FACTORS INFLUENCING AN ETHICAL – DECISION MAKING IN SOCIAL WORKER`S PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT
This study illustrates the results of an empirical study that comprises an analysis and remarks about sixteen case studies of social workers` practices in Bulgaria. The examined contingent is divided in five major groups. Presented case studies are incorporated by the common dilemma of the choice between ethical attitudes and laws which faces the social worker. Authors express their adherence to the postmodern paradigm in the analysis of presented problems.

Key words: Social work, Virtues, Ethical dilemmas

INTRODUCTION
The International Federation of Social Workers defines social work as a profession promoting social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environment (1). From a broader perspective, social work is identified by its role as a remedy for socially excluded individuals and groups. This is most clearly seen in the position of the social worker in the institutional structure of society. Social work practice and the process of its implementation are typical social intermediary between, on the one hand, people in condition of scarcity of vital and social resources, and on the other hand, social institutions regulating civil societies and generally accepted moral norms.

Combination of the mediating role of the social worker with the possibility of protection socially vulnerable individuals and groups implies attention and understanding of several circumstances:

- The quality and the final outcome of the social work are determined by the moral and attitudes of the workers towards the fulfillment of their professional duty.
- Low-recognized merits and insufficient payment lead to several issues from which the most important is the lack of sufficient qualification level of the personnel in terms of moral training for social work.
- The focus is on the interdisciplinary training of the social worker. The need to combine both specialized knowledge in various fields of science and acquiring social skills is generally recognized. (2)

Social work practice shows that when social workers face with several issues, they base their behavior on ethical principles. The complexity and importance of ethical dilemmas as an important step in learning how to manage them are recognized. There are also cases in which, for various reasons, social workers do not admit the occurred ethical dilemmas in their practice. Their answers in those kind of situations are known: they either know the "right" answers or the discussion of this sort of problems does not make sense. The existence of such situation necessitates a special consideration and analysis of the issues related to both professional and personal factors which determine the selection
The postmodern theoretical model to which we stick in this study emphasizes the idea that there must be an equality between ethics and morality in social work. Personal and professional values of social workers are an integral part of the decision-making process.

**Objective:**
The aim of the empirical research is to identify factors determining ethical decision making in social work practice.

**Tasks:**
1. To rationalize the norms which regulate the behavior of the social worker
2. To define the role of social worker’s personality traits, determining his/her solutions.

Methods and results: In the empirical research 16 cases from the practice of social workers in Bulgaria are explored and described. The case studies provide real-life situations in the work of the experts of the "Social Assistance" Directorates in several cities in southern Bulgaria. The contingent studied is diverse but involves mainly poor families. The cases can be conditionally divided into 5 major groups that cover the main issues faced by social workers in the course of their work, namely child abuse, problems with adoptions, cases related to applications for welfare subsidies, divorces, cohabitation of adults with minors.

Results: In this study of 16 cases in the social sphere is observed the following percentage distribution of problems (Figure 1).
1. Cases of child abuse: The major problem (90% ) in the cases of child abuse is related to low living standards of families and alcohol abuse. In a small percentage (10% ) the problem is due to poor communication between institutions and irresponsibility of relatives and neighbors.

2. Problems with adoptions: The major problem in the cases of adoptions is the adaptation of the children and the parents. Financial problems are the basis of most of the cases, together with the unwieldy social system that do not contributes in order to help and support the adoption process.

3. Cases of applications for welfare subsidies: The main problem in the case of welfare subsidies applications is rooted in the moral duty of social workers who hold in their hands the decision whether to invoke the law or follow the morality. The dilemma for the social workers in these cases is whether to follow its moral principles, thus to be beneficial to the client or to act according to the law.

4. Cases of divorce: a major problem in divorce cases is the issue of child custody and division of property. In this case the problem is rooted in the mismatch of parents’ interests, their lifestyles and the lack of dialogue.

5. Problems with illegal cohabitation: The main problem in the cases of cohabitation are cultural differences, poor communication between institutions and inadequate penalties. The problem deepens due to purely administrative and formal circumstances, which aggravate the criminal or assisting procedures.

In the examined 16 case studies, we observed situations in which social workers make decisions based on their values and morality, and thus in one way or another violate or circumvent the law. According to the statistics 20% of social workers rely on morality, and 80 out of 100 act according to the law. In 4 of the 16 cases studied, social workers based their decisions on morals, not on the law. In these cases, considering the difficult way of life of their clients social workers tend to circumvent the law and act according to their own morals and values. In many cases there are minor breaches of the law, but though them social workers can help to their clients in need. In some cases if the social worker follows strictly the law, he or she would hurt more than one person, which causes conflicts with the moral norms of the specialist.

CONCLUSION

As a result of the cases studied in the field of social work, we can define some basic conclusions. Factors determining the decision making in social work practice are the law, morality and personality traits of each social worker. In this respect, norms that shape the behavior of the professionals can be spit in two large groups - moral and legal.

Morality and law in the work of the social worker are factors with equal status and importance. This is because the personality traits of the social worker determine his or her decisions. Ethical decision is made by the team of specialists, but the individual traits of each social worker determine his or her responsibility for decision making in social work. When making ethical decisions in various situations,
the behavior and performance of the social worker are influenced by his or her personality traits.

Due to the complexity of the social work, legal and moral responsibility of the social worker in the decision making, and the risks associated with it, we consider that it is important the "ethics of social work" to find a larger and more comprehensive place in university education. The purpose of this education is to encourage critical thinking and reflexivity of future social workers, to display specific ethical issues in social work, to indicate ways and models how to deal with those problems. With this knowledge, social workers will gain more confidence in their ability to justify their own decisions and will have more clarity related to the opportunities to defend their clients. (5)

REFERENCES