
AXIOLOGICAL FUNDAMENT OF THE PRINCIPLES IN SOCIAL AND MEDICAL ASSISTANCE

**Mihaela Cernușcă-Mițariu¹, Ioan (Irineu) Pop²,
Georgeta Sorina Corman^{3*}, Mihai Mițariu¹, Florin Alexandru Pavel⁴,
Viorica Bobic³, Dragoș Dădârlat¹ and Marian Țiplic³**

¹ 'Lucian Blaga' University of Sibiu, Faculty of Medicine, 2A Lucian Blaga St., 550169 Sibiu, Romania

² '1 Decembrie 1918' University of Alba Iulia, 5 Gabriel Bethlen Str., 510009, Alba Iulia, Romania

³ 'Lucian Blaga' University of Sibiu, Faculty of Social and Human Sciences, Blvd.Victoriei no.5-7, Sibiu, Romania

⁴ 'Lucian Blaga' University of Sibiu, Faculty of Theology, Blvd.Victoriei no.10, 55002, Sibiu, Romania

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Abstract

The article offers a typology of principles underlying social and medical intervention in order to highlight the message on the one hand to those who receive social assistance/care and on the other hand to those who provide it, under the impact of social change and political, economic and cultural constraints. We identify an ethical structure, which includes principles found on personal and administrative responsibility that are the cornerstone of the relational system to the individual in social or medical interventions, located on any level of the administrative hierarchy, with the assisted/clients, colleagues, management or any other individual involved in this process.

Keywords: principles, social work, nursing

1. Introduction

Customer/assisted persons expectations are related to, not only the behaviour of those individuals who are in a position to ensure protection and provide social support, but also to their ability to establish and implement the needed nursing objectives. Therefore we are dealing with an ethical structure, which includes principles founded on personal and administrative responsibility that are the cornerstone of the relational system to the individual playing a role in both systems (medical and social), and are located on any level of the administrative hierarchy, with the assisted/clients, colleagues, management or any other individual involved in this process.

Here is what kind of expectations vulnerable people have in this context: "These people (social workers) are working with and for the people with special

*Corresponding author: e-mail: sorinacorman@yahoo.com

needs, meaning us. So we want them to know how to speak, how to act and especially what to do, so that they can help us overcome this situation.” (Excerpt from the statement of a vulnerable person about his expectations regarding the quality of the social workers)

The classifications or distributions of these ethical principles which guide the behaviour of the nursing intervention in a particular case, or the delivery of social care in a general sense, is diverse and varied. We will try to further illustrate some of them, noting that beyond this distribution lies the unity and stability of a behaviour based on ethical judgments.

2. The vision in research purposes

2.1. *Ethical principles in social service from a managerial point of view*

Charles S. Levy in the article ‘The Ethics of Management’ talks about ethics in social service from the perspective of management. He distinguishes the following categories of principles: 1. managerial ethics in relation with administrative organization, 2. managerial ethical principles in relations with colleagues, 3. management principles in relation with funding and other resources [1].

In the first category, the author includes the principle of professional competence, loyalty to the organization, the principle of ethical judgment (duties, rules, and risks), and the principle of general and specific responsibilities. He considers “as a fundamental ethical principle and the attribute that distinguishes the management of social services from the management of a company that produces profit, the **congruence** between ethics (ethical principles) associated with the organization of the given service (outside) and human resource management principles (internal management). Each symbolizes and participates in building the uniqueness of such an organization.” [1]

The second category, the managerial ethical relations with colleagues includes: the principle of loyalty, ethical responsibility, the principle of ethical sensitivity, the non-exercise of authoritarian power and the principle of resistance to pressure. The author recommends “taking account of people’s souls and their true temperament. Unfortunately, ethics in relation to colleagues – especially when there are subordinate relations of power and control between them, and they have also an uncertainty of their position in the labour market – appears to be more fragile under the fiscal pressures of the jobs, the organization, etc... Perhaps the most important managerial ethics is resistance to such pressures in relation to colleagues and general resistance to the temptations related to power.” [1]

In the third category of principles, Levy includes: the principle of good usage of funds/benefits, the principle of responsibility in financial transactions, the principle of identification and effective management of financial and human resources, the principle of ownership, the principle of competition, the principle

of autonomy, the principle of delegation of responsibility, the principle of responsibility towards the community. Values underlying these principles are intelligence, conscientiousness, care and attention in resource usage, but also in implementing social policies.

2.2. *Imago Dei but the bioethical end sociological fundament*

Nowadays, the image has a very important role. One speaks about the political, economical, cultural image and even about the image of Romania from the perspective of the European integration. Still, there is an important detail, which is being ignored. The society image is given by its member's image. If their image superposes upon the evangelic image, the society will be ontologically structured on good, justice and love values. Egoism and violence will disappear. This image, generally speaking, emanates from mass media and may transform our society at all its levels. We are witnessing real sociological events of the image when we are speaking about the image culture, the media culture, the semblance society or the show era. This interest for isn't the only purpose for the theology. Man is God's image that's the reason why His Son takes this human image in order to restore it (II Corinthians 4.4).

From a sociological point of view, there is an enclosure theory that refers to a person who refuses communication. For our contemporary man, the lifeless nature becomes the alter ego (the computer, the television and the material goods). Because of that, the Church has the mission to open the interpersonal perspectives of communications by means of image as transcendental God's image and not by means of an immanent image. God's image removes the people's enclosure tendency and opens them the eternity perspective. The enclosure of the image may be realized by suprening the relation image-truth and becoming mediatical may contribute to the individual enclosure or even that of society.

Man is God's image as body and soul. The Platonism tried to localize God's image only inside the human soul the same way Jean Calvin does, who lifts the notion of the image not only to man as person but to whole humanity. Since the post-apostolic époque, Irene of Lyon strained the dichotomous unity of man as God's image: man was done by the Father's hands, through the Son and the Spirit and not only a part of him (the body or the soul) which becomes the image and the resemblance of God.

2.3. *Principles in relation to moral issues*

On a managerial perspective of social services writes Burton Gummer in his article *Ethics in Managerial Behavior (Come On! Who Are You Trying to Kid?)* [2]. Burton writes on the managerial perspective of social services, stating three categories of principles in relation to moral issues: utilitarian principles (the behaviour is assessed in terms of its effects on collective welfare), principles of human rights (highlights the personal rights of people), principles of justice

(focus on the fair distribution of benefits and targets through an action or a policy).

2.4. Principles and values of knowledge social service

In Romania, Vasile Miftode talks in his work *Theory and method in social service* about principles and values of social knowledge in social services, including the *role, purpose and motivation of the values involved in social services, dilemmas and 'ethical consequences', including potential of 'conflict of interests' and rights occurring in the family (through case concerned the impact of the social worker), the importance of knowing the impact of (potential) conflict of values: individual, professional, organizational* [3].

2.5. Principles of human rights and social justice

The same author (Vasile Miftode) identifies another important category of principles, the legal principles and 'legal obligations' in social services. According to the author this category includes: *1. respect for individual freedom, 'Natural Justice', human rights, legal rights, 2. providing legal services in legal processes (to assist defendants) 3. law must fulfil a social function (first of all: preventive, educational and coercive); fundamental conditions of existence; social service must follow the pursuit of happiness, the right to housing, the right to a 'material income' and the right to welfare; 4 . legal responsibilities of the social worker towards the clients (toward the assisted individual or group) 5. detailed knowledge of the 'legal requirements' on practical solutions of 'special' or difficult cases* [3, p. 35].

The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) published the Declaration of Ethical Principles in Social Work (IFSW/IASSW, 2004). According to declaration, *principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work*. In the category of human rights the following principles are included: self-determination, participation, holistic therapy, focusing on the potential (strengths) and accountability. In the second category, that of social justice, the following is included: anti-discrimination principle, the principle of recognizing diversity, the principle of equitable resource distribution, the principle of fighting against injustice and the principle of solidarity [4].

2.6. General principles of the social worker profession

Regarding the Romanian legal regulations referring to principles guiding the activity of the social worker, Chapter II of the Code of Ethics for Social Workers in Romania includes *general principles of the profession of social worker: the duty to obey law* ("The social worker is required to practice the profession according to the legal provisions concerning the profession of social

workers, as well as specific professional rules of social assistance”- Art. 5), respect for professional values (“The social worker is obliged to promote and respect the values of his profession, the methodology of practice in his profession and the good practice guidelines approved by the College, thus ensuring the quality of professional achievement”- Art. 6) and professional development principle (“The social workers must continuously enhance their professional knowledge and consistently seek to raise their standards of quality of their profession and research, indicating the professional authority an illicit practice in this field”- Art. 7) [Law no. 466/04.11.2004 on the statute of the social worker, online at <http://lege5.ro/Gratuit/gu3dsnjx/legea-466-2004-privind-statutul-asistentului-social>].

The ethical principles of the Romanian legal regulations, which guide the social worker in his activities, are consistent with the international ones. Thus, Law 466/2004 on the statute of social worker provides the following ethical principles: the principle of social justice (“Social workers provide equal opportunities for the assisted persons to access information, services, resources and their participation in the decision making”- Art. 20, Par. 2), the principle of respect and promotion of individual dignity, uniqueness and value of each person (Art. 21), the principle of involving the beneficiaries in resolving situations of vulnerability (“The social worker helps the assisted people in their efforts to identify and clarify goals in order to choose the best option”- Art. 22), the principle of improving the quality of life of the assisted people (Art. 23), the principle of responsibility (Art. 24), the principle of professional competence (Art. 25).

In this sense, the law 47/2006 on the national social service system presents some general principles in order to ensure equal access to rights provided by law: universality, respect of human dignity, social solidarity, partnership, subsidiarity, participation of the beneficiaries, transparency, and equity/non-discrimination (Art. 4) [Law no. 466/04.11.2004].

To illustrate the importance of clearly defining the social ethics we cite an excerpt from an interview with a social worker tormented by the tough situations he must face: “I work in a community where children are put to work at a very young age. They carry wood, feed the animals and work on the field. Everybody ignores the fact that these children’s health is in danger. I do not know what to do. Nobody helps me in educating the families that they should not exaggerate with the amount of work they delegate to these children. Everybody think that these children have to work, and authorities say it is the right of these families to raise their children as they want. It’s not my business to meddle with. Why do I feel that my job and responsibility as a social worker is to take a stand?”

2.7. Essential principles in social service

In his article *The Reality Principle: Realism as an Ethical Obligation*, Chris Beckett considers realism *first of all an important ethical principle by itself* and then for the practical dimension of the social work [6]. He suggests

two ways in which realism, as an ethical principle should be applied by social workers and decision makers: realism regarding the results and realism regarding the context. “A truly ethical position does not refer to the ability to make aspirational statements, but to fight with practical realities, such as the existence of constraints in resources, the limitations of what can be done during a certain amount of time and with a certain amount of skill, and that some social objectives can be achieved and others cannot.” [5]

The paper *Ethical Decisions for Social Work Practice* [6] presents seven key ethical principles considered by the authors as essential ones in social service: 1. The principle of autonomy and freedom, including the right of people to self-determination and independence; 2. Principle of equality and inequality, all people in the same circumstances should be treated the same and people in different circumstances have the right to be treated differently; 3. The principle of nonmaleficence: social workers are ought not to harm other, and if the damage is unavoidable, they ought to choose the best solution, that will cause the least harm possible; 4. The principle of privacy and confidentiality – the protection of privacy and confidentiality should be protected to the greatest extent possible; 5. Principle of protection of life: life should be protected to the greatest extent possible; 6. The principle of quality of life: the options should be chosen for providing the best quality of life; 7. The principle of truthfulness and complete information: social worker should tell the whole truth and provide all available information.

3. Conclusions

We did not intended to write down a hierarchization of these principles, but their exposure to the ‘actors’ on both systems, the knowledge and the awareness of these ‘actors’ can help them to be better prepared and more aware when they face ethical choices.

Whether these ‘actors’ from both systems (social and medical) are guided by ethical principles from the perspective of social services management, by the principles regarding moral issues, by the principles and values of social knowledge, by the principles of human rights and social justice or by the general principles of the profession, they must be aware of the role, purpose and motivation in their line of work.

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