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Ethics and Supervision Process - Fundaments of Social Work Practice

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Abstract

The article intends to present the concepts of ethics and supervision and the importance of each of these two concepts in Romanian social work practice.

Based on the idea that social work ethics can be defined in relation to its values and principles which emerge, we consider necessary to establish a conceptual definition to meet the need of knowledge of the social worker. Values and ethics are the foundation of social work mission and involved normative considerations of what should be done regarding the orientation of social work ethics.

Social work is a field that is based on constitutive powerful ethical values, the social work domain being developed and improved by translating these values into principles and then into practice.

Approaching social work ethics, we mention our opinion about the underlying values of social worker profession, both at constitutive as well as practical. One of instruments of the ethics implementation

Supervision as an educational and training process based on providing support, training, monitoring, evaluation specialists of social work is a relatively new field of applied research in Romanian social context. In Romanian legislation, supervision was required for the first time in 2004, when the Romanian Government urged to implement this process in the minimum standards on human resources in the field of child and family protection.

Introduction

Article intends to present the concepts of ethics and supervision and the importance of each of these two concepts in social work practice.

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Based on the idea that social work ethics can be defined in relation to the values and principles that emerge, we consider necessary to establish a conceptual definition of this field to meet the need of knowledge of the social worker on social work ethics in order to implement ethical social programs.

A series of ethical values have been the foundation of social time. They involved a series of normative considerations on what should be done to the ethical practice of social work. Addressing social work ethics, we mention our opinion on the values that underpin social work profession at both constitutive and practical levels. One of the tools implementing social ethics is supervision.

Supervision as an educational and professional training process based on providing support, training, monitoring, evaluation specialist social work is a relatively new field of applied research in Romanian social context. In Romanian legislation, supervision was requested for the first time in 2004, when the Romanian government urged to implement this process in minimum standards on human resources in the field of child and family protection (Order no. 64/19 May 2004).

This article aims to provide an introduction to ethical supervision, clarifying both the problematic of ethics and supervision practice in social work.

I. Ethics in social work

In the literature we can hardly find references to address social work ethics in particular, mainly speaking about the ethics of medical services, which may derive concepts and social guidelines. An example of implementing the ethics of medical practice in social practice could be Belmont Report, which establishes a set of principles with a strong moral character and social (Belmont Report, 1979).

Frederic Reamer exposes the historical emergence of core social values. The quoted author argues that the development of ethical values in social work has four distinct phases: morality period, values period, ethical theory and ethical decision making period and ethical standards and risk management period (Reamer, F. G., 2006).

In the first period, starting in the late nineteenth century, social work as a profession is inaugurated, with the client's morality main concern, then morality and ethics and the social work profession, the main purpose being the improvement of social poverty.

Period of values is related to morality period, but now the focus is mainly on social work practice, they aim to improve strategies, instruments and practice. After half a century of development, in the United States, the social work profession has moved towards a period characterized by a series of attempts to develop a consensus on core values of social work. Nearly half a century after the opening of the profession, social work began to develop formal ethical guidelines, which were based on the core values of social work profession. Social workers have always shown a keen interest in establishing a set of core values that have served the profession as a basic structure, values such as dignity, uniqueness, respect for individual, self-determination, autonomy, respect, justice, equality and individualization (Reamer, F. G., 2006).

The period of ethical theory and decision making is characterized primarily by a significant transition to values and ethical issues, showing a tremendous surge of interest in applied ethics and professional ethics. Thus, in addition to social areas such as medicine, journalism, law, engineering, health care began to pay attention to ethics. Numerous trainings and professional or applied ethics in the curriculum, many scientific events, conferences and publications in the field (Reamer, F.G., 2006). Bioethics is growing significantly in the United States, with its development being built specialty centres and then association – The Association for Practical and Professional Ethics.

In the second half of the twentieth century, the interest shown towards professional ethics organizations was due to a variety of factors. Developing controversial health technologies generated ethical debate on topics such as organ transplantation, genetic engineering and assisted reproduction. Professional responsibility of specialists in various professions has become an important topic to be spread by contemporary media. Potential malpractice scandals and abuse of power were and are still many aspects that we consider professions in order to
reduce and prevent them through training of practitioners based on ethical values and principles. The emergence of applied ethics significantly influenced the development of social work ethics, according to Reamer. Since 1980, through a group of researchers, there appeared in the American literature papers which approached ethical issues and dilemmas. They started from literature, theories and concepts of moral philosophy and continued to applied ethics and professional ethics. For the first time there appeared books and articles that discuss the relationship between ethical dilemmas developed in social work and ethical decision making (Reamer, F. G, 2006, p.10).

The next period, the ethical standards and risk management period, is characterized as the most recent period in the development of social ethics in the United States and reflects the maturation of social workers in understanding and awareness of ethical issues. Moreover, the period includes the development of ethical codes of the profession, the emergence of an important scientific literature based on ethics - preventing malpractice liability risk and risk management strategies developed to protect clients and prevent ethics complaints and ethical processes (Reamer, F. G, 2006, p.10).

I.1 Ethical values in social work. Principilism

Social work is a field based on strong constitutive ethical values. The social work system has been developed continuously in time, being improved by translating these values into principles and then in social intervention practices.

Mel Gray and Stephen A. Webb offer in volume “Ethics and Value Perspectives in Social Work” a variety of assumptions from which we may start the analysis of the social work system from an ethical point of view. The authors treat social activity as an evaluative intrinsic value which plays an important role in society. When referring to the intrinsic character, the authors aimed at social activities based on human welfare and appreciation of the importance of shared values that transcend self-interest (Gray, M., Webb, SA, 2010).

On the basis of social work profession, at constitutive and practical levels, they are ethical values. We call constitutive values those values who fundament the social work profession. In the context of this article we have chosen to treat the concepts of “social justice” and “social solidarity”, which we regard as constitutive elements of the social work profession. Besides these we can identify without being exhaustive, values such as social responsibility, dignity, self-determination, etc.

- Social justice. In broad terms, "justice" is a concept of moral rightness based on ethics, rationality, law, natural law, religion and fairness. It is also to act as right and/or fair (Konow, J., 2003, p 1188). Justice is understood by Rawls as the first virtue of any social institutions (Rawls, J., 1973).

A just society is defined by its proponents as based on principles such as equality and solidarity. However, such a society simultaneously recognizes generally applicable human rights and dignity of every human being (Zajda, J., Majhanovich, S., Rust, V., 2006, p 220). Human rights refer to a range of values that refer to all individuals belonging to the human species, while the dignity of each individual is related to the specificities linked to the particular condition and needs. The right to welfare is such a universal value, which refers to the whole humanity, which will be based on extensive social programs that will address the entire class of individuals, while for poverty, due to the particular situation of an individual or family, a project will generate a punctual intervention at the individual and family. We can talk about such programs developed on the basis of social justice principle and the customization of justice at the individual level.

Justice as a constitutive value of social work can be considered distinct and important than philanthropy. Aristotle in “Nicomachean Ethics” argued that all men mean by justice that moral disposition due to which we are capable of right acts and due to which we carried them out to accomplish or we want to accomplish, being one of the virtues which seems to be good for the another, manifesting itself in favour of another, regardless of which is the manifest for (Aristotle, book V, pp. 103-106).

Aristotle states the existence of corrective and distributive justice, referring to distributive justice as a proportion of the "being a material dispensing, justice consist in reporting to a merit, but not everyone
understands the same merit, but democrats see it provided free, the oligarchy sees the wealth and noble origin, the aristocratic will see the virtue. Justice is therefore a kind of proportion (for proportion is not only a property of abstract number, but the number in general) "(Aristotle, Book V, pp. 110-118).

**Distributive justice** is for social work, the fairness of access to resources, positions in society and the distribution of benefits, obligations between individuals and groups in society. In educational and community context, Ehrlich defines social justice as "value which is the difference between the civic life of communities and development of knowledge, skills and motivation to make a difference. Social justice means promoting the quality of life in the community, through both political and non-political processes" (Ehrlich, T., 2000, p vi).

John Rawls (1973) developed a series of normative theories elaborated on the principles of justice, under which social institutions should be governed. Development of these theories was made but, without knowing the nature of social institutions on which specific principles should apply and adapt their approach depending on each institution (Miroiu, A., 2009). Rawls develops the theory of justice as fairness and aims at an equal distribution in society. Justice as fairness is perceived as responding to both freedom and equality, and leads to a version of the social contract theory, which the philosopher considers that provides a superior understanding of justice than the utilitarian one. Rawls’ principles of justice as fairness were developed on the central liberal idea that cooperation should be fair to all citizens regarded as free and equal (Wenar, L., 2008).

A distributive principle is consistent with the possibility that its achievement is the result of the action of a large number of persons or institutions and may look different procedure whereby individuals are assigned parts of the good, or to see the results of that allocation. Distributive principles may vary in different sizes, depending on the subject distribution - income, health, opportunities, wealth, utility, and subjective distribution that can be represented by individuals, groups of individuals, class reference, but at the same time and that should be made based on the distribution of - equality, maximization, depending on the individual characteristics, on the available transactions (Miroiu, 2009; Mureșan, V., 2006).

**Social solidarity** - is one of the values we believe to be constitutive of the social worker profession. Family and family relationships, community life, trade union activity and identity politics of new social movements, are some of the many ways in which solidarity can be integrated into contemporary social arrangements (Crow, G., 2002, p.1).

Durkheim started his research on the social solidarity of the questions about what people have in common and what makes them act together. Using this approach, Durkheim wanted to expose the fact that in modern societies, the common interest of its own is not sufficient to ensure social cohesion and social effort. The observations of sociologist Emil Durkheim, that ‘if the common interest between people approaching them, this approach will not last more than a few moments ”(Crow, G., 2002, p.12) conduct to the conclusion that social solidarity require agreements and beliefs sharing in order to be sustainable.

Social worker, as mentioned in the codes of ethics of organizations and institutions in the field, is acting in favour of the beneficiaries, being guided by values that society has gradually defined and under which it develops. Social justice, solidarity, social responsibility, are moral values first and then sociological character concepts.

Together with the constitutive values of equal value in social work, we are identifying values which underpinning practice. Practice values generates a set of ethical principles that guide the way social workers should treat clients as well as how they should focus on making the best decisions in professional practice.

Adam Barnard argues in his work, *Values, ethics and professionalization: a social work history*, that there are four spheres of values in social work practice, defined in terms of moral philosophy, the legislative framework, the dominant political ideology in practice and the historical perspective. The first sphere the moral philosophy is forming a background of ethics debate in social field. A second sphere refers to legislative issues that create the legal context of social work and providing legal answers or solutions to situations or individual cases of social practice. Political ideologies is the third sphere that can be defined in terms of social values, they actually help to refine models, methods and social practices. The fourth sphere to which it refers Barnard is
historical emergence of social work as a profession in its own right and the social worker's fight for identity in professional practice (Barnard, A., 2008).

We believe that both the practical as well as constitutive values underlie a number of ethical principles of social practice aimed at ethical decisions and we refer here to principlism. Principlism was originally developed to help doctors and researchers come to the medical and behavioural sciences. This ethical framework has its origins in the 1979 Belmont Report, issued by the U.S. National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research. Principlism in its current form was theoretically developed by Tom L. Beauchamp and James F. Childress in Principles of Biomedical Ethics (2001). Principlism adepts act on the belief that "principles are at the heart of moral life even if you are sceptical about the role that could be played by ethical theories in the so-called" applied ethics " " (Muresan, V., 2006, p.203-239).

The practicality of the principlist approach derives from the fact that is consistent with a variety of ethical approaches, theological, moral and social in decision-making process. This pluralistic approach is essential when making moral decisions at the institutional, community representatives with decision-making power cannot reach common ground on certain moral theory or epistemic justification thereof (Bulger, J.W., 2007, pp. 81-100).

Members of the Commission issued Belmont Report found that there are three basic ethical principles:

- Respect for autonomy - which contains two ethical assumptions that (1) human beings should be treated as autonomous individuals, capable of making their own decisions, (2) persons deprived of self-determination should be protected.
- Beneficence - aimed at treating people ethically, not only by respecting their decisions and providing them protection, but also by creating measures to ensure the well-being of the person.
- Justice - Treats justice in terms of fair distribution of goods and services which benefit the customer is entitled.


- Principle of autonomy - autonomy is defined as self-determination outside the control and intervention made by others that generate a meaningful decision. Autonomous individuals, sovereign, act freely according to their own plan. The principle of respect for autonomy is as especially important in social system as in health care, services users must be informed and respected in decision making regarding their social status. Autonomy, as a basic principle of individual and social morality, fall the category of fundamental human rights (Bulger, JW, 2007, p.87).

- Principles of beneficence and non-maleficence - projects to develop practices that meet and promote the achieving of subjects welfare and to avoid any evil of their status. Even if principlism does not provide a precise hierarchy of the four principles underlying the principle of autonomy, beneficence, and justice non-maleficence, we agree with the opinion of Bulger, which refers to the principles that emerge from each other, as well as the principles autonomy and justice based on the principles of beneficence and non-maleficence. Therefore, autonomy contributes to moral decisions by maximizing the benefits and minimizing the evil of a person. Principlist perspective implies autonomy, beneficence, and justice as assessed non-maleficence inter-subjective, correlative analysis of these principles generating issues more relevant than an individual analysis (Bulger, J.W., 2007, p.92). Beauchamp and Childress principlism starts from common morality as the foundation of ethical decision. The authors identify in American common morality utilitarian strong influences.

Utilitarianism argues that action morally right is that action which produces the maximum good for the greatest number of individuals possible, this is the classic version of this principle, supported by philosophers such as Jeremy Bentham (1907) and John Stuart Mill (1998). They identified good with pleasure.

Utilitarianism is also defined by impartiality and agent-neutrality, happiness or individuals well, being equally important values. Applied in social institutions, utilitarianism aims at assessing the facts and character traits, assessing practices and institutions in terms of overall benefits, which refer most often to the welfare (Driver, J.,2009). Utilitarianism can be used to illustrate the basic characteristics of the principles of welfare, even if the
supporters of this theory have used the term utility rather than welfare. The utility itself is seen varied in terms of pleasure, happiness or preference-satisfaction. As a result, it will pursue social practice, the distribution of economic benefits to maximize the preference – satisfaction rapport. Robert E. Goodin illustrates that utilitarianism is associated to crafts architect or craftsman furniture, concept equivalent to that of "functionality", the author stating some of the advantages of utilitarianism as a theory of the good: not involve any commitment the individual who has the ability to filter everything through their own system of preferences and reaching out to all people and impartially (Goodin, R.E., 2006, pp. 269-276.). Modern values as a range of mixed social, political and philosophical values were directed to the specific nature of the ethical dilemma questions like "How should I act?" Or "What I do is right?". Barnard argues that theorists such as Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill have developed an ethical system based on the consequences of actions and hedonism and promoting happiness as the basis of ethics (Barnard, A., 2008).

- Principle of justice – aimed, as a Belmont Report and stipulates, a fair treatment of the individual and provide services based on an equitable distribution. Most theories of justice have the priority analysis axis, economical distribution and moral authority. Principalist applicability of justice can be achieved through a variety of social justice perspective. Therefore libertarianism followers will highlight the moral and economic rights and freedoms through a process of "fair procedures" rather independent of the actual benefits and burdens. Utilitarian’s, besides libertarian’s approach, will emphasize and maximize the benefits and minimize the burden of both citizens and society as a whole. Egalitarians will highlight both economic equality and with reference to social morality and Communitarians will highlight the importance of culture, traditions, human relations and the importance and need for individual rights and freedoms. Justice as a value and as a moral and social principle is always applied according to the nature of each community acting on this principle. In the context of democracy, we know that a better information of citizens is desired, wishing them to be competent and be tolerant of different points of view.

II. Supervision in social work

The origin of supervision practices lies in apprenticeship system, which requires that a beginner in a profession to benefit of the guidance and control of a master. Subsequently supervision process has been developed as an educational and providing support process in various areas, particularly in social services. In 1904, supervision was mentioned in the literature for the first time in association with social work by Jeffrey R. Bracket in Supervision and Education in Charity work. Supervision as social concept was originally introduced in the evaluation of programs and institutions that practice gradually move towards human resource in the project (Kadushin, A., Harkness, D., 2002, p 2).

Etymologically speaking, the term supervision is a combination of two Latin words (super = "above, on, over," and videre = "to see, to look") and was built to name a supervision activity for efficient organization work, especially work less people trained in a field.

Literature is making visible a supervision process evolution, which goes through different points of reference for defining current supervision. In the ’20s, Dawson claimed supervision functions, aimed from the administrative point of view - to promote and maintain quality standards of work, under the coordination of the administrative principles and policies, ensuring effective collective work; terms of educational functions, supervision followed the educational development of each worker on hand, in order to meet its full utility; in terms of support, supervision serve to maintain harmonious working relationships and fostering a team spirit (Kadushin, A., Harkness , D., 2002, p 12).

The most significant component of this process was educational supervision, theorists of the social work supervision trying to apply a general theory of change in the educational process of supervision (Kadushin, A., Harkness, D., 2002, p.13). Throughout its development, supervision was interpreted and approached in various ways, from the perspective of various theorists in the field. Kadushin appreciated that the ultimate goal of long-
term supervision is to ensure efficient services of assisted clients and the short-term objective of administrative supervision is ensuring a proper context for professionals to properly and efficiently carry out its tasks.

From the perspective of the beneficiary of community care services, the scope of supervision is to help participating members to fulfill their professional duties effectively, for the maximum benefit of the client (Damian et al, 2012). Supervision should ensure proper conditions in order to individuals, families and groups assisted to be granted with maximum benefits and prevent inappropriate responses they might receive from the professional staff (Shulman, L., 1995, MK, Smith, 2005).

Supervision is seen as an educational (Robinson, V., P., 1949), administrative (Barker, R. L., 1995) support professionals, decision-making on behalf of the organization process, promoting directions, rules and values by guiding employees (Cojocaru, S., 2005). The process was understood as a re-evaluation of the other, with the authority of monitoring and directing the performance, and to ensure efficiency, as well the customer safety (Caspi, J., Reid, W., 2002). Supervisors may establish performance standards for certain requirements, cases and roles for employees, appropriate and realistic goals, providing feedback to employees about their performance.

II.1. Role, functions and the necessity of supervision in social work

In developing a comprehensive definition of supervision Kadushin argues that this is constructed from an unitary body and incorporates the supervision functions, supervision objectives, hierarchical position, supervision as indirect service and interactional process (Caras, A., Sandu, A., 2013).

In the social sphere in the American social system, Frederic Reamer argues that supervision fulfilled an essential function in social work practice, a process that is constantly offered daily and social workers in professional or administrative staff or medical Beginners (Reamer, F., G., 2009). If, in American social work practice, supervision is mentioned in the literature since 1904, in the Romanian social work, supervision appears for the first time in 2004 when there appeared in the Official Gazette a series of government orders stipulating standards required for the child and family protection services, stating in fact mandatory, as a minimum standard, the "supervision of human resources." Following the U.S. model, starting with the 2004-2005 academic year at Western University of Timisoara, Romania, was born in the first post-graduate program that offered training in supervision (Muntean, A., 2006, p.30).

We did a review of the temporal aspects of supervision in direct association with the development of social work practice, in order to understand the level at which it discusses about supervision in Romanian context and the importance of developing a more powerful system to be based on specific functions of supervision with applicability in Romanian social work practice.

Theorists and practitioners as Kadushin and Harkness (2002), Barker (1995), Bernard and Goodyear (2004), Caspi and Reid (2002), Reamer (2006), defined supervision in professional practice through exposure of its functions, roles and objectives. By understanding the extraordinary contribution made by this practice at the level of international social work systems that have adopted and developed supervision practices in organizational management and human resource, Romanian practitioners will be aware of the need for supervision in Romanian professional practice of social system.

It is important for us to expose the functions of supervision as discussed by the literature, referring first to the supervision model supported by Kadushin. According to Kadushin and Harkness (2002) the definition of supervision incorporates the supervision functions (administrative, support and education), the objectives of supervision, hierarchical positions in supervision, supervision as indirect service and interaction in the process of supervision. According to the integrated model of clinical supervision developed by Philip Rich (1993) supervision has the following four functions: facilitation, professional development, socialization of staff and providing services. Given that it is a recent qualification in Romania, the supervisor has the role of trainer and mentor in supervision, believes Ana Muntean (2007).
II.2 Supervisor as a gatekeeper of ethical behaviour of professionals

We intend to treat the supervisor role in achieving equitable social distribution of justice, distribution being understood at the professional level of service provision by specialist supervisor, just to train professionally. Theorists in the field approached the supervisor roles, among which is discussed and the role of gatekeeping. However supervisor, part of supervision, in fact we would say the process initiator, acts as gatekeeper for those who are initiated in different professions. Stephen Behnke assigned to supervisor the gatekeeper role in social policy applicability compliance with the organization's legislative constraints (Behnke, S., 2005). Supervisor gets the gatekeeper of supervisee professional development, in which vision, the professional may establish performances in the full benefit of the beneficiary, to the extent that his particular needs are met. Gatekeeping is addressed by practitioners and Nelson, Oliver, Reeve and McNichols (2010), in association with supervision in educational programs.

Code of Ethics of the American Counselling Association (2005) addresses and clearly describes the ethical and professional role of supervisors. In the process of supervision, supervisor should provide periodically feedback and evaluation to the supervisee. Besides the role of supervision, monitoring, providing support, education and training, the supervisor shall, as Nelson et al states, design to assess how the supervisee interpersonal skills influence its clients. ACA Code of Ethics mandates that supervisors act as gatekeepers when they consider that supervisees do not meet the standards required to practice in counselling. These roles of supervisor may raise ethical and supervision dilemmas when they interact with problematical supervise (Nelson et al, 2010).

Conclusions

The article was intended to highlight the need to adopt an ethical welfare practice, based on values and ethical principles which underline the social development processes, through awareness of the importance of compliance the ethical foundations of social work practice.

Social work is a field that is based on strong constitutive ethical values, social field being developed and improved by translating these values into principles and then in professional practice. Supervision as an educational and training process of social specialists can be defined by combining it with the ethical side of welfare practice, considering that at the basis of both processes, both the supervision and the social work, ethical principles are fundamental. Supervision practice is a guarantor of ethical compliance of social work practice, precisely because of the gatekeeper role of the social worker.

Ethical practice of supervision is influencing clients quality of life in that supervisor is a distributor of justice by applying a set of principles. Ethical supervisor as gatekeeper of ethical compliance will consider the antidiscrimination policies in social practice.

Ethical supervision can be seen as a method of support for professionals from ethics field, but it can be applied with success also in social field, aiming to improve the professionals’ performance, to increase their motivation and developing an efficient work environment following the highest professional standards and ethical intervention.

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