ETHICAL CHALLENGES IN SOCIAL WORK

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ABSTRACT: *This paper aims to bring to attention professional ethical issues in the practice of social workers, exploring fundamental values, codes of ethics, ethical challenges, in the literature. The values and ethics of social assistance are an integral part of the practice of social assistance and higher education. An important role in the social worker profession is played by moral values, such as equity, respect for human dignity, respect for human self-determination, social justice, human solidarity, respect and care for others.*

Keywords: *professional ethics; ethical dilemmas; professional values; code of ethics;*

Introduction

Professional ethics is the way in which people should be and behave in professional activity, according to "ethical values", that is solid beliefs about what is considered worthy, correct, valuable for human well-being.

Codes of ethics are written documents that cover the main object of the profession, its values and ethical principles, including rules or standards of practice, in order to guide professionals in their practical work.

The practice of social assistance reveals the need to adhere to basic ethical principles in assisting vulnerable social groups. A first pillar of this approach is respect for human rights, focusing the social worker on human needs, skills and abilities of clients, in order to create connections between people, sharing and valuing experiences and expressing emotions, in a non-discriminatory way and encouraging participation.

The entire practical activity carried out by social workers is guided by fundamental values that include four basic categories: values of the company in which the social worker works, professional values according to the Code of Ethics of social workers, personal values of the social worker and client values.

The mission of the social worker profession is to improve human well-being and contribute to meeting the basic human needs of all people, with a particular focus on the needs and empowerment of vulnerable people living in poverty.

Professional ethics according to the National Association of Social Workers

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2017), founded in 1955, is the largest organization of members of professional social workers in the world that publishes the Code of Ethics, organized in four sections. The first section, "Preamble", summarizes the mission and core values of the social worker profession, the second section, "Purpose of the Code of Ethics", provides an overview of the main functions of the Code and a brief guide to addressing ethical issues or dilemmas. the practice of social assistance, the third section, "Ethical principles", presents broad ethical principles, based on the basic values of social assistance and the final section, "Ethical standards", which includes specific ethical standards to guide the conduct of social workers.

The code lists six essential values and ethical principles designed to guide

practitioners and standardize the profession: service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, the importance of human relations, integrity and competence.

In describing the first value, service, as an ethical principle adopted by social workers, their main activity includes raising the services of others above their own interest, being encouraged to voluntarily offer some of their professional skills without expecting a financial profit.

With regard to *social justice*, social workers challenge social injustice and promote ensuring access to the necessary information, services and resources, equal opportunities and active participation in decision-making, for all people.

The *dignity and value of the person* is the ethical value in which social workers respect the dignity and value of the person, treating each person in a respectful way, taking into account individual differences and cultural and ethnic diversity.

The importance of human relations is a basic principle for social workers, in which they recognize the central importance of human relations, involving people as partners in the process of helping, in an ongoing effort to promote, restore, maintain and improve the well-being of individuals, families, social groups, organizations and communities.

Integrity requires that social workers behave in a trustworthy manner, acting honestly, responsibly in order to promote ethical practices on the part of the organizations to which they are affiliated.

Competence. According to the National Association of Social Workers, the competent practice in social assistance includes the concept of reflective practice, which emphasizes the need for professionals to demonstrate creativity in their practice. Social workers practice in their areas of competence, develop and improve their professional expertise. They can provide services only within the limits of education, training, licensing, certification.

One of the basic principles in social assistance is related to respecting the privacy and confidentiality of individuals. Social workers must protect the confidentiality of all information obtained during the professional activity, except for compelling professional reasons, when disclosure is necessary to prevent serious, foreseeable and imminent injuries to one client or others.

Ethical responsibilities and ethical values of social workers towards clients

Social workers respect a commitment to customers and have a responsibility to promote customer welfare.

Self-determination is one of the emblematic principles of social assistance that marks the autonomy of individuals and the right of individuals to make their own decisions as key values in social assistance (Furlong, 2003).

In the current social assistance literature (Banks, 2012 a, p. 60) three groups of complex values are presented:
1. respect for the dignity and worth of all human beings: the obligation to respect every human being as an individual, equally respecting and promoting human rights;
2. promoting well-being: consists in the continuous process of bringing benefits to the beneficiaries of social services and to society in general;
3. Promoting social justice: refers to eliminating inequalities between people and groups and promoting the equitable distribution of their social benefits and services.

Social practices can shape and guide values. Social values change over time as a result of exposure to new experiences, situations, beliefs and information (Bardi, Goodwin, 2011).

In this sense, practices shape and incorporate values, which reflect honesty and integrity and bring to the fore a performative

understanding of values (Gehman et al., 2013). This perspective characterizes practices as tools in which values play a dynamic role in the processes of social change.

Ethical dilemmas

The ethics of social assistance refers to challenges and contradictions, related to rights, responsibilities and obligations, in the daily activity of practitioners. Acting ethically involves a process of critical reflexivity (being aware of the social and political contexts in which one works and recognizing one's position, role and power). "Ethics work" (Banks, 2012) involves both emotions and reason, as well as good decision-making skills.

These ethical dilemmas are complex and difficult circumstances in which social workers have to make decisions on issues that conflict with their ethical principles, the procedures of the institution in which they work, or certain directives that may create disagreements. In some cases, ethical dilemmas refer to borderline issues in which social care practitioners face possible conflicts between their professional duties and their various personal relationships (Reamer, 2006). Other challenges that create ethical dilemmas relate to issues of confidentiality, cultural competence and competence in the field of practice.

According to Dominelii (2010), social workers play an active role in social assistance systems designed to care for, control or empower people. This can often lead to various contradictions and ethical challenges. The key values and principles identified earlier may be in conflict and social workers have to make difficult choices as to how to act and the role to play. The literature refers to dilemmas and ethical issues - difficult choices without an easy solution, where the rights, needs and interests of different parties are in conflict.

Regarding the content of ethical

challenges in social assistance, several practitioners suggest at least four main themes (Banks, 2012, p. 21):

a. *individual rights* and welfare, in which beneficiaries of social services have the opportunity to make their own choices and make their own decisions;

b. *public welfare*, the responsibilities of social workers are mainly related to the promotion of the good for as many people as possible;

c. *equality, difference and structural oppression*, the responsibility of the social worker to challenge oppression and work for change in society, promoting equality, and diversity.

d. *professional roles, limits and relationships*, the role of the social worker should be taken into account in particular situations, considerations of the boundaries between personal, professional and political life.

In the context of ethical dilemmas in the field of social assistance, practitioners have at their disposal manuals on ethics, which include sections on decision-making in difficult situations (Bowles et al., 2006; Dolgoff et al., 2012; Reamer, 2006).

In professional ethics, the emphasis is on ethical decision making, so social workers are active moral agents involved in decision making, guided by ethical principles, will be able to perform a critical analysis of relevant ethical codes, including a prior evaluation of them (professional values , assessment of rights, needs and interests).

If we refer to social values, in general people behave according to the norms of the social system to which they belong, and a change in these values will lead to a change in the behavior of these people (Manfredo et al., 2016). Values are generally conceptualized as sustainable beliefs that shape, legitimize, and incorporate change, thus enabling and constraining efforts for social change (Schwartz, 2015).

Therefore, in many countries, stricter regulations have been introduced to ensure

efficiency and ethical conduct, and social assistance bodies have been set up, whose functions include maintaining a register of qualified professionals with the authority to remove persons from the register if it proves necessary. incompetence or unethical behavior (Orme and Rennie, 2006).

Social assistance is among the most rewarding of the professions. Social workers get a lot of satisfaction from their work with the people they support, always having a high commitment.

At the same time, there are many stressful situations in social assistance, which often start from lack of resources, limited support lack of social workers in many statutory situations.

Conclusions

Throughout the world, it is a goal for social care practitioners to adhere to the ethics and principles of social assistance and to uphold the ethical standards of the practice, taking into account the high responsibility both to society and to clients and colleagues. Social work ethics is necessary to ensure that practitioners maintain a certain professional conduct established by ethics and values to ensure the legitimacy and credibility of the profession (Banks, 2010). However, the extent to which social workers adhere to the code of ethics in practice depends on several factors: their work environment, the uniqueness of the country's legal requirements, the culture of clients, and the values and individual environments of social workers.

However, even if there is no standard method of solving it in certain situations, action is needed in all areas, even in the social field where ethical dilemmas often arise.

Whether people are prepared or not to deal with dilemmas, they arise and often people are in positions where, in a shorter or longer period of time, they are forced to make a decision.

It is possible for a professional to hold the key to a person's future at some point.

Initially, if you already have the options formulated, you need to think about the consequences they will have on the well-being of your customers and then choose the best one, even if the decision is difficult. If you do not have the solutions chosen yet, you need to find them before continuing with the other steps. Sometimes you can find the answer in existing rules and regulations, other times it is necessary to treat those rules and even your own critical behavior and use intuition, experience, empathy and any other ability you have. The decision must be made very carefully because, although we do not like it, in such situations something will always be lost so we must minimize losses.

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