

CODE OF ETHICS AS A PROFESSIONAL TOOL IN THE WORK OF PERSONAL ASSISTANTS

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In their almost daily routine, personal assistants face particular ethical questions. Their awareness, search for answers and consideration of the questions in general require due diligence and time. The main purpose of the text is to investigate the extent familiarity with a code of ethics influences social service workers, especially personal assistants. What is the applicability of a code of ethics when dealing with ethical dilemmas in relation to doing this job? Furthermore, we will investigate these assistants' familiarity with a code of ethics.

Keywords: *ethical dilemma, code of ethics, ethics, personal assistance, professional profile.*

INTRODUCTION

The very topic of ethics in social work has not been an area that would lack research in the last decade. The issue resonates with both experts here at home and from abroad. The crucial subject is the client/user who is viewed in the field of social work as an individual needing a specific form and degree of assistance and support. “[T]he aim of social work is to especially support the ability of the client to resolve a situation in which she/he is found, accept it and manage problems that surround her/him, and in a given problem develop and work on the improvement of the current state” (Gulová, 2011: 30). In a professional sense, we want

to extend the bounds of social work. This direction includes the necessary systematic support of independent actors from social work, i.e. individuals who offer or want to assist and support in their positions as professionals.

“Social work will always reflect the values (because it intervenes into important aspects of everyday life), and at the same time, it will always be prone to conflict too (because its goals may not necessarily be acceptable to all members of society)” (Nečasová, 2001: 9).

Social work is thus bound to the values that would be presupposed by our professional role, although it depends on the social worker or social service worker. The ethical dimensions of social work are evident not only in terms of the field's historical development and new findings. Instead, there always were, are and also will be ethical dilemmas that change with the development of society. We must not, however, omit who is also the main actor in social work, when our paper concerns them, i.e. the personal assistants who step into this professional role not only with specific knowledge and skills, but also their own personalities that should interact with the ethical aspects of the profession in question.

The social service providers in the form of personal assistance are engaged in important tasks concerning the quality of care. For example, it includes increasing the quality of the provided service, handling ethical dilemmas, following regulations and internal guidelines, and increasing the responsibility of personal assistants in relation to activities being performed. This development is reflected in the composition of the population. It relates to the changes in the traits of care applicants and the changes in the demand for care. Of particular importance is the growth in the number of seniors and the attempt at providing optimal care for individuals with disabilities. It is thus personal assistants primarily facing specific ethical questions in their everyday experience. Their awareness and search for answers to these questions and consideration of them, however, demand necessary diligence and time. The time for reflection over one's own conduct requires a degree of attention that personal assistants often “cannot afford”. Consequently, the importance of ethics and its influence may be trivialised.

A user of a social service in the form of **personal assistance** is a person who enters into a contractual relationship with the provider of a social service that involves the provision of these activities that are mentioned in the paragraphs below. As stated in Act No. 108/2006 Coll. on Social Services (2006), the services provided therefore include:

- assistance when managing activities of daily living (ADLs) (using the toilet, dressing, turning schedule);
- support and development of self-care;
- assistance with personal hygiene, meals and household chores (tidying, vacuuming, doing the laundry and ironing);
- educational, training and knowledge-acquisition activities;
- mediating contact with the social environment (visits to the theatre and other activities);
- help in exercising rights, entitled interests and in arranging personal matters (transport to a government office).

Based on the list of services that come under personal assistance, it is evident that users of this service form a very diverse group, and it will not be limited here in any respect. A personal assistance user may in fact be any citizen with different types of disadvantages who is determined to achieve maximum independence through their own efforts. Seniors, people with physical handicaps, people with sensory disabilities, people with intellectual handicaps and people with chronic illnesses are among the frequent users, but there are other types of disadvantages. We confirm the diversity of users even in the research section, which involved cooperation with organisations and different users.

Act No. 108/2006 Coll., on Social Services (2006) defines personal assistance as “social services in the field provided to people who have reduced self-sufficiency because of age, chronic illness or disabilities and whose situation requires assistance from another natural person. The service may be provided without a time limit (i.e. 24 hours a day, seven days a week), in a natural social setting and as part of activities that a person needs. “The aim of personal assistance is the preservation of a person’s integrity and provision of dignified support and assistance “despite the disability resulting from a handicap, old age or illness”. As

Hrdá discusses (1997:4), “an important condition is respect for her/his dignity and lifestyle. To meet this aim, the services should allow citizens to live at home, at a standard of living that is as close as possible to the ordinary level.” Personal assistance is a means of maintaining social ties with the family and with the surroundings, thus preventing social isolation of the users. Personal assistance may be combined with a different service such as protected living or home medical care, depending on the needs of the individual.

Regarding the research objective, it is essential to focus on the **professional profile of the personal assistant**. This focus is primarily intended to discuss the responsibility for quality care then, later, discuss the focus on professional attitude and values. A professional relationship and responsibility in the provision of quality care is closely connected with the ethical behaviour and conduct of a personal assistant. The organisation–provider of a social service delegates to a specific social worker, i.e. in our case a personal assistant, a specific relationship, namely a carer relationship with a user. The institution/provider’s responsibility for quality does not end here. The whole organisation has to constantly support the social worker’s job. The definition of the social worker’s and institution’s role is derived from the collective responsibility for team care. This may be made directly operational in specific measures that motivate the social worker in her/his work: pay, place of work and administrative support. The institution’s content is helpful. This means that the social worker has her/his own responsibility for the content obligation, namely to recognise it in its policy. Not only the provision of quality care for a social service user, but also ensuring the institution’s care of the social worker, follows from this. Only in this connection can shared responsibility take shape.

Quality care and support on the part of the organisation provides the social worker with the supportive environment to do her/his direct job with the user (Laan van der, 1998). This type of support requires both time and quality – this means allowing time for initial and work discussions, supervision, the option for training and other means of increasing qualifications and other education. This offer cannot be “non-binding”

since the institution as a moral actor should bear its own share of the responsibility for quality care. The institution forms through content management of the executive staff its own responsibility for quality care.

The basis for providing quality care is still more often the specified demand of applicants for care. This requires a different way of thinking by helpers and carers who thus evaluate the demand and attempt to accommodate the applicants for care. This means to ask: "What type of applicant for care is reaching out to me, and what is her/his real request?" The development is connected to the adequate attention in handling psychological problems among all users and with the greater use of compensatory aids.

Accepting the notion that a job is satisfying, that it brings definite fulfilment and that it in part gives life a sense of meaning is becoming the path to identifying with work and the acceptance of this activity as one's own. The nature of a job along with the personality of the individual, as well as with social factors, may positively influence identification with a job. Jurovský (1980) and Laan van der (1998) agree that a social worker easily identifies with work that is varied, provides feedback and offers chances to participate in the decision-making.

Values and expertise depend on personal and professional ethics. Responsibly drawing attention to moral inconsistencies when they are confronted with them is among the principal professional ethics of social service workers as well as social workers. A professional attitude is co-founded on a professional code that is a part of the professional standards. Professional attitudes are a summary of the views on a person's and society's behaviour. The maintenance of specific norms and values connected with doing the job stem from this. An important element of a professional attitude is still the requirement that a personal assistant be able to act on her/his own, which will be critically tested in relation to the performance of the job. In this way, a generally valid professional attitude acquires an individual tone. A professional attitude is important in every situation and moment of care. Various situations during the carrying out of care work place a range of demands on the competency that are connected to the professional attitude. It may also happen that

the surroundings themselves will frame the discussion. The personal assistant is more often finding her/himself in situations in which ethical questions play a part. Professions that are characterised by values also require, apart from expertise and skills, a relationship to doing the job. The value nature of a profession then requires an ethical approach. "We do not have to doubt that the relationship with the client is an essential component of the job in the helping professions" (Kopřiva, 2013:15). The values of the profession are generally unwritten. An exception is the gradually developing codes of ethics and professional codes in which the professional values are described along with the characteristic traits that define a given profession, particularly in relation to the users. A social worker by using specific expertise bears unwritten moral and legal responsibility that her/his behaviour and conduct will comply with the professional code. Professional values are a broad system that are further defined for the greater effectiveness of a job in certain organisations (Kárníková, 1997).

Professional ethics exist as a part of general principles of civil morality. This means that the personal assistant has to act in accordance with her/his own conscience, integrity and civic morality. Questions of ethics in practice are often very complex. It is important to pay attention to the moral content of a job, although it is a time-demanding task.

Methodical performance of the profession refers to a systematic method by which tasks focused on the requirements of the user are being done. The process of the personal assistant is an ordinary method of systematic, methodical and purposeful behaviour. Care, according to Haterd van de (2000), is provided in four steps:

- stipulating the care
- scheduling
- carrying out the care
- evaluating the care.

The process of personal assistance is not a static whole, but a dynamic process. We are constantly evaluating and monitoring in all the phases of the process. Using the data thus obtained, the service becomes transferable, verifiable and open to inspection. The new information or

unexpected findings may lead to changes in the approach of a personal assistant. Evaluating the whole process of care may also lead to modification in the care provided.

According to Mlčák (2005), the competence of the professional attitude is characterised by:

- Communicative and social skills that appear in different situations;
- Respecting a user without regard to her/his social and economic status, political persuasion, education, race, gender and age; (However, we take into account the values and norms, wishes and habits as well as the feelings of the applicant for care.)
- Having a chance to enter into, maintain and terminate a functioning relationship with the applicant;
- To know how to work with various types of interests such as the interests of the applicant and the institution;
- Able to bear responsibility for her/his own actions and be able to defend her/his own boundaries. To manage a large workload as well as difficult work circumstances; showing initiative in handling changes;
- Awareness of own values and standards. Know how to reflect on one's own behaviour and experiences and know how to discuss them.

Practical competence is the aggregate of all that a social worker does and how she/he does it while working with a user. Practical competence in this sense are specifically described as follows: "It is not anything different than an overview of totally obvious behaviour of a social worker who works with her client reasonably and with interest and, in so doing, makes use of a whole range of possibilities, contacts and knowledge" (Havrdová, 1999:48). We may only add that it does not only apply to female but also male social workers.

Social workers and ethics have concerns in common. Ethics places an ordinary demand on a person to behave in accordance with society. Social work, as a professional discipline, reflects the specific requirements of the socially formed contract. "Both these dimensions of ethics for

social work derive from one so-called social ethos. Their conflict, which we understand as a conflict of the general requirement for high-quality behaviour and the requirement of fulfilling the social contract through the profession of social work, stands at the foundation of the problem that even affects this final social worker" (Fischer, 2008:9).

As far as the ethics of social work as a profession and ethics of a social service worker / social worker are concerned, then it is possible to distinguish between several levels in which ethics plays a role. Ethics of social work contains three elements. In the first place, there is the value on which the profession focuses. It is how people function in their social relations.

The profession's legitimisation and the setting of its objectives is grounded in the social recognition of this value. In second place there are rules of behaviour for doing the job. These rules are derived from the norms generally applicable in society and find expression in the Code of Ethics of the Society for Social Workers of the Czech Republic. In third place, there is the area of problem solving and decision-making. Social workers are of the opinion that applicants for care have their own responsibility for matters that concern them, for decisions they should make. However, assuming their own responsibility always lies in a force field of interests, (im)possibilities and needs. The opinions of applicants and other stakeholders in care work on what "should" be done also play a role here. The possibility for various values and norms that appear in decisions and choices to be considered and mutually evaluated is thus provided to all stakeholders. A social worker / social service worker points to the facts that the user overlooks. Besides this, the opinions of all stakeholders – including the social worker / the social service worker – may be critically evaluated. This presumes the intimate knowledge of the ethical component in the everyday activity of people.

What is and is not ethical for a social service worker is in several cases possible to clarify even within the collective task of social work. The collective task of social work creates a framework providing sense to professional practice. The understanding of social work and at the same time even what social service users and others may require of it is

thus a given. A social worker's goal is that people develop better in interaction with their surroundings, according to their own nature, needs and opinions. Illustrating the relationship between the ethics and task of social work may involve the confidentiality of information that the social service worker obtains from users.

Social work understands itself as a profession of providing help which includes a relationship based on trust. Therefore, it is no accident that confidentiality and discretion occupy an important place in the professional code. In order to be morally acceptable, it is necessary to distinguish between the following aspects that are decisive for outlining ethics and its acceptability:

- values, norms, morality;
- decision-making – handling problems;
- professional ethics;
- personality and attitude (Haterd van de et. al, 2000).

Focusing on value orientation – value orientation means a “hierarchically arranged system of values that is created over one's life and that reflect the actual ranking of the importance of values” (Průcha et al., 2009:92). According to Tugendhat (1998), a person is a being that can and wants, according to ability, to act responsibly in a relationship with her/his surroundings. This view on a person forms the basis of the value orientation of the profession of social work. The statement that “individuals act in social life with others” characterises this orientation in a nutshell.

Where people live together, there is a responsibility to others, a shared responsibility of the whole to each member and a responsibility of each person to the whole. Where people live together, however, disturbances in their mutual relationships arise. Some are burdened with their strengths in the situation in which they find themselves, others are for some reason unable to provide what can reasonably be expected of them. But even an improvement to once functioning relationships is possible. The more complicated society becomes, the more is expected of participants in their interaction with others. The value orientation (Homola, 1972) shows three basic requirements:

- The value orientation should be internally consistent with the whole personality of the individual. It should form a hierarchy according to the importance of individual values for individuals.
- The value orientation should be realistic and flexible, but at the same time it should remain relatively stable. Values in value orientation are practically applied in the world around us.
- Value orientation, according to which a person lives, should bring everyone satisfaction. If it is a part of an individual, it influences her/his personality and is more comprehensive.

Law and legislation are becoming the value level. By its nature, it is more a matter of adhering to the limits of our behaviour. Legislation is subject to social development in which even the occurrence of isolated non-standard situations plays its part.

The social field is closely interconnected with human rights. It is not necessary to specify a service user, but it is necessary to apply the substance of the legal documents and their practical use. For example, they may include the General Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights, the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, the European Social Charter and the applicable internal rules (codes) within the work of personal assistants.

“If we want to establish social work as a profession for human rights, it is necessary to step beyond the narrowly defined demands for help and service as a result of human rights and move toward the universally conceived demand that stems from human rights. Since we are bound in practice by a range of restrictions and norms that we do not ourselves influence, we should accept the fact that the offer of social assistance or services is, in principle, aimed at the person as a person, and not at the citizen or a member of this or that group” (Tomeš, 2001:207).

We can assume that personal assistants are constantly confronted by moral questions. In practice, it means a specific moral question, and how to handle it: priorities are set, problems defined, and their solution sought. Furthermore, we can point to mutual respect, the protection of privacy and the right to difference. Everyday practice allows us to recognise moral dilemmas, then put them into words and make them easily

manageable. Professional morality is the aggregate of professional moral norms, the aim of which is the provision of quality work. In the case of personal assistants, professional competencies necessarily also include, beside skills and knowledge, the ethos of the profession. Moral attitudes that the employee should accept in her/his profession are thus intended.

A code of ethics is one of the elements of a character of a given profession. It thus determines the professional values and norms. A direction for the social worker's behaviour is indicated by the code, and demands are placed on her/his behaviour and conduct. A code determines a space and method of behaviour that at the same time grounds and gives direction too. "A code of ethics encapsulates the mission of the professions, safeguards the management and inspiration for members, creates and maintains a professional identity, emphasises the status of the profession, serves as a measure of evaluating current practice, protects clients against abuse of official power and dereliction of the duty of care, provides a summary of instructions in the area of ethical dilemmas and protects the profession from external policing" (Nečasová, 2010:93).

Ethics is not only a code, disposition and plan, but also the people who we can address by their activity or inactivity. Personal assistants are not the only ones burdened by the moral tasks of care work for which they bear responsibility. This emphasis on responsibility takes place not only in terms of an organisation's or institution's demands on a social worker but also in the relationship to values and norms that people comply with. Everyone thus also has a notion of what is good, correct and thus worth following. A code of ethics is valid for certain members of a professional group. It is important for a professional group to make its professional values and standards transparent and explain them. A code serves this purpose and thus determines the direction of professional conduct. For a social worker to be able to address an ethical dilemma in practice, it should thus know its own code of ethics and know how to apply them. Service users and society should demand that social workers act professionally. Values and norms that are contained in a code are variable and depend on the socio-cultural status of the given society.

The code of ethics of the Society for Social Workers of the Czech Republic (2006) encourages members how to address ethical problems. Its recommendations are:

- The social worker's main right is communication, not only with colleagues but also with users who the problem concerns;
- Serious ethical problems are resolved through the Society of Social Workers of the Czech Republic;
- The Society of Social Workers of the Czech Republic may adapt its code for social outreach work where ethical problems are complicated and even serious.

The model of ethical decision making comprises several questions. Their responses should in the end create the ethically responsible decision. Using this model, the personal assistant may learn to deal with an ethical dilemma and beside this it may provide feedback on her/his own decision. Then the care-service can be said to be meaningfully provided.

In practice, it happens that the ethical questions are often ignored. Personal assistants are increasingly being called upon to approach them objectively and effectively. It can be said there is growing "Taylorism of care" = a treadmill in the land of well-being. This would mean reaching the results more quickly, less discussion and less minutes on average for doing care work. Standardisation and dealing with protocols should increase the efficacy of the work and many matters are carefully being recorded using the developing systems (Haterd van de et al., 2000).

Even with the help of the Model of Ethical Decision-Making, it is not realistic to create a certain formula, full of data that will lead us to a clear solution. Presupposing the principle that ethics is a process, not a solution in and of itself, they then become the starting point for questions that try to identify the essence of a given ethical problem. A separate point of ethical decision-making is a logical analysis of the problem in connection with the solution of the whole situation. The model of ethical decision-making is rather a tool that facilitates our handling of dilemmas without the direct instruction for a specific decision.

It is necessary to realise that a potential service user contacts an institution for a certain purpose, need of assistance or support, so she/

he comes with a problem or burden. It is not enough just to listen to a potential service user and let her/him speak. The social worker expresses her/himself to what the potential user of a service is saying. In every task carried out by the personal assistant, he/she is concerned with a conscious or unconscious question:

“Is it possible or not?”

Another author who attempts to emphasise the systematic approach in the process of handling dilemma situations besides Haterd van de (2000) is Reamer (2006). He proposed a systematic approach using social workers who will find themselves in a dilemmatic or ethically troubling situation in which it is necessary to make a decision. This approach is formed through the seven points below:

1. Identification of an ethical problem, dilemma arising in the conflict, including the value and responsibility of social work;
2. Identification of individuals, groups or organisations that the ethical decision likely concerns;
3. Consideration of potential benefits and risks happening for all stakeholders; at the same time, we can specify more versions of problem solving;
4. Thorough investigation of the advantages and disadvantages of each version of problem solving with regard to:
 - a code of ethics and valid legislation
 - a theory of ethics, principles and directions/guidelines
 - a practical theory and the principles of social work
 - personal values including culture, religion and ethical values;
5. Consultation with a colleague and relevant expert;
6. Providing documentation for the whole decision-making process;
7. Monitoring, evaluating and decision-making documentation.

It thus follows from the aforementioned models that one of the tasks of professionals is to know how to address and make decisions in situations that we may evaluate as problematic or giving rise to ethical dilemmas. The Model of Ethical Decision Making or the Systematic Process of Handling an Ethical Dilemma is not a guaranteed instruction for the

correct result of a decision, but rather should help us and in this way make easier the work that entails quite a few challenging situations. The personality of the social worker, her/his experience and knowledge also have a part in this. Experienced staff should pass on their knowledge to newcomers and try to eliminate mistakes that these inexperienced carers may make when working with service users. The significance of the ethical question then grows along with the professionalisation.

The ethical principles form a subset of the ethical principles and values of the whole society, and each expert faces a choice and should bear responsibility for this choice.

RESEARCH

Presupposing the claim that a social worker's code and professional profile jointly create "pillars" of the profession of a social service worker, then we need to determine the influence of the degree of familiarity that the social service workers, especially the personal assistants, have with the code of ethics. What is the applicability of a code of ethics in handling ethical dilemmas in relation to performing the given profession?

Selected research tool – questionnaire.

This is a frequently used technique in, but not limited to, the pedagogical, sociological and psychological fields. We have used in the questionnaire questions that were created with an attempt at an unambiguous answer and that correspond to the topic. They are comprehensible questions related to the given research issue. Respondents were informed of the possibility to use consultation on the topic or on clarification of some questions that they could not handle alone.

The questions in the questionnaire are arranged into three basic thematic groups that are not obvious in advance. Our aim was to primarily avoid any confusion on the part of the respondents due to a broader subdivision of the questions. The Code of Ethics of the Society of Social Workers of the Czech Republic (2006) was used by us to create the aforementioned groups and subsequent questions.

It comprises thematic groups, attempting to touch upon various professional areas in carrying out care work by the personal assistant. The questionnaire was thus created following subdivisions of the Code of Ethics of the Society of Social Workers of the Czech Republic, with the wording of the questions being specific to our experience. We primarily adapted the questions to illustrate the descriptions of the situations for personal assistants so that their responses would be the most informative as possible.

The first part of the questionnaire contains information about the personal assistant – this is the introductory questionnaire part that briefly introduces the social worker and answers general questions – gender, age, level of education, length of time working in the organisation, length of time the personal assistant has devoted to direct work with the service user and whether she/he is qualified in the eyes of the law. The introductory part should engage the respondent to be motivated to cooperate and will also give us more detailed information about the respondent's personality.

The second main part of the questionnaire follows on from the previous section by gradually focusing on research issues. We believe that experience with direct work with the service user is necessary for research in the field of ethics of personal assistance. This work experience may enrich the employee with an ethical understanding or other valuable experiences. For this reason, this area was a part of our research. This crucial part of the questionnaire has three thematic areas following from the Code of Ethics of the Society of Social Workers of the Czech Republic (2006):

- Ethical behaviour of the personal assistant toward the social service user – outlining possible ethical problems in relationship to the user. Obtaining information whether the employee is aware of other ethical imperatives.

Ethical behaviour of the personal assistant toward the employer – focusing on information whether the employee was at all familiarised with:

- The issues of ethics and a code of ethics. How does she/he view the relationship toward her/his employer?

- Ethical behaviour of the personal assistant toward colleagues – in this area we will determine the collegiality of social workers. Information on whether employees have any expectations from the social work profession in the social services is obtained here.

The final third part of the questionnaire offers the possibility to express one's own opinion or leave other remarks about the questionnaire or the topic. Here we find out the opinion not only about the questionnaire itself but also the whole thematic use of ethics in the job of the personal assistant.

The total number of distributed questionnaires was 145. Of these, 95 were returned. The return rate was thus 66%. We included in the analysis data 10 questionnaires we obtained in the pilot study. Finally, we evaluated 105 completed questionnaires in total.

The target group of respondents was not in any way limited in terms of gender, age, skin colour, religious belief, education or length of service in the position of personal assistant / social service worker. So that we could answer the research questions, we obtained information from a certain group of people. These were social workers who are classified in the position "social service worker / personal assistant" and who do personal assistance outreach work. The diversity of choice was reflected in the age of respondents, gender, education and also in the diversity of the workload – i.e. with what service users these personal assistants work and whether they dealt with or deal with ethical dilemmas.

The research sample is created by the social workers from the services of personal assistance, namely two non-profit organisations that primarily offer personal assistance services. The organisations differ in that primarily one of them offers services not only in Prague but also in other regions of the Czech Republic. The mission of this organisation is to attempt to involve its users into their natural social network and society to the maximum amount as possible. The second organisation is different where area of operation is concerned. It offers its services in Prague and occasionally in the Central Bohemian Region. Its capacity is limited to 40 service users. The mission of this organisation is to support socially excluded children with disabilities.

PARTIAL FINDINGS

The proportion of women in the completed research questionnaire was 78% of respondents (i.e. 86 personal assistants). The remaining share, i.e. 22% of respondents (or 24 personal assistants) were men. The diversity of ages and genders of personal assistants helps to satisfy the more frequent and specific demands on the part of the user of a personal assistance service. Some users who want to use a personal assistance service come with specific age and gender requirements for the personal assistant. Most social workers are between 45 and 60 years of age. The questionnaire also showed us that personal assistance in organisations where the research was conducted is most often done by employees with secondary school education.

The research yielded interesting results. For example, 97% of respondents were familiarised with the code of ethics when signing the work contract. This means that as much as 52% of respondents, i.e. more than half, provided information on the user of a service to a third party, without her/his awareness, which we consider an example of unethical behaviour. The results, on the contrary, confirm that the higher the education, including education requirements that the law imposes on the personal assistants, the greater the tendency in practice to refer to the code of ethics and its use. Furthermore, the results show that the length of practical experience, both in the position of the personal assistant and in the position of a social worker in direct contact with the service user, is directly unrelated to the ability of the assistant to identify an ethical dilemma. The ability to identify an ethical dilemma is thus likely influenced by other factors. From the research, it follows that 58% of respondents did not have the feeling or get the impression that the service user treated them inappropriately. On the other hand, 42% of respondents had this impression. It is useful to note what the second group most often encounter in practice. It includes “verbal abuse–insults; verbal insults with derogatory terms; there has also been a physical attack by a user; unjustified accusation of something the personal assistant did not do; the service user has changed her/his behaviour – for a

personal assistant for an unknown reason; physical aggression towards oneself; anger and rage.”

It was found that 65% of respondents did not encounter a situation where the service user requested a service that they could not provide. In contrast, 35% of respondents did encounter this situation. Respondents listed these activities: medical services, technical matters–home repairs; bathing that was not possible given the physically demanding nature of the task and where the user of the personal assistance did not have aids available; trips to the doctor in the client’s car or personal assistant’s car; foot care–pedicures.

The relationship between the user of a social service and the social service worker or social worker is in social work an area that is often dealt with. There are many factors that influence the formation of problematic behaviour. According to Emerson (2008:17), problematic behaviour is defined as “culturally abnormal behaviour to such a degree, frequency or duration that it will likely threaten the physical safety of a given person or other people or behaviour that is likely to significantly restrict or prohibit access to common social facilities.”

According to Jůn (2010), the problematic nature of behaviour is predominantly decided by what is considered in the given society and also the “community” as a norm. There does not exist any list of specific examples of behaviour that we call problematic. Therefore, Jůn provides another definition: “Problematic behaviour is any behaviour that staff judge as problematic.” The third definition loosely based on Emerson’s definition claims that “problematic behaviour is that behaviour which is not normal” (Jůn, 2010:16, 17). Based on this definition, it can be stated that the user’s behaviour does not determine what is problematic behaviour or not, but rather the staff who are evaluating this behaviour. We can regard, for example, aggression and acts of violence that are not necessarily physical but are verbal or threats: inappropriate sexual behaviour – whether physical or verbal; theft; taking narcotics – alcohol, drugs, etc; lies or psychological blackmail as problematic behaviour.

Based on the research, it emerged that as much as 72% of respondents impart information on doing their job to colleagues. Personal assistance

is a service that is based on an individual approach toward the user, and thus some assistants do not even know one another. The question then is whether an organisation will acknowledge this issue and offer group meetings of employees to personal assistants. The remaining 28% of respondents do not use the possibility to share information with colleagues. There may be various reasons, but the basic one is the great degree of independence in performing the service and also the organisation not encouraging staff meetings. In addition, respondents claim that sharing information is essential for quality care of the service user, and the length of work experience and the level of education do not matter. The stated information may show that personal assistants use the telephone and email the most to transfer information. This fact is due to the speed of transfer of information following on from the necessity of quick reaction as part of the personal assistance service. In terms of the transfer of information, respondents do not point to the possibility of an ethical dilemma. However, the transfer is a fact that arises outside business hours, which may positively influence the relations in the workplace, and reveals the atmosphere in the organisation and also about the organisation's culture.

One of the points of the Code of Ethics of the Society of Social Workers of the Czech Republic (2006) is respecting differences in the opinions and practical activities of colleagues. Inadequate communication that may spring from a fast work tempo causes work problems and inconsistencies to arise. The reasons are an overwhelming lack of time and high work demands as well as a fear of communicating specific requirements to colleagues about their behaviour or to evaluate their work results. Regularly provided and accepted feedback allows colleagues to mutually understand work interests, wishes and the development need of individuals. Forty seven per cent of respondents never encountered colleagues having a different opinion/attitude to the task/activity that the respondent was doing. This means that colleagues would choose the same work process, task or activities. More than half of respondents, i.e. 53%, found in communication with colleagues that they have a different opinion about a given work matter, which is logical in terms of the

human way of thinking and acting. However, the question is how the personal assistant deals with the given information:

- expression and listening to such an opinion led to discussion with more colleagues, during which the positives and negatives of individual behaviour, attitudes or activities were evaluated. In total, 54% of respondents answered in this way, and this number reveals trust among colleagues and the possibility to share their opinion and attitudes, which is an important finding given the topic of this paper.
- expression and listening to the opinion/attitude on the part of colleagues made, but not influencing the decision itself of the performance of the activity of the personal assistant in any way. In total, 27% of respondents answered this way.
- expression and listening to the opinion/attitude on the part of colleagues made and influencing the decision itself of
- the performance of the activity of the personal assistant. In total, 19% of respondents answered this way.

Fifty five per cent of respondents applied a code of ethics in practice. Following on from this finding, we have interpreted a sub-question on the attitude to the code of ethics as well. Fifty nine per cent of responses were positive and appreciated the fact that the organisation has a code of ethics. Thirty five per cent of respondents stated that they do not know how to use a code in practice. Six per cent of respondents used a code of ethics for consultation with colleagues.

Respondents also provided answers about what the situation concerned. We thus found other areas that may be a source of ethical dilemmas for social workers. These are:

- rejection of the use of aids by the service user (the user requests the assistant not use rubber gloves when washing them);
- how the assistant dresses;
- the approach to the service user to preserve human dignity;
- how to reject the service user who invites me to perform the service outside the organisation;
- clarifying the responsibilities of the assistant;

- creating a relationship with the user – what is beyond the scope of the profession;
- how to stand up to rude behaviour of family members toward the service user;
- unreasonable requests for care from the service user;
- how and whether to accept a gift from the service user at all;
- invading someone's privacy;
- comparison of the code from older and existing employment.

CONCLUSIONS

Every profession evolves in its own way. This evolution is observable in the profession of the personal assistant – new areas and topics where the personal assistant may work can be discussed (e.g. sexual personal assistance). In each profession, the personality of the individual intertwines with her/his attitude toward moral values and morality. It follows from this that the moral responsibility of the personal assistant is to remain with the teaching professionals, to participate in the education and training in the recognised educational institutions, to follow the professional literature, consult with colleagues, learn from past examples, share knowledge and work on the ability to create moral judgements. Reflecting on and discussing the ethical questions in personal assistance is not entailed in and of itself. Besides time, a helpful nature and empathy are essential, but also a certain degree of discipline. A preparedness for the notion and conviction itself becoming the topic of the exchange of opinions on which we react to with respect is, among others, part of this discipline.

In terms of meeting the objectives of the text, it was primarily aimed at investigating the influence of the degree of familiarity of the social service workers, specifically of personal assistants, with a code of ethics. At first glance, this degree may have positive effects. Respondents claimed that they knew about the existence of the code of ethics, but subsequently from partial questions that specifically outline the general thematic ethical areas, it is evident that the respondents do not know or

do not want to use the code. This finding is alarming because the situations, whether in relation to oneself, in relation to the user, organisation or colleagues, which deserves ethical insight and the applicability of the code or the need to address the topic, is innumerable. We can also view the level of familiarity here from a positive angle, where the basic pillar is the aforementioned fact that employees know that the document exists. How it is further worked with, whether it is a priority of the organisation, what is the degree of motivation of work in relation to the document are areas that were not identified. Subsequently, we answered an additional research area – What is the applicability of a code of ethics in handling ethical dilemmas in relation to performing a given profession? The applicability of the professionally oriented documents that is the code of ethics is thus minimal. The aim is not to highlight the lack of respondents in a professional orientation/familiarity toward ethical aspects, but rather on the fact of the importance of the topic of ethics in social work or social services from the perspective of the practitioners.

The consequent findings for practice are evident in the very basis of the professionalism of social work. If we support the idea of professionalisation, then ethics and professional ethics are an integral part of this process. Research highlights the realistic use of codes of ethics in particular. The question therefore relates to the form, setting and content of these documents, which are currently an integral part of social work, but are very superficial. The resulting recommendation is to thus take into account the professional profile of the employees, when they are not only social workers or social service workers, but that they are becoming experts in the field with regard to the focus of assistance and support of a certain target group (children, seniors, people with disabilities, etc.) or certain areas (social work in health care, education, etc.). It is therefore necessary to modify and specify the area of ethics with regard to the professional orientation of the social worker or specialisation in the target group. Subsequently, the worker can better identify possible pitfalls not only in relation to the work as such, but also to himself.

From the perspective of research into social work, we can focus on several different fields or topics. If we stay true to professionalism and

the need for development, the research area is thus evident, in connection with the partial findings of the aforementioned competencies of employees. An interesting research area that may follow on from our research is the ethical consideration at the professional level and in situations that, due to their possible diversity, make social work more substantial.

The profession and ethics are crucial components for quality social work. The ethics of a professional life should correspond to the ethics of the whole life. It is essential to appreciate the personal quality and moral standpoint of each fellow social worker. Apart from codified regulations and ethical principles that are necessary to uphold, it is important and indispensable for the social worker to have a high level of moral and personal values. Ethics is an integral part of personal assistance. Ethical awareness is a basic component of expert practice of social workers. Their ability and determination to act ethically is a foundational aspect of the quality of social work services.

It is not the case that there is a single specific area/situation that would be a source of ethical dilemmas for all personal assistants. However, there are situations, such as the behaviour of the service user in relation to personal assistants or the service user's attitude in relation to her/his own life attitude, which most of the respondents encounter.

The moral standpoint of personal assistants / social service workers is in a key position in the formation and subsequent resolution of an ethical dilemma. We stress the need for a deeper orientation in the profession itself while constantly supporting the interest in the relationship with the service user and the organisation. This interest is linked to the practical use and knowledge of the code of ethics, but also the values of social work.

Ethical challenges are an integral part of social work. Social work can therefore become an indicator of the professionalism and education of workers, especially in ethics or a code of ethics. With regard to the partial development of, for example, SQSS, ethical practice and knowledge must be renewed or supplemented, practical experience reflected and appropriate and inappropriate professional conduct strictly delineated.

It is then necessary to use these areas for the educational process, when we know from a historical point of view that ethics was not primarily an area that would be automatically taught in social work. Over time, however, it has become an integral part of education and today the ethical aspect is educated for the fields of social work or for partial qualification courses for social service workers. We should therefore go further and focus this model on areas of practical knowledge that should be heard as part of educational processes. We have outlined above the area of specialisation of social workers or workers in social services, and this is an interface that encourages specification in, though not only, the field of ethics. Discussions on ethical issues should be heard more frequently, especially nowadays, on the one hand to provide social workers and social service workers with feedback on the meaningfulness of their profession and on the other hand to provide incentives for the general public to strengthen interpersonal solidarity and strengthen social justice. From this general recommendation we can move to a specific concept of the importance of the method and forms of communication, which should be a powerful tool for the social worker, not only in relation to clients and colleagues, but also the organisation.

Finally, the task for social work is also the area of technology development and the tendency to recognise the complexity of practical issues in the context of cultural and social diversity not only of clients but also of employees.

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LUKÁŠ STÁREK

ETIKOS KODEKSAS KAIP ASMENINIO ASISTENTO PROFESINIS ĮRANKIS

SANTRAUKA

Socialinis darbas yra susijęs su vertybėmis, kurias numato profesinis vaidmuo. Etinės socialinio darbo dimensijos kinta vystantis visuomenei. Straipsnyje analizuojami asmeninių padėjėjų, kurie atlieka šį profesinį vaidmenį, turėdami ne tik specifinių žinių ir įgūdžių, bet ir savo asmenybės, kurios turėtų sąveikauti su etiniais atitinkamos profesijos aspektais, nuostatos. Socialinių paslaugų teikėjai, teikdami asmeninę pagalbą, atlieka svarbias užduotis, susijusias su asmens priežiūros kokybe. Asmeninės pagalbos vartotojas gali būti bet kuris pilietis, turintis įvairių trūkumų, pasiryžęs savo pastangomis pasiekti maksimalų savarankiškumą. Dėl šios priežasties svarbu aptarti asmeninių asistentų atsakomybę už kokybišką asmens priežiūros paslaugų teikimą, vėliau – jų profesinį požiūrį ir vertybes, kurie glaudžiai susiję su etišku asmeninio asistento profesiniu elgesiu. Šiame straipsnyje pateikiami kiekybinio tyrimo rezultatai, kurie atskleidžia etikos kodekso taikymą asmeninio asistento praktikoje. Tyrimas atskleidžia, kad nors etikos kodeksas yra neatsiejama socialinio darbo dalis, asmeninio asistento praktikoje ji taikoma paviršutiniškai. Remiantis tyrimo rezultatais rekomenduojama atsižvelgti į darbuotojų profesinį pobūdį, kai jie yra ne tik socialiniai ar socialinių paslaugų darbuotojai, bet ir kai tampa šios srities ekspertais. Socialinio darbo užduotis – pripažinti praktinių klausimų sudėtingumą ne tik sąveikoje su paslaugų vartotoju, bet ir darbuotojų kultūrinės bei socialinės įvairovės kontekste.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: etinė dilema, etikos kodeksas, etika, asmeninis asistentas, profesinis profilis.