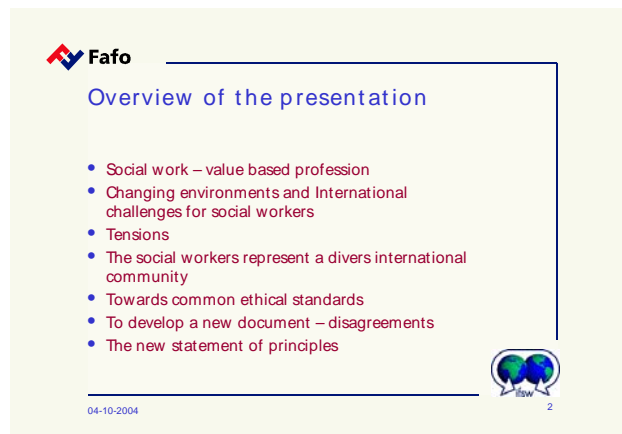


Ethical Challenges for Social Workers - and the new international ethical document

Arne Grønningsæter
Adelaide 4 October 2004
Maastricht 30 October 2004




Overview



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Overview of the presentation

- Social work – value based profession
- Changing environments and International challenges for social workers
- Tensions
- The social workers represent a diverse international community
- Towards common ethical standards
- To develop a new document – disagreements
- The new statement of principles

04-10-2004  2

The International Federation of Social Workers and The International Association of Schools of Social Work adopted a new international statement of ethical principles at their general meetings in Adelaide in October 2004. I have actively participated in the process of developing the new document. In this presentation I will discuss some of the perspectives, considerations, ideas and disagreements behind the new document. Before I start let me also mention my most important partners in the process; Richard Hugman from Australia, Sara Banks from the UK, Bente Moseng and Jorunn Vindegg from Norway. Lena Dominelli, Imalda Dods and Tom Johannesen from the leadership of the two international organisations have also played an important role in this process. This paper, however, is my responsibility.

The presentation will follow the structure shown on the slide:

Social work – value based profession

Changing environments and International challenges for social workers

Tensions in social work ethics

The social workers represent a diverse international community

The process towards common ethical standards

To develop a new document – disagreements

The new statement of principles

Social work – a value-based profession



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Social work – value based profession

- "Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work"
 - (Definition of Social Work - IFSW General Meeting 2000)

04-10-2004  3

Social work is a value-based profession. This is clearly stated in the definition of social work adopted by IFSW in 2000 and AISSW in 2001. "Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work". Let me quote the supplementary comments to the definition:

“Values

Social work grew out of humanitarian and democratic ideals, and its values are based on respect for the equality, worth, and dignity of all people. Since its beginnings over a century ago, social work practice has focused on meeting human needs and developing human potential. Human rights and social justice serve as the motivation and justification for social work action. In solidarity with those who are disadvantaged, the profession strives to alleviate poverty and to liberate vulnerable and oppressed people in order to promote social inclusion. Social work values are embodied in the profession's national and international codes of ethics.”

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Changing environments and International challenges for social workers

- The challenges from globalisation
- Norway and the oil prices that has reached the highest level in history
- Globalisation and localisation (Bauman)
- "There is evidence of increasing inequality and polarisation in the distribution of wealth and opportunities of globalisation are unevenly distributed between nations and people"
- "Globalisation has benefited many countries, but has also completely marginalised others, particularly in such of Sub-Saharan Africa, and impoverished rural areas of Latin America and Asia"

04-10-2004

4

When I left Norway, I read in the newspapers that the oil prices were reaching their highest level ever, almost 50 USD per barrel. Why do I start a presentation about ethical issues in Social work with that? It means that one of the richest countries in the world, Norway, as well as some other countries, receives millions of dollar more that expected. And it means that the poorest countries suffer even more. Consequently the economic differences between this very rich country and the poorest increases even more that before. Global poverty is an important issue for social workers. It might, however, be quite alienating to have to relate our daily work as social workers into this global frame. But it is important that we see ourselves in this bigger system of exploitation. Let me use an example: child labour. Child labour is a result of poverty. The countries with most child labour are also among the poorest countries or among the countries with a high level of poverty. The fight against child labour has to be fought on all levels to be effective. If we start at the global level, the fight against child labour has to include international conventions as well as economic distribution. But the fight must also include trade regulations, consumer involvement, trans-national corporate social responsibility, national legislation, access to basic education, community development, support to families etc. A holistic approach must include interventions on all levels from human rights issues to individual support. Several of those means include social work. (see e.g. Grimsrud 2002, Tørres/Grønningsæter 2004)

Zigmunt Bauman says that for many people globalisation has localisation as its human consequence. (Bauman 1998) I will quote Patricia Kennet for a short conclusion on the issue of social work and challenges from global social problems:

”There is evidence of increasing inequality and polarization in the distribution of wealth and opportunities of globalisation are unevenly distributed between nations and people”

”Globalisation has benefited many countries, but has also completely marginalised others, particularly in such of Sub-Saharan Africa, and impoverished rural areas of Latin America and Asia” (Kennet 2001)


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To see the person as a whole -
"I have been lucky, because ..."

- The horror stories from users of health and social services
- They are thankful to the social services, as well as to social workers
- But then they tell us at least one horror story
- What do these stories have in common?
- The user is not heard
- Lack of holistic approach

- The next story is the positive story.
- About one person who has been helpful and see him/her as a whole person
- The helper do more that the minimum and see to that the user get what they need.
- The helper is there when there is need for comfort
- The good helper sees the whole situation.

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My second starting point is on a different level. I was involved in several projects that included in depth interviews with users of social services. When we analysed these interviews we saw a common pattern in the stories that the interviewees told us, regardless of the issues we were interviewing them about. Interviews with users of social services are encounters with persons who have to deal with great challenges in life. (see e.g. Grønningsæter 2004, Gautun/Grønningsæter 2002)

First they say that they are thankful to the social services, as well as health personnel and social workers. But then many of the users tell us at least one horror story. There are such stories about e.g. a very sick patient at home, and the doctor did not want to send an ambulance. They tell us about lack of elementary knowledge on hiv/aids, followed by inadequate regimes for protection against transmission. They tell us about gay people met with prejudice. They tell about mistreatment and lack of common sense. These horror stories have in common that the user is not heard, and there is a lack of holistic approach from the health and social service personnel. But when the interviewees have finished these stories they change the angle and then they say: ”but I have been lucky, because ...” And the next story is the positive story. What do the good stories have in common? Mostly they are about one person who has been helpful. It is about meeting a person who sees him/her as a whole person. These helpers do more that the expected minimum, they see to it that the user gets the help that he/she needs. These helpers follow the user from instance to instance and explain the user’s needs. They ask “how are you” and are available when there is need for comfort. The good helper sees the whole picture of the users situation. According to these interviewees the good professional is a person who breaks the boundaries of the professional role.

What I have tried to illustrate by these two examples is the fact that challenges for social work as a profession in a globalised world range from international unjust structures to how we meet each individual that need our services and support

Changing environments and International challenges for social workers



What are the most important ethical challenges for social workers today

- Privatisation and the growing role of the market
- Fragmentation and specialisation
- Growth of multi-disciplinary working
- Declining trust in professionals, concern for accountability
- The 'consumer' movement and demands for service user and participation
- Growing concern with the responsibilities of citizens
- Questioning of universal values
- Changes in society
- Changes in social policy framework
- Professional standards and responsibility
- Relation social worker – user/client
- Relation to society
- Institutional challenges



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The process for developing a new ethical document took as its starting point the following question:

What are the most important challenges for social workers today. Let me start with quoting Sara Banks at a seminar in Oslo. The quote is a good illustration of the link between changing professional environments and ethical challenges in social work today. She mentions the following points:

- Privatisation and the growing role of the market in social care
- Fragmentation and specialisation of social work
- Growth of multi-disciplinary working
- Declining public trust in professionals and concern for more accountability and credibility
- The rise of the 'consumer' movement and demands for service user and community participation
- A growing concern with the responsibilities of citizens
- Questioning of universal values

(see Banks 2001)

And here are some answers we have got from social workers to our question about the most important ethical challenges, the issues are grouped:

Changes in society

- Increased social exclusion, unemployment, poverty,
- Multicultural issues, integration policy
- Liberal economy – money talks

Changes in social policy framework

- Privatisation, Insufficient resources, Tight economic policy
- Balance between ethics and law - What to do when the agency do not provide the assistance or benefits that is described in the law?

Professional standards and responsibility

- Establishing vocational standards and skills;
- Competence and professional development
- Integration of knowledge, skills and values;
- How to develop good practice
- To establish space for ethical considerations

Relation social worker – user/client

- To consider citizens who need support as equal fellow citizens
- To involve clients actively and meaningfully;
- Participation and empowerment
- Tendency towards seeing some people as “not worthy”
- The right to privacy and confidentiality
- Loyalty towards the client;
- To dare to criticise colleagues

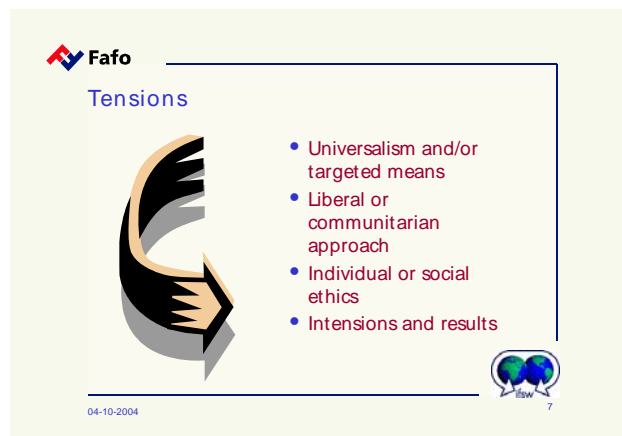
Relation to society

- To value working on social problems; Lack of trust in the profession
- Relation to media; Relation to political bodies
- Defence of human dignity and equal worth of all people

Institutional challenges

- Develop networks across institutional boundaries
- Development of good working culture

Tensions in social work ethics



But the process did not end with defining changes and challenges. The social environment among social workers is diverse. So are also the values of social workers around the world. I must admit that I do not like the concept of dilemmas. It gives the impression that there are only two sides to an issue. Therefore I prefer to use the concept tension. There is not one answer to critical questions. In the process of defining a common ground I find that it is useful to look at tensions and try to find a way through those tensions. I would like to focus on tensions linked to these four dimensions:

- Universalism and/or targeted means
- Liberal or communitarian approach
- Individual or social ethics
- Intentions and results

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Universalism - Individual needs

- Universalism: The same right and benefits are given to every individual independent of their needs and status. The benefit or the service is based on objective criteria.
- Social assistance and community oriented social services are based on means testing and an evaluation of the individual' or family's needs.
- Social work is to a large extent conducted within locally (community or municipality) based social policy frameworks.

 8

04-10-2004

The first of these tensions that I want to mention is between universalism and targeted means. Universalism means that the same right and benefits are given to every individual independently of their needs and status. The benefit or the service is based on objective criteria.

Social assistance and community oriented social services are based on means testing and/or an evaluation of the individual's or family's needs. Social work is to a large extent conducted within locally (community or municipality) based social policy frameworks. For example in my own Nordic context we experience that social services in some cases suffer from a lack of legitimacy. The reason for this might be that the users expect a rights oriented approach, e.g. in the locals social service departments. The social workers will be focused on an evaluation of the user's need and living conditions. Consequently the users get something different from what they expect when they approach the social service departments. The social workers have to work within this tension. Often their clients will represent people that have fallen through the safety net of the universal security system. This phenomenon challenges our concept of fairness and justice.

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Liberal or communitarian approach

- The liberal approach
- The understanding of justice
 - "Combining philosophical dimensions and socio-political distribution will reward our love of wisdom"
 - (Kant)
- The communitarian approach
- Ubuntu (to be human)
 - "A human being becomes a human being among human beings"

 9

04-10-2004

Very often when we discuss ethics in social work we end up in a discussion about an individual or a communitarian approach. And it is true that the liberal approach stresses the individual. But the liberal approach is much more than Margareth Tacher's libertarianism. John Rawls e.g set up his principles of justice, saying:

First sentence: "Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all"

Second sentence "Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both to the greatest benefits of the least advantaged and attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity.

He talks about justice as fairness. A principle of fair distribution must be set up under a veil of ignorance and he continues to say that a maximum just society would be one planned by rational and mutually self interested people ignorant of their own future status. Justice is based on openness of positions and institutions the create inequality. Rawls difference principle says; "

"social inequalities are allowed, providing that they also profit the disadvantaged".

(Rawls 1971)

Dworkin makes a distinction between the distribution of recourses and the values of the individual.

The communitarian critique of liberalism says that the liberal view of the self is empty, and violates our self perceptions. It ignores our embeddedness in communal practice. There is a communitarial "common good" (Kymlika 1990)

An example of a communitarian approach that have fascinated me a lot can be found in the African philosophy of ubuntu. Ubuntu is isiZulu and means to be human. There is a proverb in Sepedi (another South African language) saying "Motho ke motho ka batho" and it means "A human being becomes a human being among human beings". (Mogobe 2002) The fascinating thing about ubuntu is that it in many ways challenges our understanding of solidarity. In a way they say that when I let you help me I include you in my community and you become a human being.

The problematic part of it can be that when you fall outside the community, you also loose your humanity. An example could be being gay. If we do not stress the individual rights strongly we might close our eyes for the violation of a gay person's rights. A communitarian approach is not necessarily concerned about the minority in the minority. Which leads me back to the importance of the distinction between distribution of resources and the respect for the person individual values.

This discussion concerns the relation between institutions, e.g. the state, and the individual. Social workers act as representatives for these institutions. Again, we have to live with the tensions. The answer is not one common international approach. This is an illustration of how difficult it can be to establish international consensus about ethical issues.

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Ethics of nearness and justice

- Nearness
 - Levinas: Meeting with the other person's face
- Justice
 - Rawls: Principles of justice

04-10-2004

10

For me personally two of the most inspiring philosophers have been Emmanuel Levinas and John Rawls. Levinas has a strong emphasis on the relation between two people as a starting point for ethics. Ethics and morals occur when we see the other persons face. Rawls' and his principles of justice represent a very different approach. But I think that when we try to develop ethical awareness among social workers the difference or tension between nearness and justice can be a good starting point.



The slide features the Fafo logo in the top left corner. The title 'Individual or social ethics' is centered at the top. Below the title, there are two main bullet points: 'The individual approach' and 'Solidarity'. Each main point has sub-bullets. At the bottom left, the date '04-10-2004' is visible. At the bottom right, there is a small globe icon with the number '11' below it.


- **The individual approach**
 - The social worker's individual responsibility for his or her own ethical decisions
 - The strong demand for respect for the individual
- **Solidarity**
 - The collective responsibility of the social work community and among colleagues at the work-place
 - A collective and political understanding of social problems.

One of the interesting developments during the process of developing a new ethical document was the strengthening of the social ethical aspects. The first draft was criticised for being too individually oriented. I think this change represent an improvement of the document. At the same time I believe that we now can see much clearer the tension, and we find it on two levels.

The first is the balance between the social workers own responsibility for his/her own actions and the collective responsibility to uphold ethical standards. The other level is the balance between the strong demand for the respect of the individual and on the other hand understanding social problems in a social and political context. "Social workers have an obligation to challenge social conditions that contribute to social exclusion, stigmatisation or subjunction, and to work towards an inclusive society" (from the new document)


The post-modern, globalised world contains a new kind of diverse societies. This is due to new consciousness of the traditional diversity of each society as well as to migration. Social work has to deal with the values of each individual and each community. These might be in conflict with the universal values of the profession.

I believe that we can see the need for interventions on all levels, which actually brings us back to my first point about globalisation, poverty and child labour.

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Intensions – Results

- A profession needs to be able to prove that it's interventions leads to the expected results
- On the other hand the profession also needs to link development of knowledge to practice
- With the aim to legitimise its work a profession must show the probability of links between aims and results, but the social work profession often lack documentation of these links
- Professional ethics must be related both to the intensions and the consequence of the intervention.


04-10-2004  12

A profession needs to be able to prove that it's interventions lead to the expected results. On the other hand the profession also needs to link the development of knowledge to practice. With the aim of legitimising its work a profession must show a probable connection between aims and results, but the social work profession often lack documentation of these connections. (Fløtten et al. 2002)

Let me add a more scary aspect to this dimension. Sætersdal and Heggem (2002) discuss under the headline "With the best intensions" acts that make people feel unimportant, without dignity and powerless. They say that previous misconducts seem to make us angrier than injustice in our own society, and they mention paternalism and indifference as evilness. They go on discussing visible and invisible evil, as well as intended and not intended evilness. There is a proverb saying "The road to hell is paved with good intentions". Is an act good because the intentions are good?

There are many historical examples of how social workers have acted with the best intensions and ended up abusing minorities or individuals; the travellers, deaf people, gays and lesbians. I myself have been a part of such a system, in my first job as a social worker. I was indirectly involved in cooperating with the so-called "mission for the homeless", and organisation working with so-called travellers in Norway (today we call them Romani people). The scary thing was how uncritical we were towards the established system.


Professional ethics must be related both to the intensions and the consequence of the intervention.

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Social work is a part of the societal control of the citizens

- "It is quite unbelievable how much time we use to control the clients of social services"
- Do the social workers see the political effect of their actions?
- Empowerment is a way to give people the ability to manage their own life, or a way to distance oneself from the responsibility to do something about social injustice?

• (Walther Lorenz in the journal Embla – my translation)

04-10-2004  13

There is a duality or ambivalence in the relation between the social workers and society. Social workers are employed because society has a need for governance and control, and this is based on a belief in a rational approach to people. But there is a lack of general consensus on the aims of social work.

Walter Lorenz says in an interview: "It is quite unbelievable how much time we use to control the clients of social services. Do the social workers see the political effect of their actions? Empowerment can be a way to give people the ability to manage their own life, or a way to distance oneself from the responsibility to do something about social injustice?" (From Embla nr. 3/2002) We can contribute to legitimise inequality, even if this is not our intention. In the Northern countries the discourse about workfare and activation as means in social inclusion and fight against poverty illustrates these dilemmas.

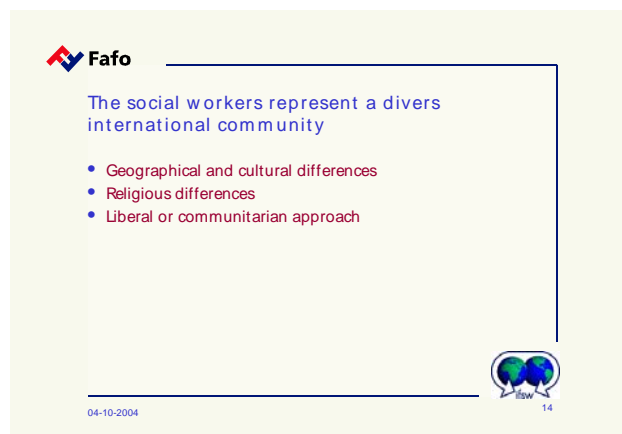
I also want to give you two quotes from a focus group interview with social workers in my own country:

"I have been thinking a lot about that we need to see the power we have as social workers. Many social workers are occupied with ethical issues. We have learned a lot about power, ethics and the view of human beings from a theoretical point of view. It is strange to hear that we have power. It becomes invisible because we are supposed to "give" all the time. We have to be conscious about what we do as social workers, especially when it come to the demands we present to the users". (Grønningsæter 2003)

Another quote is in line with Lorenz:

"It is really unbelievable how much time we use to control the users. We should rather use the time to control where the money comes from". (Grønningsæter 2003)

Social workers need to analyse the political implications of their work.



The social workers represent a diverse international community. We represent geographical and cultural differences, as well as religious differences. And we represent different approaches in the liberal or communitarian discourse.

Maybe the most obvious example is the question about how we view the family and family values. There are e.g. obvious different views on gay and lesbian issues. In the discussion about the new document we saw this in a disagreement about the paragraph on anti-discrimination. On this level it might, however, be relatively easy to agree. The issue become

far more complicated if we start to discuss if gay and lesbians should be allowed to adopt children.

Therefore we needed to find a level of statement that we can agree upon without making the statements so general that they stop challenging our ways of thinking.

The process towards common ethical standards - a short history



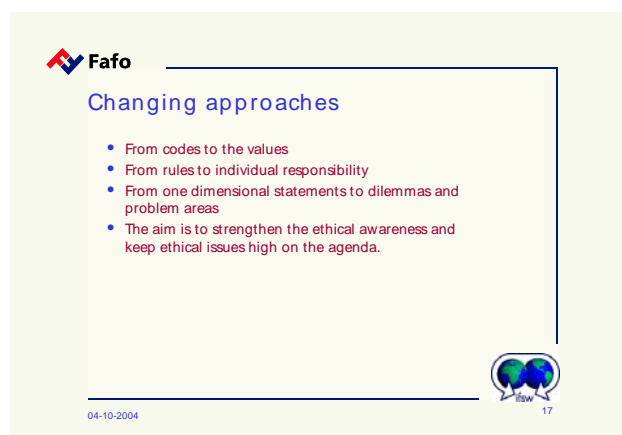
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Towards common ethical standards - a short history

- 1976: International Code of Ethics for the Professional Social Worker
- 1986: International Declaration of Ethical Principles of Social Work,
- 1994: The Ethics of Social Work – Principles and Standards
- 1994: Establishment of the Permanent Committee on Ethical Issue
- 2000: New definition of social work
- 2004: New document: Ethics in social work – statement of principles

04-10-2004  15


IFSW's adopted the first international code of ethics in 1976. The codes were criticised for being to rule oriented, and the declaration of ethical principles were adopted as an alternative in 1986. This changing approach was however quite controversial, so the compromise was that the two documents lived side by side. In 1994 the two documents were merged into one basic ethical document "Ethics of social work – principles and standards" and at the same time the organisation established the "Permanent committee on Ethics". In the year 2004 at last we can see an end to this long lasting debate about how to establish common international ethical standards for social workers. I would add, however, that the debate should never end. Living discussions are the most important tool for promoting ethical awareness in the profession.



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Changing approaches

- From codes to the values
- From rules to individual responsibility
- From one dimensional statements to dilemmas and problem areas
- The aim is to strengthen the ethical awareness and keep ethical issues high on the agenda.

04-10-2004  17

The question has been; what kind of tools do we need in a post-modern society? The principles do not give us concrete directions in situations of conflict. The dilemmas appear in practice and each social worker must consider and reflect on the situation.

We have moved from codes to the values, from rules to individual responsibility and from one-dimensional statements to dilemmas and problem areas. The aim is to strengthen the ethical awareness and keep ethical issues high on the agenda.

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IFSW - Developments




- Traditional codes of conduct
- Declaration on ethical principles in social work
- Compromise: a amalgamated basic document
- Now: a completely new document

 16


04-10-2004

Summing up, we can say that we have moved away from the traditional codes of conduct. Based on a critical discussion about the problematic sides of the rule-oriented codes, the supplementary Declaration on ethical principles in social work was adopted. Then we arrived at a compromise: an amalgamated basic document based on the declaration and the old codes. Today we have a completely new document


To develop a new document – disagreements

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The consultation Process



- Establishing international consensus about a basic ethical document is a slow process
- Hearing process involving national associations and individuals
- The work started in 1998
- First draft 2002
- Second draft 2003
- Final proposal 2004

 18

04-10-2004



Previous discussions


- Today's documents are too complicated and difficult to use
- The document should be a value based statement rather than a code of conduct.
- It should be brief and applicable to all cultures.
- It should deal with universal principles with universal applicability. These principles are linked to human rights and the UN declarations.
- The code must cover both the respect for the individual and the respect for diversity



04-10-2004 19


The previous IFSW documents on ethics were criticized for being too complicated and difficult to use. This led to demands for a new document. The discussions tended towards concluding that the IFSW document should be a value based statement rather than a code of conduct. It should be brief and applicable to all cultures. It should deal with universal principles with universal applicability. These principles are linked to human rights and the UN declarations. Human rights should explicitly be incorporated into the ethical instruments. The basic document should cover both the respect for the individual and the respect for diversity.

The process of developing a new ethical document has been going on for several years with discussions, consultations and hearings in several IFSW bodies. The first draft document was presented in Geneva in July 2002. The second draft was presented for the IFSW Executive Committee in Copenhagen May 2003. All the member organisations of the IFSW were asked to comment on the first draft. The IASSW has been informed of the process of the development of the new document, and has had the opportunity to comment as well.



Some points of discussion during the hearing process

- Social ethics needs more attention
- Compassion and care - and the respect for the individual
- Sexual orientation
- Communitarianism – liberalism
- What kind of document?
 - Code or statement?



04-10-2004 20

Altogether we got almost 40 comments on the two drafts from organisations and individuals. The responses were quite different in form, but there was a general agreement of support for the draft documents among most of the responding organisations. One comment was directly questioning the content of the draft document. It questioned the inclusion of "sexual orientation" in the anti-discrimination paragraph, and suggested an additional paragraph on "Acceptance". In addition one organisation wanted a more developed universal code of conduct. The other comments can be regarded as suggestions for improvements within the line of the drafts.

Some of the comments were interesting in the sense that they raise important and fundamental questions. An example is a statement saying that compassion and care are in contradiction to the principles of autonomy and self-determination. We might here see the beginning of new important discussions in the years to come. In that comment we see a tension between different approaches to ethics, and it is necessary to continue to discuss these tensions. It has been an aim to try to balance these kinds of problems in the document, but these discussions must never be finally concluded.

The broad participation in the process has hopefully lead to a document that can unite social workers around the world on basic ethical issues. The broad interest is partly due to high general interest in ethical issues, but we might also start seeing the fruits of the establishment of the permanent committee, and the fact that there are no two persons in each region that has taken on themselves a special responsibility for setting ethical issues on the agenda.

The new statement of principles



The new document ” *Ethics in Social Work, Statement of Principles*” contains 5 parts:

The following quotes refer to the final proposal. The document that was adopted in Adelaide has gone through some minor editorial changes.

1. Preface



Ethical awareness is a necessary part of the professional practice of social workers. Their ability and commitment to act ethically is an essential aspect of the quality of the service offered to those who use social work services.

The purpose of IASSW and IFSW's work on ethics is to promote ethical debate and reflection in the member organisations, among the providers of social work in member countries, as well as in the schools of social work and among social work students. Some ethical challenges and problems facing social workers are specific to particular countries; others are common. By staying at the level of general principles, the IFSW statement aims to encourage social workers across the world to reflect on the challenges and dilemmas that face them and make ethically informed decisions about how to act in each particular case. Some of these problem areas include:

- The fact that the loyalty of social workers is often in the middle of conflicting interests
- The fact that social workers function as both helpers and controllers
- The conflicts between the duty of social workers to protect the interests of the people with whom they work and societal demands for efficiency and utility.
- The fact that resources in society are limited

This document takes as its starting point the definition of social work adopted by the IFSW at the General Meeting in Montreal, Canada in July 2000 and then jointly with IASSW in Copenhagen in May 2001.(section 2). This definition stresses principles of human rights and social justice. The next section (3) makes reference to the various declarations and conventions on human rights that are relevant to social work, followed by a statement of general ethical principles under the two broad headings of human rights and dignity and social justice (section 4). The final section introduces some basic guidance on ethical conduct in social work, which it is expected would be elaborated by the ethical guidance and in various codes and guidelines of the member organisations of IFSW.

2. Definition of Social Work

The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.

3. International conventions

International human rights declarations and conventions form common standards of achievement, and recognise rights that are accepted by the global community. Documents particularly relevant to social work practice and action are:

- [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)
- [The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#)
- [The International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights](#)
- [The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination](#)
- [The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#)
- [The Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)
- [Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention \(ILO convention 169\)](#)

4. Principles



“Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work”

- Human Rights and Human Dignity
- Respecting the right to self-determination
- Promoting the right to participation
- Treating each person as a whole
- Identifying and developing strengths
- Social Justice
- Challenging negative discrimination
- Recognising diversity
- Distributing resources equitably
- Challenging unjust policies and practices
- Working in solidarity

04-10-2004  23

4.1. Human Rights and Human Dignity

Social work is based on respect for the inherent worth and dignity of all people, and the rights that follow from this. Social workers should uphold and defend each person’s physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual integrity and well-being. This means:

1. Respecting the right to self-determination - Social workers should respect and promote people’s rights to make their own choices and decisions, irrespective of their values and life choices, provided this does not threaten the rights and legitimate interests of others.
2. Promoting the right to participation - Social workers should promote the full involvement and participation of people using their services in ways that enable them to be empowered in all aspects of decisions and actions affecting their lives.
3. Treating each person as a whole - Social workers should be concerned with the whole person, within the family, community and societal and natural environments, and should seek to recognise all aspects of a person’s life.
4. Identifying and developing strengths – Social workers should focus on the strengths of all individuals, groups and communities and thus promote their empowerment.

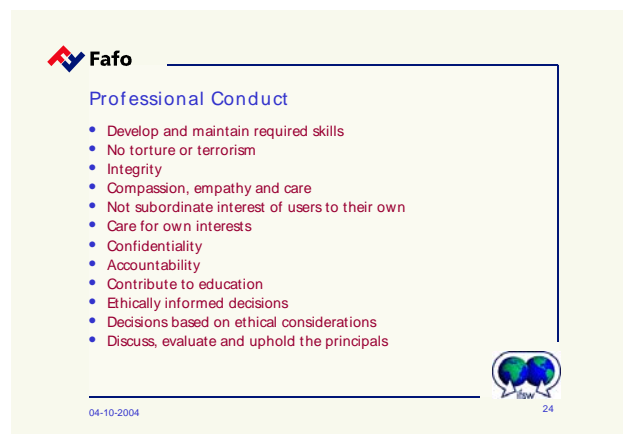
4.2. Social justice

Social workers have a responsibility to promote social justice, in relation to society generally, and in relation to the people with whom they work. This means:

1. Challenging negative discrimination - Social workers have a responsibility to challenge negative discrimination on the basis of characteristics such as ability, age, culture, gender or sex, marital status, socio-economic status, political opinions, skin colour or other physical characteristics, sexual orientation, or spiritual beliefs.
2. Recognising diversity – Social workers should recognise and respect the ethnic and cultural diversity of societies in which they practice, taking account of individual, family, group and community differences.

3. Distributing resources equitably – Social workers should ensure that resources at their disposal are distributed fairly, according to need.
4. Challenging unjust policies and practices – Social workers have a duty to bring to the attention of their employers, policy makers, politicians and the general public situations where people are living in poverty, where resources are inadequate or where distribution of resources, policies and practices are oppressive, unfair or harmful.
5. Working in solidarity - Social workers have an obligation to challenge social conditions that contribute to social exclusion, stigmatisation or subjugation, and to work towards an inclusive society.

5. Professional conduct



It is the responsibility of the national organisations in membership of IFSW to develop and regularly update their own codes of ethics or ethical guidelines, to be consistent with the IFSW statement. It is also the national organisation's responsibility to inform social workers and schools of social work about these codes or guidelines.

Social workers should act in accordance with the ethical code or guidelines current in their country. These will generally include more detailed guidance in ethical practice specific to the national context. The following general guidelines on professional conduct apply:

1. Social workers are expected to develop and maintain the required skills and competence to do their job.
2. Social workers should not allow their skills to be used for inhumane purposes, such as torture or terrorism.
3. Social workers should act with integrity. This includes not abusing the relationship of trust with the people using their services, recognising the boundaries between personal and professional life, and not abusing their position for personal benefit or gain.
4. Social workers should act in relation to the people using their services with compassion, empathy and care.
5. Social workers should not subordinate the needs or interests of people who use their services to their own needs or interests.

6. Social workers have a duty to take necessary steps to care for themselves professionally and personally in the workplace and in society, in order to ensure that they are able to provide appropriate services.
7. Social workers should maintain confidentiality regarding information about people who use their services. Exceptions to this may only be justified on the basis of a greater ethical requirement (such as the preservation of life).
8. Social workers need to acknowledge that they are accountable for their actions to their clients, the people they work with, their colleagues, their employers, the professional association and to the law, and that these accountabilities may conflict.
9. Social workers have a duty to collaborate with the schools of social work in order to support social work students to get practical training of good quality and up to date practical knowledge
10. Social workers should foster and engage in ethical debate with their colleagues and employers and take responsibility for making ethically informed decisions.
11. Social workers should be prepared to state the reasons for their decisions based on ethical considerations, and be accountable for their choices and actions.
12. Social workers should work to create conditions in employing agencies and in their countries where the principles of this statement and those of their own national code (if applicable) are discussed, evaluated and upheld.

Fafo

Congratulations

- We have ended a process and another starts
- A statement is just a piece of paper, now we must make it live
- The document must be used to encourage ethical awareness and discussions.
- We need to continue the process of developing our ethics and values.
- The new document is not a catechism, but an inspiration to further work

04-10-2004 

The adoption of a new international basic ethical document is an historic moment for the profession. The statement is however only a piece of paper. From now on the document must be used to encourage ethical awareness and discussions. We need to continue the process of developing our ethics and values. My hope is that the new statement of principles will be an inspiration for further work, and new discussions. I hope that it will contribute to ethical awareness among social work practitioners around the world, as well as in the institutions for social work education.

Let me finish with a quote from Zygmunt Bauman:

In his/her constant search for the meanings of demand and responsibility, the moral self will never ascertain what he/she is looking for. It is, however, only while searching for this moral certainty that the self can become and remain moral.

(my translation of a Norwegian translation of Zygmunt Bauman)



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