ETHICAL PRINCIPLES OF SOCIAL SERVICE

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.71404/NP.2025.1.21

Social service is a complex of measures aimed at improving the living standards of individuals who have special needs for social protection and their integration into society. The main driving force of social service is considered to be social workers, who must adhere to certain ethical rules and principles in their activities. This article explains the essence of these ethical rules and justifies the need to adhere to them.

Keywords: social service, principle, ethics, social worker, confidentiality

The institution of social service occupies a special place in the system of social security law in terms of its specificity and importance. In theory, social service is understood in both a broad and narrow sense. In a narrow sense, social service is understood as the provision of social and household services to certain categories of citizens specified in the law - assistance for the development of the economy, provision of free food, placement in social protection institutions, etc. In a broad sense, social service is understood as the realization of social security rights, which includes all types of social security other than cash payments.

In other words, social service includes measures taken, in accordance with the procedure established by law, to protect the rights of relatively weak and defenseless members of society - the elderly, minors, women, people in special need of social protection, the disabled, children deprived of parental care, etc., and to ensure their decent standard of living on an equal basis with other people (13, p. 63).

The implementation of social services is guided by several ethical principles, and the efficiency and effectiveness of social services depend significantly on adherence to these principles. The ethical principles of social service are foundational guidelines that govern the practice and behavior of social workers and other professionals in the field. These principles ensure that the services provided are carried out with integrity, respect, and fairness, while prioritizing the dignity and well-being of individuals and communities. The key ethical principles include:

1. **Respect for human dignity and worth** - every individual is entitled to be treated with respect, regardless of their background, culture, socioeconomic status, or personal circumstances. Social workers must value the inherent worth and dignity of every person.

Respect for human dignity and worth principle is a core ethical value in social service practice, emphasizing that every individual should be treated with inherent respect, regardless of their background, circumstances, or challenges. This principle acknowledges that all human beings have intrinsic value and deserve to be treated with fairness, kindness, and consideration (3, p. 40).

First,every person, regardless of their social, economic, cultural, or personal background, has inherent worth and dignity. This means social service professionals should avoid discrimination and judgment, offering services based on the individual's humanity, not on stereotypes or biases.

Also, social workers must ensure that their actions do not discriminate based on factors such as race, gender, age, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status. Everyone deserves access to the services and opportunities that support their well-being.

However, practicing empathy means understanding and sharing the feelings of others, while compassion involves a desire to alleviate their suffering. Social workers should treat clients with understanding and a genuine willingness to help, acknowledging their emotions and experiences.

Also, while offering support and guidance, social service professionals must respect individuals' right to make their own choices and decisions. This involves empowering clients to exercise self-determination, make informed decisions, and maintain control over their lives.

In addition to the above, respecting human dignity also involves recognizing and valuing cultural differences. Social workers should be aware of the diverse backgrounds of those they serve and be open to learning about, understanding, and respecting these differences in their approach.

As a result, respect for human dignity and worth is essential to ensure that social services are delivered in a manner that affirms each person's value and humanity. It lays the foundation for creating an environment where clients feel empowered, valued, and supported in their journey toward well-being.

2. Service to humanity - the primary goal of social service is to serve the well-being of individuals and communities. Social workers are committed to helping people overcome challenges and achieve better life outcomes. This principle is a foundational ethical value in social service, emphasizing that the primary purpose of social work and social services is to serve the well-being and dignity of individuals, families, and communities.

At its core, this principle underscores the idea that social service professionals exist to serve others. Whether individuals are struggling with poverty, mental health issues, abuse, or other challenges, the primary goal of social service is to offer assistance that will improve their quality of life(10, p. 36). The principle promotes selfless dedication to others' well-being. Social workers and service providers are expected to put the needs of those they serve ahead of their personal interests or gain, demonstrating a deep sense of altruism and compassion in their work.

Practicing empathy involves understanding and sharing the feelings of others, while compassion involves a genuine desire to alleviate their suffering. Service to humanity encourages social workers to approach their clients with both empathy and compassion, recognizing the unique struggles they face and offering the necessary support(9). This principle also emphasizes the need to advocate for those who are vulnerable, marginalized, or oppressed. Social workers often act as advocates, ensuring that these individuals or groups have access to the services and resources they need to thrive, and that their voices are heard in the larger societal or political conversation.

Social service professionals uphold and defend human rights, ensuring that everyone, regardless of their background, has the right to live with dignity, respect, and the opportunity for a better life. This includes advocating for equal treatment, freedom from discrimination, and access to basic needs. Social workers should not only help but also help people develop the skills, knowledge, and confidence they need to overcome challenges on their own. This empowers individuals and fosters long-term positive change (11, p. 30).

Social service is not just about responding to immediate needs but also about creating systemic change. Service to humanity involves working to improve societal structures, policies, and systems that contribute to inequality or injustice, aiming for broader social transformation to benefit all. Effective service to humanity requires addressing a range of physical, emotional, social, and psychological. Social workers often provide holistic support that recognizes the interconnectedness of different aspects of a person's life.

3. Integrity and honesty - social workers must act with integrity, truthfulness, and honesty in all professional interactions. They should be transparent in their decisions, actions, and communications, maintaining professional and personal accountability. The integrity and honesty principle are a core ethical value in social

service, asserts that social service professionals must act with transparency, truthfulness, and moral uprightness in all their interactions and decisions. It requires social workers to uphold ethical conduct and maintain trust by being truthful, transparent, and consistent in their professional practice.

Integrity requires social workers to be accountable for their decisions and actions. When mistakes are made, they must take responsibility, acknowledge errors, and make efforts to correct them.It involves following the ethical codes and standards set by professional organizations, such as the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) or the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW). Professionals must uphold these ethical guidelines even when faced with difficult situations or pressure to act unethically (8).

Being honest and transparent with clients also means respecting their confidentiality. Social workers must clearly communicate the limits of confidentiality, especially in cases where disclosure may be required by law (e.g., to prevent harm to the client or others) (7). Maintaining confidentiality builds trust and upholds the dignity of clients. Social workers must avoid making false statements, exaggerating facts, or hiding relevant information. Deceptive practices undermine trust and can harm clients and communities. Honesty means providing clients with the full scope of information necessary to make informed decisions about their lives

Integrity involves being consistent in one's behavior, decisions, and professional conduct. Social workers must ensure that their actions align with their values and commitments, both personally and professionally. Clients and colleagues should be able to rely on social workers to act in a manner that is fair, respectful, and consistent with ethical standards. Honesty also extends to maintaining appropriate professional boundaries. Social workers should avoid any behavior or relationships that could undermine their professional integrity, such as entering dual relationships or exploiting clients for personal gain.

Social workers must demonstrate integrity by continually striving to improve their knowledge and skills. This includes seeking supervision, attending training, and engaging in ongoing professional development to ensure they are equipped to provide the best service to clients. Integrity and honesty are essential for establishing and maintaining trust between social workers and their clients, colleagues, and communities. Without trust, effective social service cannot take place (11, p. 30).

Maintaining high standards of integrity and honesty upholds the reputation of the profession, ensuring that social workers are viewed as reliable, trustworthy, and competent in their field. A social worker must be honest when explaining a client's case to them, providing them with a realistic understanding of what help can be offered and what challenges they may face.

In case notes, reports, or when giving testimony, social workers should report the facts truthfully and accurately, avoiding embellishment or omission of important details. When seeking supervision, social workers should be honest about challenges they are facing in their practice and any difficulties with clients, ensuring they get the appropriate guidance. A social worker should disclose any potential conflicts of interest that could affect their ability to provide impartial service, ensuring transparency in all interactions.

4. Confidentiality and privacy - social workers have an ethical obligation to maintain the confidentiality of the information shared by clients, unless there are legal or ethical reasons to disclose it (e.g., preventing harm).This principle is a core ethical value in social service, accentuating the importance of safeguarding clients' personal information and respecting their right to privacy. This principle ensures that sensitive information shared between clients and social workers remains protected, and that clients can trust professionals with their personal details without fear of unauthorized disclosure.

Social workers have an ethical duty to protect the confidentiality of information shared by clients. This includes any details about a client's life, history, health, family, or circumstances, which should not be disclosed without the client's consent, unless required by law or ethical obligations (e.g., in situations where there is a risk of harm). Clients have the right to control the information they share and decide who has access to it. Social workers should obtain in-

formed consent before sharing any personal information, ensuring that clients are fully aware of what information might be disclosed and to whom (12).

Confidential information should only be shared with those who are directly involved in the client's care or services, and only when necessary. Social workers should avoid discussing clients' personal details in public or casual settings, to prevent unauthorized access to private information.

While confidentiality is essential, there are certain legal or ethical situations where it may be necessary to disclose information without the client's consent. For example, if there is an imminent risk of harm to the client or others (such as cases of abuse or suicidal ideation), the social worker may be required to break confidentiality to protect safety. In these cases, the social worker should inform the client as soon as possible about the disclosure.

Social workers must ensure that all client records, whether physical or digital - are securely stored and protected from unauthorized access. Proper safeguards should be set to prevent leaks, theft, or unauthorized review of confidential information.

Clients have the right to access the information held about them, and social workers should facilitate this access, providing copies or reviewing records with the client if they request it, in accordance with legal and organizational guidelines.Social workers should be trained in the importance of confidentiality, the specific laws and regulations that apply to client privacy, and the proper handling of sensitive information. This ensures that all professionals involved understand their ethical and legal obligations (6, p. 119).

Maintaining confidentiality helps build trust between social workers and their clients. When clients feel that their personal information will be kept safe, they are more likely to be open and honest, leading to more effective services. Protecting privacy helps clients maintain control over their personal information, empowering them to make decisions about what they share and with whom.

Confidentiality is not just an ethical duty; it is also a legal requirement in many cases, such as in healthcare, education, and social service settings. Violating confidentiality can result in legal consequences for the professional or organization involved. Safeguarding confidential information protects clients from potential harm that could result from unauthorized disclosure, such as stigmatization, discrimination, or psychological distress.

A social worker explains to a client that their personal information will remain confidential, except in specific circumstances, and obtains the client's consent before sharing any information with outside parties. When documenting a client's case or interactions, a social worker ensures that all written records are kept private and secure, limiting access to authorized personnel only. When discussing a client's case in supervision or with colleagues, the social worker ensures that personal information is shared only when necessary and is done in a manner that maintains the client's privacy.

5. Competence - social workers must ensure they are knowledgeable, skilled, and competent in their practice. They should engage in ongoing professional development, training, and supervision to provide the best possible service. This principle in social service featuresthat professionals must possess the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities to effectively serve their clients. It also requires social workers to continuously improve their expertise, stay updated on best practices, and recognize the limits of their own abilities. Competence ensures that clients receive high-quality, ethical, and effective support tailored to their needs.

Social workers must have the required education, training, and practical skills to perform their duties effectively. This includes a thorough understanding of theories, methods, policies, and practices relevant to their field, as well as the ability to apply them appropriately in real-world situations.

Competence is not static; it requires ongoing education and professional development. Social workers should stay updated on advancements in the field, such as new research findings, policies, techniques, and technologies, to ensure their practices remain effective and relevant. Social workers should recognize when they lack the expertise or capacity to handle a particular case and should seek supervision,

consultation, or refer clients to other qualified professionals when necessary (5, p. 207).

It includes applying ethical standards to all professional activities. Social workers should ensure that their knowledge and skills are used responsibly and in ways that prioritize the best interests of their clients. In some cases, social workers may work with specific populations (e.g., children, older adults, refugees, individuals with disabilities). Competence requires gaining specialized training and experience to understand the unique needs and challenges of these groups.

Competence includes being aware of and sensitive to cultural differences. Social workers must respect and understand the cultural, social, and religious backgrounds of their clients and adapt their practices to meet these diverse needs in a respectful and effective manner. Requires integrating research and evidence-based methods into practice(1, p. 97). Social workers should rely on proven techniques and approaches that are supported by empirical data to provide the best outcomes for clients. This includes being open to feedback, monitoring their performance, and adjusting to improve their effectiveness.

Competence ensures that clients receive appropriate and effective support that addresses their needs, reduces harm, and promotes positive outcomes. Competent professionals build trust with clients, colleagues, and the public. Operating within the bounds of competence is an ethical duty. Providing services without adequate knowledge or training can harm clients and undermine the integrity of the profession. It upholds the standards and reputation of the social service field, ensuring consistency and quality across the profession.

6. Accountability - social workers are responsible for their actions and decisions. They must be willing to account for their professional conduct and adhere to ethical codes and organizational policies, ensuring that their work aligns with the best interests of clients and the broader community. The accountability principle in social service emphasizes that professionals must take full responsibility for their actions, decisions, and the outcomes of their work. It ensures transparency, trustworthiness, and adherence to ethical and professional standards, which are essential for maintaining credibility and trust between social workers, clients, colleagues, and society.

Accountability requires strict compliance with the ethical guidelines established by professional bodies, such as the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics. Social workers must act in ways that reflect the values and principles of the profession. They should explain their reasoning to clients, colleagues, and stakeholders when appropriate and ensure that their work is conducted with transparency.

Accountability involves regularly assessing one's work and the outcomes of interventions to ensure they are effective and meet professional standards. If a method or decision proves ineffective, social workers are responsible for making the necessary adjustments. Social workers must ensure that their records are clear, complete, and available for review by authorized individuals or entities when required. It involves being receptive to guidance, supervision, and constructive criticism. Social workers should actively seek feedback from supervisors and colleagues to improve their practice and address any areas of concern.

A key component of accountability is the willingness to admit and take responsibility for mistakes. Social workers must promptly address errors, correct them where possible, and take steps to prevent their recurrence. Social workers must follow all applicable laws, organizational policies, and regulations governing their practice. Accountability extends beyond individual clients to include responsibility for advocating for systemic change and addressing broader social issues. They must ensure their actions align with the goal of promoting social justice and equity.

Accountability fosters trust between social workers and their clients, colleagues, and the public. When professionals take responsibility for their actions, they demonstrate integrity and reliability. It encourages continuous evaluation and improvement of services, leading to better outcomes for clients and communities. Being accountable ensures that social workers prioritize the well-being of their clients and communities, avoiding harm and advocating for their rights. Accountability upholds the

reputation and credibility of the social service profession, ensuring that practitioners are seen as trustworthy and competent (2, p. 55).

7. Cultural competence and diversity - social workers must be culturally competent, recognizing and respecting the diverse backgrounds, values, and experiences of clients. They should adapt their practice to meet the unique needs of individuals and communities from different cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. This principle in social service emphasizes the importance of recognizing, understanding, and valuing the diverse cultural backgrounds, identities, and experiences of individuals and communities. This principle ensures that social workers provide services that are respectful, inclusive, and tailored to the unique needs of clients from various cultural, racial, ethnic, gender, socioeconomic, and other diverse backgrounds.

Social workers must have a deep understanding of how cultural differences - such as beliefs, values, customs, and traditions - affect individuals' lives, behaviors, and experiences. They should respect and affirm all aspects of a client's identity, including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status, disability, age, and more. They must avoid imposing their own values or biases on clients. Also, they are ethically obligated to confront and challenge discrimination, prejudice, and systemic inequality. This involves advocating for equity and inclusion while addressing the barriers that marginalized groups face (4, p. 123).

Achieving cultural competence is a continuous process that requires social workers to engage in self-reflection, seek education on cultural issues, and stay informed about social and cultural dynamics. They must build relationships with clients and communities that are based on mutual respect and collaboration. They should actively involve clients in decision-making processes and empower them to express their needs and perspectives.

Beyond individual practice, social workers should advocate for policies, programs, and practices that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion at systemic levels. They should ensure that clients have access to services in their preferred language, using interpreters or translated materials, when necessary, to eliminate communication barriers.

Respecting and valuing diversity helps social workers build trust with clients, as clients feel understood, respected, and accepted for who they are. Tailoring interventions to clients' cultural contexts increase the effectiveness of social work, as clients are more likely to engage with and benefit from services that align with their beliefs and values. Cultural competence helps social workers address systemic inequality and advocate for marginalized groups, contributing to a fairer and more equitable society.

8. Collaboration and partnership - social workers are encouraged to work collaboratively with clients, colleagues, other professionals, and community organizations. Building partnerships and working in teams enhances the effectiveness of services and the outcomes for clients. This principle in social service emphasizes working together with clients, colleagues, organizations, and communities to achieve shared goals. It recognizes that social issues are complex and often require collective effort, mutual respect, and shared expertise to address them effectively. This principle is rooted in the belief that partnerships foster empowerment, inclusivity, and sustainable solutions.

Social workers collaborate with clients as active partners in the decision-making process. This involves recognizing the client's expertise in their own life and empowering them to contribute to planning and implementing solutions. The partnership fosters trust and accountability, ensuring that interventions align with the client's values, preferences, and goals. They often work with professionals from other fields (e.g., healthcare, education, law enforcement) to address multifaceted issues.

Partnerships with government agencies, non-profits, and private organizations expand resources and create networks to provide more comprehensive services to clients. Organizations can share funding, expertise, and tools to address social issues more effectively. Collaboration requires mutual respect, clear communication, and a shared commitment to achieving common objectives. It also involves acknowledging and valuing the contributions of all parties, including clients, colleagues, and other stakeholders. Social workers often form

alliances with advocacy groups and coalitions to address systemic issues and promote social justice. These partnerships amplify voices, mobilize resources, and create a broader impact.

Adherence to these principles ultimately serves the efficiency and effectiveness of social services. In order to properly organize their work and provide social services that are of higher quality and aimed at citizen satisfaction, social workers must strictly adhere to the ethical principles listed above. At the same time, the relevant state authorities should regularly focus on involving social workers in advanced training courses or training.

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