvement of the worker, social work also requires the following from social workers:

• Maintaining high standards in personal behavior
• Setting the goal of maintaining a high degree of professionalism in their careers
• Providing services as the most important segment in social work
• Maintain a high level of professional integrity
• Engaging lifelong learning in order to maintain competence
• Practicing on the basis of scientific research and the use of evidence as information on the provision of best practice (Ingrao, 2015).

When we talk about the responsibility of social workers towards their clients, they should be guided by the following:

• Make clients their primary responsibility
• Foster maximum self-determination in clients
• Respect the privacy of clients and keep information that has been shared during the course of their duties confidential
• Charge fees for services that are honest and attentive to clients (Ingrao, 2015).

Contemporary teaching, with an emphasis on ethical education in social work, is performed and penetrated terrain. It includes a specific focus on the social work values, ethical dilemmas, decision making, risk management, etc. As we have already mentioned, for social work it is essential to create models that will be based on evidence and in such a way they will inform and support this important component of vocational education. This type of instruction for ethical responsibilities in the profession, which is practically done, is of great importance for the professional development and progress of the students. Only practical training can provide a rich opportunity for students to meet and begin to apply a wide range of ethical concepts, theories and decision-making protocols. It should also be noted that it is crucial that educators in social work have a solid command for current ethical standards, literature in this area, conceptual frameworks and risk management trends. What students will have the opportunity to gain as an experience in the field of ethics is likely to be among the most important and most useful lessons during their career (Reamer, 2012).

4. Key topics in the field of education for social work ethics

For the overall work and foreseen activities of the students, it is necessary to prepare a learning agreement, which sets out the main learning objectives and goals. Regarding ethics and its values, students should be placed in situations to identify ethical issues that are directly related and focused on the field of their interest.

In the process of students' professional development, they must actively participate in searching for opportunities for explaining relevant ethical issues in the field of social work. There are a number of prominent topics in ethics for social work, among which we can mention: client rights, confidentiality and privacy, informed consent, service delivery, boundary issues and dual relationships, conflicts of interest, documentation, defamation of character, supervision, training, consultation, referral, fraud, termination of services and many other topics (Reamer, 2012).

Social workers are sensitive to cultural and ethnic diversity and strive for ending discrimination, oppression, poverty and other forms of social injustice. These activities can be found in the form of direct practice, community organizing, supervision, consultation, administration, advocacy, social and political action, policy development and implementation, education and research and evaluation. Social workers also try to find a way to promote the responsiveness of organizations, communities, and other social institutions to individuals' needs and social problems. Professional ethics is at the core of social work. The profession has an obligation to articulate its basic values, ethical principles, and ethical
standards. The NASW Code of Ethics sets forth these values, principles and standards to guide social workers' conduct. The code is relevant to all social workers and social work students, regardless of their professional functions, the settings in which they work, or the populations they serve (NASW, 2017).

The mission of the social work profession represents a set of core values. These core values, embraced by social workers throughout the profession's history, are the foundation of social work's unique purpose and perspective:

- service
- social justice
- dignity and worth of the person
- importance of human relationships
- integrity
- competence.

This core of values reflects what is unique to the social work profession. Core values, and the principles that flow from them, must be balanced within the context and complexity of the human experience (NASW, 2017).

5. Social worker’s ethical principles

The ethical principles are based on social work's core values of service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity and competence. These principles represent the starting point for setting the ideals in the work of social workers.

- **Ethical principle of service**: the primary goal of the social worker's profession is helping people in need and addressing social problems. It involves their dedication and providing help to others, over their personal interest. Social workers rely on their knowledge, values, and skills to help people in need and to address social problems. They gain experience through volunteering, where they acquire their professional skills.

- **Ethical principle of social justice**: Social workers' focus primarily is set on the issues of poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and other forms of social injustice. These activities try to find a way to promote sensitivity to and knowledge about oppression and cultural and ethnic diversity. Therefore, social workers strive as much as possible to ensure access to needed information, services, and resources; equality of opportunity and meaningful participation in decision making for all people. Social workers track social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people.

- **Ethical principle of dignity and person's worth**: Social workers start from the slogan that every person should be treated in a caring manner and with respect, mindful of individual differences and cultural and ethnic diversity. They promote customer self-determination, respect their innate dignity and personality value. Aware of their dual responsibility (both towards clients and society), social workers work to increase the capacity of their clients, change them and meet their needs. Therefore they seek solutions to resolve conflicts between the interests of clients and society, in accordance with the values, ethical principles and standards of the profession.

- **Ethical principle of human relationships**: Social workers recognize the great importance of human relationships and understand that relationships between and among people are an important channel for change. They seek to strengthen relationships among people in
enthusiastic effort to promote, restore, maintain and enhance the well-being of individuals, families, social groups, organizations, and communities.

- **Ethical principle of integrity**: This principle refers to the confidentiality, honesty and promotion of ethical practice by social workers and the organizations to which they are related. They are aware of the mission of their profession, values, ethical principles and standards, as well as the practice that comes with them.

- **Ethical principle of competence**: Competence is one of the most important links in social work. The social worker should continually develop and progress in his area and to improve his professional expertise. The main core of the social worker's competence involves skillful, professional practice in an ethical way, using critical thinking and professional judgment, distinguishing between clients differences, developing and advancing with particular emphasis on human rights and socio-economic justice. (NASW, 2017).

6. **Social worker’s ethical responsibilities**

Awareness of ethical values is an indispensable part of the professional practice of every social worker, because it is the way to be able to act ethically in the function of offering quality customer service. The basis for ethical development is found in the “Ethics for Social Work- Principles and Standards”, which is based on the existence of the two key documents, the International Declaration on Ethical Principles of Social Work and the International Standards for Social Workers. These documents set out the basic ethical principles and standards of the social work profession, recommendations for certain procedures with ethical dilemmas, as well as the attitude of the social worker with the clients, colleagues and others in this field. (KBL781, 2011) Some of the standards are enforceable guidelines for professional direction and some are inspirational. The extent to which each standard is applicable is a situation of professional judgment to be practice by those responsible for reviewing supposed violations of ethical standards (NASW, 2017).

Ethical standards are necessary and relevant to the professional activities of all social workers. They actually refer to their responsibilities in the profession. Therefore, the following types of responsibility can be distinguished.

1. social workers’ ethical responsibilities to clients,
2. social workers’ ethical responsibilities to colleagues,
3. social workers’ ethical responsibilities in practice settings,
4. social workers’ ethical responsibilities as professionals,
5. social workers’ ethical responsibilities to the social work profession, and
6. social workers’ ethical responsibilities to the broader society (NASW, 2017).

7. **Essential educational guidelines for ethics in the field of social work**

Ethics content in field instruction is a vital component of social work education. Ethical standards and knowledge have expanded significantly in recent years. There is a wide range of ethical content that should be included in the practice of students, and a number of topics to be pointed out. The key ethics content addresses core social work values, students’ personal and professional values, ethical dilemmas in field placements and social work practice, ethical decision-making frameworks and strategies to manage ethics risks. The sense of practice in social work education is a vital component in education, which begins its formal training programs towards the end of the 19th century. Due to the emphasis of this process in education and teaching, today, ethical values in social work significantly mature.
What was once a mere study for the values of social work students, in a tight form, slowly but surely develops into a more ambitious, more comprehensive examination of delaying the challenges in the profession. Nowadays, modern education and teaching expects professors/instructors and students to implement and integrate very important content related to ethics and its values, in practical work, in seminars, trainings, etc.

Ethical values have always been part and parcel of social work education and field instruction. But, the aims and content of ethics education in social work have changed significantly throughout the profession’s history. In the early 20th century, at the time of the beginnings of the development of social work, social literature was primarily focused on the nature of the values of social work, as well as the moral goals of the profession. But it was an incentive for scientists in social work, practitioners and field instructors to face a number of issues related to the basic values of the profession, their clarification, and the relationship between the values of students and practitioners in relation to values with the profession (Reamer, Essential Ethics Education in Social Work Field, 2012). When it comes to practical teaching in the study of ethics in social work, the focus should be put on the four basic topics: social work values, ethical dilemmas in social work, ethical decision making and ethics risk management.

- Social work values

Social workers are a significant factor in the society, because they contribute greatly to improving the quality of life of the individual and the society as a whole. Their work can be directed at a macro level (work for an organization that helps undeveloped countries and areas) or at a micro level (individual counseling). Regardless of the level of work, social workers are expected to abide by a professional code of ethics, which includes the core values of this profession (Miller, 2018). Of all professions, social work is one of the most important and occupies a central place in the basic set of values, which are the main factor for the successful realization of the mission of this profession, as well as the priorities of those who practice it (Reamer, Essential Ethics Education in Social Work Field, 2012). In the list of social workers’ values, the following can be stated as the most important:

- **Service to humanity**, as the main value, from which further arise the rest. Social workers consider that providing services to others is far more important than their own interests, and their needs are priority.

- **Social justice**, as a key value, due to which many social workers decide to enter this profession, because they will thus be able to help poor, disadvantaged, vulnerable categories, homeless people, drug or alcohol users, or victims of violence. A social worker, in the true sense of the word, becomes one who has an innate desire to improve the quality of people’s life who are unhappy, unfulfilled, injured, disadvantaged or lacking will and motive to advocate for themselves.

- **Human dignity and value** are treated by the social worker as something inherent in man, regardless of his background or beliefs. This involves respecting the differences between personal convictions and those of customers in terms of ethnic and cultural differences.

- **Integrity** is an integral component in the social worker’s profession and refers to his honest, responsible and ethical work at any time. Through its reliability and confidentiality to the client, it acts with integrity and promotes it to other colleagues and professionals in the field.

- **Competence** as a value refers to continuous advocacy and work in the field of social work, in order to improve skills and experience in it. This means a steady aspiration to improve knowledge, as well as a significant contribution to the profession. This can be achieved in
The ethical dilemma is a situation in which a choice of two offered but undesirable alternatives should be made. Dilemmas may arise out of various sources of behavior or attitude, failure of personal character, conflict of personal values etc. (Fernando, 2012). Social work is such a kind of profession that often encounters situations in which the core values of the profession are in conflict and this involves ethical dilemmas. Because of facing ethical dilemmas in practice, social work programs, in their training with students, incorporate professional ethics and values in order to help students gain experience in such situations (Allen, 2012). Students in social work, during their practice, should be placed in a situation when they need to decide which values or responsibilities have an advantage. The main purpose of this is to enable students to apply ethical principles for social work, to participate in the process of ethical decision-making, to be able to recognize and manage personal values and to bear with ambiguity in solving ethical conflicts. Their acquaintance with the code of ethics is very important, which helps in the study of various models of ethical decision-making. Students still do not have the routine to recognize the ethical dilemma, but the first step in its resolution is its proper identification.

- Ethical decision-making

Ethical decision-making is an everyday practice of social workers who, during their work, often face ethical dilemmas, which in turn require careful thinking as well as critical thinking. It refers to the choice between two actions, based on conflicting professional values, which can be morally accurate and professionally based. (Linzer, 1999).

Resolving ethical dilemmas in social work practice. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

The framework for ethical decision making includes the following segments:

1. Identification of substantive ethical issues, related to the values and duties that are in conflict
2. Identification of individuals, groups and organizations that may be affected by the decision
3. Identification of all possible activities and participants with all possible benefits and risks in them
4. Examining the reasons for the benefit, but also the opposite in the action, taking into account ethical theories, principles, codes, legal principles, as well as the principles of social work and personal values.
5. Consultations with experts (field instructors, administrators, ethics experts, etc.)
6. Deciding and documenting the same process

Social work education, which includes practical classes, focuses on decision-making strategies that students can use when faced with ethical judgments (Mattison, 2000). Therefore, in the study and practice in this field, it is essential to include the application of protocols for ethical decision-making. It involves a series of steps that students need to follow, in cases where they try to solve issues with ethical dilemmas. The focus of these steps is on conflicting values, ethical duties, members involved in the case, possible directions of action, ethical theories, principles and guidelines, ethical codes and legal guidelines,
principles of social work, consultations with field experts, monitoring, evaluating and documenting decisions (Reamer, Essential Ethics Education in Social Work Field, 2012). One of the important moments in social work is the encouragement of social workers to use ethical decision-making models because this promotes critical thinking and reflection. Decision-making models, in fact, are an accumulation of numerous aspects of models that are included in the literature and are based on the best practice (Committee N. P., 2015).

- Ethics risk management

Social work is such a kind of profession in which the possibility of risks is always present. It often happens to social workers when they provide services to individuals, couples, families, small or larger groups, communities or organizations. Risks usually arise when there is circumvention and non-compliance with ethical standards, laws or regulations in the profession. On the other hand, risks may arise when it comes to customer rights, confidentiality, privileged communication, double reliance, conflict of interest, consultations, risk interventions, termination of service provision, etc. For these reasons, such situations need to be treated very carefully and professionally. Risks that are skillfully managed can protect clients, third parties, social workers and their employers. Conversely, poorly managed risks can lead to very bad situations that would harm the mentioned parties. This can lead to an unpleasant situation, because those who believe that are trapped or harmed, in any way by social workers, can file lawsuits or complaints with state licensing boards or professional associations (Reamer, Risk Management in Social Work, 2014).

This is a very important reading for students, future social workers, dealing with the risks that naturally and undoubtedly come in package with this profession. They should be aware of the consequences of these risks in terms of making ethical decisions and carrying out activities in order to avoid the possibility of professional malpractice. To avoid the risk or minimize it for all involved parties (clients, students, instructors and field agencies), social work programs and field agencies need to compared, and at the same time, to coordinate their policies and guidelines, which are related to ethics, in order to provide consistency (Reamer, Essential Ethics Education in Social Work Field, 2012).

Conclusion

Starting from the fact that social work is a profession dedicated to improving the health and social well-being of individuals, couples, families and communities, the ethical responsibilities of social workers are an essential component of their practice. In other words, responsible, competent, professional and ethically built social workers who use skills, knowledge and professional legal decisions in order to be sure that they offer quality services to their clients. The foundation of the social work is the code of ethics, which sets the values and principles that actually form the common ethical framework (Committee N. P., 2015).

Ethical education and contemporary teaching include the explicit focus on the values of this profession, ethical dilemmas, ethical decision-making and risk management. The present concept of ethics relies on rich conceptual models that have been developed since the 1980s and from relevant ethical theories. It is necessary for the further development of ethical education, educators and scientists to create evidence-based models that will support and constantly strengthen this this essential component in vocational education. Teaching ethical responsibilities should always be present within the field teaching, which is vital for gaining experience in student work. Only in this way students will have a great opportunity to find
themselves in a situation to apply ethical concepts, theories and decision-making. The advantage is that educators in the field of social work have a solid knowledge and access to information on current ethical standards, ethical literature, conceptual frameworks and risk management trends. What students acquire during their practice and field work from a social worker's profession will be one of the most important lessons during their career.

Bibliography


