VÝZNAM ETIKY VO VZDELÁVANÍ V SOCIÁLNEJ PRÁCI

THE IMPORTANCE OF ETHICAL EDUCATION IN SOCIAL WORK

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Abstrakt

Tento príspevok sa zaoberá otázkou etického vzdelávania za účelom rozvoja vhodných postojov u študentov sociálnej práce smerom k ich budúcim klientom. Príspevok je rozdelený do dvoch častí. Prvá z nich analyzuje vybrané etické dilemy v sociálnej práci s klientom sociálnej starostlivosti, spojené, okrem iného, s problémom bezpodmienečného prijatia všetkých klientov, rešpektovania ich rozhodnutí a uznania práva na sebaurčenie, alebo potreby individualizovania každého prípadu v procese poskytovania pomoci. Druhá časť príspevku sa zaoberá otázkou rozvoja etických postojov prostredníctvom akademického vzdelávania budúcich sociálnych pracovníkov. Ukazuje možnosti rozvoja špecifických osobnostných a sociálnych kompetencií na základe získaných vedomostí a schopností študentov s ohľadom na znalosti ľudskej povahy, rozvoj jedinca a jeho fungovanie v sociálnom prostredí, ako aj metodológiu sociálnej práce s osobitným dôrazom na metódu prípadovej práce.

Kľúčové slová

Sociálna práca. Etické vzdelávanie. Etické dilemy. Etické postoje. Sociálne kompetencie.

Abstract

This article examines the issue of ethical education for the purposes of development of appropriate attitudes in students of social work towards their future social clients. The article has been divided into two parts. The first one analyzes assorted ethical dilemmas in social work with a client of social welfare, connected, among others, with a problem of imperative acceptance of all clients, respect of their decisions and appreciation of the right of self-determination, or a need to individualize each case in the process of aid provision. The second part of the article examines the issue of development of ethical attitudes through academic education of future social workers. It shows the possibilities of development of specific personal and social competences on the basis of knowledge and abilities acquired by students with regard to the knowledge of human nature, development of an individual and his functioning in a social environment, as well as methodology of social work with special emphasis to the casework method.

Key words

Social Work. Ethical Education. Ethical Dilemmas. Ethical Attitudes. Social Competences.

Introduction

In the broadest sense, ethics is a system of values and norms of behaviour binding in a given community, social group or historical epoch (Dunaj, 2001: 242). Ethics also denotes the set of principles determining the behaviour in a given area or profession. This is the so-called professional ethics, understood as "a set of principles and norms determining how members of a given profession should behave from the moral viewpoint" (Jedynak, 1990: 71).

Ethical standards are among the most important elements of development of the ethos of a professional group and they usually occur as codified rules in the form of ethical codes accepted for a given profession. In Poland, the ethical standards of social work are regulated by the Ethical Code prepared and published by the Polish Society of Social Workers in 1998. Apart from general rules of behaviour of a social worker, it also determines the principles of ethical responsibility towards the client, co-workers, employer, as well as towards own profession and the entire society. Similar codes function in other countries, such as Slovakia (of 1997), the United States of America (of 1979) or Canada (of 1983). Their role is to

improve the quality of work in this profession by consolidation of ethical attitudes of social workers (Brągiel, 2002: 83-84, 87; Žilowá, Janigová, 2007: 52-53; Kwaśniewski, 1998, 116-124; Łuczyńska, 1998: 115-118, Zbyrad, 2009: 410-411).

Social work is a special kind of profession. It is a process of long-term aid provided to individuals, families and groups in difficult life situation. Therefore, it includes actions intended to improve the living conditions of individuals and groups, e.g. by supporting their activity in overcoming of various hazards and consolidating their strength and living capabilities (Dubois, Miley, 1996: 25). Social workers bear a special responsibility, since in their implementation of tasks for the needy, they are simultaneously representatives of the entire society and its interests. Their social mandate results from their public function, and this gives rise to a necessity of observance of higher moral standards in work with a social client (Kamiński, 2000: 2; Łoś, 2007: 76).

As Józefa Brągiel stresses, "the plane in which the ethicality of the profession of social worker expressly reveals itself is a day-to-day work with a client" (2002: 70). Therefore, the author of this article wants to pay special attention to ethical standards binding in social worker's relation with a client of social welfare, and consequently to the problem of development of proper attitudes in future social workers already during their academic education. A social worker needs more than professional knowledge and practical abilities to work effectively. Another essential element is adherence to high ethical standards, and consequently, a proper attitude towards the client.

Before we proceed to demonstration of the possibilities of ethical education in social work on the academic level, it is worth paying attention to the specificity of the profession, which gives rise to many moral dilemmas which in turn, in lack of a well-developed ethical attitude, may cause a dysfunction of the entire process of aid to another human.

1. Assorted ethical dilemmas in social work with a client and the attitudes of social workers

Social workers, carrying out their professional responsibilities, often face the issue of solving various dilemmas, including moral ones. Ethical dilemmas are an essential part of this profession (Kaźmierczak, Łuczyńska, 1996: 110-112; Brągiel, 2002: 77-79; Sutton, 2007: 225-231). Taking into consideration the range and complexity of problems faced by a social worker, as well as the differentiation of categories of beneficiaries of the social welfare system, it is worth to recollect the most important principles of social work with a client. Usually, the following ones are mentioned: the principles of doing good, of acceptance of a social client, of individualization of each case, as well as of clients' self-determination and their cooperation in the process of aid provision (Kitchener, 1984: 45-47; Brągiel, 2002: 79-81).

a) The good of the client
An essential premise of social work is the assumption that the supreme value is always a human with a right to respect for his dignity. Therefore, a special emphasis in social work is put on subjective treatment of clients and imperative following of the principle of their good (Brągiel, 2002: 69-70; Majchrowska, 2005: 223).

The care about the clients' good demands involvement, thorough recognition of their life situation, needs and capabilities from a social worker. Only comprehensive and extensive actions by social workers can contribute to the achievement of a broadly defined good of a given person (Szatur-Jaworska, 1993: 91). The care about the client's good means that the provided aid should be relevant to the recognized needs of the client. Therefore, it is

unacceptable to condition the aid on any circumstances or traits of the client. However, as the survey conducted by the Chair of Social Pedagogy of the Opole University shows, every tenth social worker (10 % of the general population of 188 respondents) conditions the provision of aid on client's honesty, truthfulness or will to cooperate (Brągiel, 2002: 75).

It is not uncommon that the care about the client's good gives way to clerkish attitude of a social worker. This is evidenced by the research conducted by the Institute of Sociology of the Catholic University of Lublin in Stalowa Wola at 70 social welfare centres of the Podkarpackie Voivodeship. A majority of the surveyed social workers (¾ of the surveyed population) have declared that with regard to the broadly defined good of the client, they "did the best they could, in accordance with the regulations". Synonyms of this statement, as stressed by Teresa Zbyrad, the author of the survey, could also be the statements: "I can do nothing more", "such are the regulations", "it is not my fault" etc. Only one fifth of the surveyed social workers (21 %) were ready to involve actively for the benefit of their clients, claiming that the good of the client is more important that the effort and difficulty of this work, and only 5 % of respondents have given priority to the good of the client over pecuniary gratification connected with their profession (Zbyrad, 2009a: 114).

b) Acceptance of the client

The principle of acceptance obliges the social worker to accept all clients, regardless of who they are, in what environments they live, what are their life problems, beliefs, attitudes etc. It is unquestionably a principle which requires a social worker to have a mature moral attitude, based on kindness, forbearance and empathy. However, a hindrance can be the fact that in their work, social workers face a wide range of matters and problems, as well as various categories of beneficiaries of the social welfare system. They include destitute, unemployed, homeless or handicapped people, former prisoners, alcohol or other intoxicant addicts, victims of natural disasters etc. The "clients" of social welfare are also entire families with a differentiated range of problems, such as domestic violence, upbringing inefficiency, numerousness, single-parenthood and many others (Bulenda, 1998: 311-317; Sutton, 2007: 224; Zbyrad, 2009b: 404).

A social worker, in view of such a wide range of social problems, can feel aversion towards a specific category of clients (e.g. alcoholics, domestic violence perpetrators, former prisoners), according to the belief "they got what they deserved". The acceptance of a client or a lack thereof may be connected with a simplified division into those who are "guilty" and those who have been "wronged by fate". A tendency of such treatment of clients is not uncommon among social workers. For example, the already mentioned survey from the Opole Voivodeship has shown that 41 % of social workers claimed their clients had consciously chosen their way of life, and 37 % of the surveyed, that their clients were not wronged by fate. Moreover, every fifth of the surveyed (20 %) attributed "ill will" and a tendency to violate social and moral principles to their clients (Mudrecka, 2002: 134).

The division into the "guilty" and the "wronged" can also apply to members of a single family benefiting from social welfare. An example of such situation can be domestic violence. A social worker may feel inclined to take the side of a victim of violence (also with regard to the provided aid), while they not only can feel but also show clear aversion towards the perpetrator. In lack of acceptance of a client, it is hard to expect a social worker to take an effort to understand the complex mechanisms of behaviour of the perpetrators and to convince them to change such behaviour. To motivate them to change their behaviour, the social worker would rather "threaten" the perpetrator with criminal law consequences.

However, the acceptance of a client (as a person) does not mean approval of all his behaviour. A social worker often faces the dilemma of passing judgments or opinions, or a

necessity to assume an attitude to the behaviour (or lack of activity) of the client. The principle which should be guiding in social work with a client can be formulated as follows: we always evaluate a specific behaviour, not the person behaving in a specific way (Mudrecka, 2002: 132).

c) Case individualization

The principle of case individualization means treatment of each social client as a unique and exceptional individual, even if the client is seemingly in a similar life situation as other ones. This principle simultaneously assumes a necessity of thorough recognition of the clients' family and social situation, as well as their needs and capabilities. Simultaneously, it adjusts the scope and kind of the aid provided to the client to the revealed problems and needs. The principle of case individualization also states that any "labelling" of the clients, i.e. assigning them to one category of another, is unacceptable. It gives rise to the hazard of stigmatization of a specific group of clients, that is, of attributing of presupposed negative characteristics or tendencies to them.

Are such attitudes not uncommon to social workers, if they can, more often than other professions, contact not only individuals but entire socially-stigmatized groups (e.g. ethnic groups such as the Roma) (Łęcki, Szóstak, 1999: 45)? The survey of social workers in the Opole Voivodeship have shown that many of them tend to stigmatize their clients. Every second respondent (50 %) has stated that no social aid should be provided to alcoholics since "they do not want any change of their situation, only alcohol". In the opinion of the surveyed, another group not deserving the aid are people working in the grey area (25 %) because they not only hide their actual earnings but also avoid the "legal" work (Brągiel, 2002: 77-78).

d) Client's cooperation and self-determination

Every individual has an inalienable right of self-determination. This requires the social worker to consider and respect the clients' decision, their own suggestions of changes, as well as fears and doubts with regard to the proposed solutions. It is unacceptable to exert any pressure on the client, even in the name of the aforementioned good of the client. Such tendency can guide these social workers who believe they "know better" what is good for their client. This problem is illustrated by the survey of social workers of the Opole Voivodeship, which has shown that only 2/3 of the surveyed population (i.e. 64 %) claimed that social clients should be treated as equal partners, while more than half of the surveyed (53 %) were convinced that clients should not be fully trusted (Mudrecka, 2002: 135). Such attitude excludes a possibility of cooperation of clients in activities intended to improve their life situation. However, the participation of clients is a necessary condition of effectiveness of social welfare, the final goal of which is achievement of life independence by clients and their ability to solve their own life problems without the assistance of a social worker.

Simultaneously, it should be kept in mind that provision of social aid is always connected with some intervention in the life, autonomy and sense of independence of another person (Brągiel, 2002: 77). However, a social worker's striving to overcome the passivity of clients or motivating them to undertake actions in order to improve their difficult life situation is not a violation of the principle of the client's self-determination. However, it requires a social worker to be patient and able not to be discouraged by failures or by a necessity of multiple undertaking of the same actions towards the client. Moreover, a social worker should always take into consideration the capabilities and abilities of clients, in order not to set impossible goals to them.

Unquestionably, one of the most difficult problems of ethical nature in the field of social work is undertaking of actions or provision of specific services against client's will (Brągiel,

2002: 76; Łuczyńska, 1998: 109). As an entry in the *Ethical Code of the Polish Society of Social Workers* says, in particular situations workers are entitled to provide aid without the client's consent. They can also cease to provide aid without the client's consent, if the possibilities of aid provided by law have been exhausted (1998: 117). Here, the client's right of free choice and self-determination may be limited in the name of a higher value, such as life and health of an individual (a client or members of his family). Nevertheless, a behaviour against the client's will is (with regard to both the kind of the provided aid and the manner of its fulfillment) always a source of strong emotions for social workers, even if the final decision is preceded by persuasion of clients to change their behaviour (Olech, 1998: 170).

2. Assorted areas of education in the field of social work and their importance in the process of development of ethical attitudes

The academic major named "social work" is available in Poland since 2007. Earlier, the preparation for the profession of social worker was conducted during studies at the specialty of the same name at the following majors: pedagogy, special pedagogy, political science, social policy, psychology, sociology and family studies. In 2007, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education issued an order on the standards of education at the undergraduate studies in social work (Annex No. 84, Journal of Laws 2007, No. 164, entry 1166). In the Polish system of higher education, the works intended to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the education system and to adjust it to the requirements of the Bologna Process are still in progress (Wyrozębski, 2009: 20). This applies to definition and determination of the effects of education with regard to both the knowledge and abilities and specific personal and social competences acquired by a graduate.

Social work as a scientific discipline is an interdisciplinary field, taking advantage of the theoretical achievements of various humanist and social sciences, such as psychology, pedagogy, sociology, social policy, social pathology, social philosophy and ethics etc. Development of ethical attitudes of future social workers should be done not only through acquisition of knowledge of general ethics (defined as a science of morality) but also through education in other fields of knowledge. The possibilities of development of ethical attitudes of future social workers on the basis of knowledge of various scientific disciplines, acquired through academic education, will be shown below.

a) The importance of knowledge of human nature

From the viewpoint of development of the ethical attitude of future social workers towards the clients of social welfare, the knowledge of general psychology and philosophy seems to be extremely important, especially the knowledge about a human and the human nature. The choice of a specific model of conduct towards the social client depends to a large degree on the assumed concept (philosophy) of human. Specific acquired views on the nature of other humans not only affect the kind of attitude towards them but also determine the perspective of the provided assistance.

In psychology, four main theoretical concepts of human are distinguished: behavioral, psychodynamic, cognitive and humanist (Kozielecki, 2000: 24-28). Adoption by a future social worker of the behavioral view of the human nature, assuming humans develop their behaviour under the influence of external stimuli coming from the social environment, may cause assumption of an authoritarian attitude towards future social clients, resulting in treating them in an instrumental and manipulative manner. Thus, the actions towards clients can be limited solely to control of their behaviour or "motivating" them to change their behaviour under pain of specific sanctions (such as cessation of aid) (Olubiński, 2004: 20; Sutto, 2007:

31-36). The psychodynamic concept should also be critically evaluated with regard to development of an appropriate attitude of future social workers. It assumes that the human behaviour is a result of inborn, and therefore unchangeable, instincts and strivings. Adoption of such understanding of human nature denies any sense in provision of any aid whatsoever to the client. Since alcoholism, poverty, aggression etc. are derivates of some inborn mental disorder, activities of a social worker are doomed to fail because clients will return to their old way of life anyway (Olubiński, 2004: 20-21; Sutton, 2007: 27-31).

The development of attitudes of future social workers should be done in the spirit of complication of knowledge adopting a cognitive and humanist viewpoint on human nature. The cognitive concept assumes that humans "process" the information reaching them and develop their behaviour depending on their knowledge. With such assumption, future social workers will perceive their professional role in the context of necessity to make the clients realize what conditions and circumstances have led them to their difficult life situation. They will also strive to mobilize the clients to acquire new abilities facilitating their future independent functioning. This attitude is also supported by the understanding of human nature in the humanist trend, defining human actions as an expression of the natural tendency of self-actualization, fulfillment of own strength and capabilities. Adopting the humanist viewpoint, we assume there are no people evil "by nature" and the fact that not everyone behaves in accordance with social norms and expectations, does not result from their ill will but from e.g. difficult living conditions, failed socialization, unfortunate coincidences etc. A social worker will therefore seek to activate the social clients by creating conditions which would enable them to notice their self-development potential (Olubiński, 2004: 21-22; Sutton, 2007: 36-40). It is worth adding that only this attitude guarantees fully subjective treatment of clients, taking into consideration their dignity and right of self-determination.

b) The importance of knowledge of development of an individual

For the purposes of development of ethically appropriate attitude of future social workers towards the clients of social welfare, it is also necessary to acquire the knowledge on the development phases in human life and the regularities governing them (e.g. knowledge of general pedagogy, developmental psychology, social pedagogy). The attitude of acceptance, kind understanding and respect for the individual's right of self-determination is affected by knowledge of specific developmental needs and opportunities of a human, from the youngest childhood to the period of advanced old age, considering all aspects of this development, i.e. the physical, emotional and social aspect. Here, a significant role is played by acquisition of knowledge of conditions of proper development of individuals, changes occurring in their physical and emotional development, as well as possible interferences of this process influenced by biological (organic), psychical and environmental factors (also in the fetal period). The future social workers will also be more inclined to kind care about helpless persons, who cannot manage their problems and have difficulties in social adaptation, by knowledge and understanding of the significance of crises in human life (e.g. in adolescence), as well as of psycho-social mechanisms of emergence of behaviour disorders, including aggressive and asocial behaviour.

c) The importance of knowledge on the individual's functioning in the social environment

The elementary knowledge of sociology, including the sociology of deviation and social pathology, is another necessary element of development of positive attitudes of future social workers towards their clients. The attitude of understanding and acceptance of a socially-unadapted, passive individual, violating the social and legal norms, arises on the basis of understanding of mechanisms of functioning of an individual in a social world, subject to

complex interactions by various social groups and environments (e.g. family, school, peer groups, neighbours etc.) Consideration of unfavourable factors of the living environment of an individual, such as disorder of a group bond, family split, poverty, pathologies of family life and many other dysfunctions within small social groups, not only is a necessary condition of understanding of the difficult situation of a social client, but also of adjustment of the aid process to both his needs and possibilities.

Of special significance for the development of the attitude of acceptance towards social clients is also knowledge and understanding of the social course of the process of evaluation of various phenomena occurring in a specific social and cultural reality, including the causes of arising of prejudices and stigmatization towards chosen individuals or social groups.

d) The importance of knowledge of methodology of social work

The consolidation of the ethical attitude of future social workers towards clients of social welfare should be conducted through acquisition of knowledge and perfection of abilities connected with methods of work with an individual case. It is one of the main methods of social work. It requires a specific attitude towards another person and adherence to the main principles of social work: subjective treatment of a client, imperative acceptance of him, treatment of each case as unique, consideration and respect of client's decisions, treating the client as an equal partner in the process of initiated changes, as well as complex treatment, and therefore perception, of an individual as living in a specific environment and involved in various social relations (Mudrecka, 2002: 132).

A necessary condition of this method is development of an atmosphere of trust and mutual understanding, supporting the release of client's sense of safety. Therefore, it is no less important to acquire knowledge and to develop abilities of interpersonal communication with the client. It is connected, among others, with development of the ability to correctly decipher the verbal and non-verbal signals of the interlocutor, to understand his intents, to formulate messages suitable for the perception abilities of the client, to listen actively, to arrange a place of conversation with the client, as well as the abilities of persuasion, negotiation and agreement of positions etc. (Łęcki, Szóstak, 1999).

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Only assorted areas of education of social workers, supporting the acquisition of specific social competences, have been outlined above. In subjective opinion of the author of the present article, their importance for the purposes of development of positive attitudes towards the clients of social welfare is significant. Effects of this education should be reflected in the following social competences, revealing in:

- being convinced about the "good" nature of all humans and their natural aspiration to self-actualization and development with no organic, psychological or social limitations,
- an ability to notice positive traits, as well as the ability to actively solve own life problems, in every individual,
- conscious acceptance of all clients of social welfare, regardless of their deeds, the environment they live in and their life problems,
- assumption that even if behaviour of a human does not comply with social norms, the reasons of wrong behaviour can always be discovered and counteracted,
- assumption that every human may make mistakes, therefore one should refrain from passing moral judgments on persons, violating their sense of self-esteem and personal dignity,

- belief on the social nature of humans involved in complex relations with the social environment, and consequently, acceptance of a necessity of long-term interactions with a human taking into consideration the entire environment of his life,
- acceptance of the human right of self-determination of oneself and one's fate, and consequently, respect of their decisions and appreciation of their activity in the process of initiated changes,
- awareness of the importance of cooperation of clients in the process of proposed aid, without imposing solutions they do not accept or cannot manage.

Acquisition of the above competences by a social work graduate helps consolidate the attitude of subjective treatment of clients of social welfare, full with acceptance and kind forbearance, and thus simultaneously guarantees high efficiency of social work.

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