Chapter 8

Ethical Dilemmas That Turkish Social Workers Encounter and Factors That Influence Their Decisions in Case of Ethical Dilemmas

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to present the ethical dilemmas that social workers in various institutions in Turkey encounter as well as the factors that influence their decisions in case of ethical dilemmas. 234 social workers participated in the research. Statistical analyses were performed in the SPSS program and p<0.05 was considered statistically significant. Three out of four social workers who participated in the research (76.5%) indicated having experienced ethical dilemmas in their practices. When we look at the causes behind the emergence of ethical dilemmas, clients’ request or need for service conflicting with legislative regulations comes to the fore among the responses given (77.6%). More than half of the social workers who participated in the research (54.1%) stated that they decide primarily according to the principle of client’s best interest in case of an ethical dilemma. Social workers often encounter ethical dilemmas due to legal and institutional causes and in case of an ethical dilemma, they usually make a decision in favor of the client.

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INTRODUCTION

Ethics has been among the most fundamental concepts to which social work referred as it historically developed with a philanthropic motivation and went on to being professionalized. The concept of occupational ethics which provides a kind of roadmap regarding attitudes and behaviors towards persons and institutions that members of various professions work with in practice, is called social work ethics in the discipline of social work and it guides social workers in the services to be provided to clients, relationships to be established with clients and in professional decisions to be taken by social workers. On the other hand, ethics is the body of ideal attitudes and behaviors and in some cases it is not possible to act in line with ethical principles. Especially ethical dilemmas due to macro structures may tend to leave social workers in a tight spot in terms of making a professional decision. The aim of this study was therefore determined as presenting the ethical dilemmas that social workers working in various institutions in Turkey encounter and the factors that influence their decisions in case of ethical dilemmas.

DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL WORK ETHICS

Abraham Flexner’s 1915 report questioned whether social work was a profession since it had no code of ethics and following this, Mary Richmond who was a social work pioneer authored the first draft of code of ethics (Congress and McAuliffe, 2006). Around the same time, Australian authors Mary Van Kleeck and Graham R. Taylor pointed out that the profession of social work should have definite and agreed ethical principles and specified the general principles fit to shape the ethical principles as ‘practical activities and methods that can be tested with their results, appropriate standards for the effectiveness of social workers, social workers’ attention and functions regarding professional development, channeling personal attention into public welfare and offering appropriate services’ (Özateş, 2010, p. 95). The American Association of Social Workers developed a code of ethics for social work in 1960 and with this work, it has become the first professional social work organization to develop and accept code of ethics (Congress, 1999). Biestek’s (1961) seven part classification regarding social work ethics constitutes another cornerstone. This classification is as follows:

1. Unconditional acceptance of the client as an individual,
2. A non-judgmental approach to the client,
3. Individualization of the client,
4. Purposeful expression of feelings,
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