

Social Work

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN A
CHALLENGING PROFESSION



S E C O N D E D I T I O N

DIANA M. DINITTO
C. AARON MCNEECE

SECOND EDITION



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Issues and Opportunities
in a Challenging Profession***

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Florida State University

and Contributors

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Dan, the years go by, but you are missed every day.
Diana

For Carl McNeece, 1912-1995

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Preface

This book is our attempt to portray the profession of social work in a realistic light. Many introductory texts describe social work in ways that make the profession seem devoid of controversies and struggles. For example, social workers are portrayed as people helping clients who want their services, and the clients all do better in the end. In fact, anyone who has practiced social work knows that many clients have little interest in seeing social workers and that social workers often feel they do not have the power or abilities to solve many of their clients' problems. Social workers do have a positive impact on the lives of many people whom they serve, but painting too rosy or placid a picture of the profession fails to represent the field accurately to students. In this text we present a balanced picture of the many rewarding aspects of social work practice as well as the difficulties, struggles, and problems that social workers face as they do their jobs and attempt to uphold the values and ethics of the profession.

This book also addresses controversial issues within the profession. For example, we consider what the roles of social workers should be today and debates over the movement of social workers toward psychotherapy and private practice. In addition, many social work students receive their education without much understanding of the roles of organizations such as the Council on Social Work Education and the National Association of Social Workers in these issues. Through this book, we hope to help students become more knowledgeable consumers of their social work education by making them aware of the roles of these organizations in shaping social work education and practice.

Another distinguishing feature of this book is that it addresses controversies faced across the board by human service professionals and the interrelationships among these professional groups. For example, where do social workers stand in relation to others practicing in the fields of mental health and substance abuse? These issues are particularly relevant in an era of managed health and mental health care and conservative attacks on the kinds of services that social workers provide.

We also do the things that most other introductory social work texts do. We cover the social work practice methods, a number of fields of practice, women's issues, and ethnic minority concerns, as well as the knowledge, value, and skill bases necessary to practice social work.

Social work is no easy profession. Students generally recognize this from their early days in field placement. We hope that this text serves as one resource that those interested in a social service career can turn to in making their decisions about whether or not social work is right for them.

In doing this second edition, we have called on a number of colleagues in the profession to assist us. We are grateful for their contributions and acknowledge them on the first page of the appropriate chapter. Diana also wishes to thank Kelly Larson, Mary Margaret Just, and Phyllis Bassole for their assistance in completing this manuscript. And thanks to the following reviewers: Sally Spill, Concordia College; Patricia Johnson-Dalzine, Central State College; Harv Leavitt, Heritage College; Richard Blake, Rutgers University; Martin Hope, Winthrop College; Ronald W. VanderWiel, Temple University; Elaine Leeder, Ithaca College; William C. Berleman, University of Washington; and Thomas D. Oellerich, Ohio University.

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1

Origins of a Diverse Profession



Photo courtesy of the Cincinnati Historical Society

Social Workers on the Job

Mainstream Social Work

James works for the Children's Protective Services Division of a large state human services agency. He is assigned primarily to investigating reports of suspected child abuse and neglect, although he occasionally recruits and trains foster parents for his office when his schedule permits. A typical day includes an early morning review of reports from the local hospital, the county sheriff's office, and the local schools, which are all required by state law to report suspected child abuse to the county child abuse registry. James spends part of his day talking to the alleged victims and the doctors, nurses, neighbors of the family, and anyone else who may be able to shed light on the child's circumstances. He spends a considerable amount of time in court, pursuing legal efforts to have children removed from their homes and providing the court with periodic reports on the progress of children in foster care. He has seen several badly injured children die from their injuries, but he has also placed many other children into safe, nurturing environments, and he takes a great deal of pride in knowing that he may have saved them from further abuse.

Emerging Roles in Social Work

Kim is in a management position at a large manufacturing firm. Unlike most of her executive counterparts, however, she is not directly concerned with production, marketing, or accounting. She is director of the firm's employee assistance program. Several years ago her company discovered that it was losing money because of high turnover and personal problems among production workers. She supervises a staff that works with these employees concerning marital difficulties, substance abuse, and emotional problems. In addition to supervising staff and making sure that all appropriate paperwork is completed, she spends much of her time training supervisors and working with other management personnel.

Social Work Serves a Wide Range of Clients

Fred works with chronic alcoholics—the kind of clients some people used to call “winos.” They are mostly men, but the number of women in these circumstances seems to be growing rapidly. Many of them are only passing through town on their way to or from South Florida, and quite a few are homeless. Every morning Fred makes his rounds of local hangouts—alleys in the center of town where a few down-and-out men gather around a fire in an old barrel and share a bottle of MD20/20 or Wild Irish Rose. He also visits the city jail's “drunk tank” daily and attempts to convince a judge to release one or two of its residents to him. Sometimes he takes them to the shelter where his office is located, provides them with a hot meal and a bed, and sees them off at the bus station the next day. Sometimes he manages to get them a minimum-wage job busing tables or washing dishes. Occasionally Fred will accompany them to a local mental health or social services office to request counseling,

financial assistance, or placement in a halfway house. A few of the clients he helps have quit drinking, found steady employment, and become solid citizens. These are the cases that keep him going.

Social Work and Social Planning

Gina, a planner in a state social services department, is responsible for collecting and analyzing data regarding foster care for dependent, neglected, and abused children. Her reports are used by departmental administrators (and sometimes legislators) to make decisions on such matters as the appropriate level of payments for foster care, the number and location of foster homes, and the types of families that should be recruited as foster parents.

A Common Bond

Fred and James spend much of their time working directly with clients, while Kim and Gina are involved primarily with supervisory and administrative matters. They all have something in common, however: They are all professional social workers who earn a living helping others. Although in different helping efforts, they are all pursuing similar goals—goals that are bound together by a common value base.

Values and the Profession

Most people are concerned enough about their friends, family, and neighbors to be willing to help them occasionally in difficult times. Some people feel so strongly about helping others that they volunteer a considerable amount of their time to that end, while other people, such as doctors, nurses, teachers, and *social workers*, help others as a vocation. Before we define exactly what social workers do, let's look at the values underlying this profession.

In 1960 the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), the largest professional membership group of social workers in the United States (see Chapter 2), adopted its first official code of ethics; in 1967 a preamble, or philosophical introduction, was added that states:

Social Work is based on humanitarian, democratic ideals. Professional social workers are dedicated to service for the welfare of mankind, to the disciplined use of a recognized body of knowledge about human beings and their interactions, and to the marshaling of community resources to promote the well-being of all without discrimination.

The preamble to the new proposed revision of the code of ethics states that “the primary mission of the profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet basic human needs, with particular attention to the needs of vulnerable, oppressed and poor people” (National Association of Social Workers [NASW] 1996, p. 19). It

continues to stress the role of social workers in promoting *social justice* and *social change* on behalf of clients. The six core values of social work are identified as service, social justice, dignity and worth of the individual, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence.

Of course many other groups are concerned about the welfare of society. They are as diverse as the Junior League, "candy-stripers," and members of the Socialist Labor Party. But social work is different from these groups because it is a *profession* based on the importance, dignity, and well-being of the individual, commitment to the service of others, and professional preparation for practice. The last characteristic is perhaps what most distinguishes social workers from others who serve as volunteers.

The Summary of Principles from the current code of ethics (NASW, 1980) follows. You should review these principles to see whether your own personal values are generally consistent with professional social work standards of ethics.

I. The Social Worker's Conduct and Comportment as a Social Worker

A. Propriety. The social worker should maintain high standards of personal conduct in the capacity or identity as social worker.

B. Competence and Professional Development. The social worker should strive to become and remain proficient in professional practice and the performance of professional functions.

C. Service. The social worker should regard as primary the service obligation of the social work profession.

D. Integrity. The social worker should act in accordance with the highest standards of professional integrity.

E. Scholarship and Research. The social worker engaged in study and research should be guided by the conventions of scholarly inquiry.

II. The Social Worker's Ethical Responsibility to Clients

F. Primacy of Clients' Interests. The social worker's primary responsibility is to clients.

G. Rights and Prerogatives of Clients. The social worker should make every effort to foster maximum self-determination on the part of clients.

H. Confidentiality and Privacy. The social worker should respect the privacy of clients and hold in confidence all information obtained in the course of professional service.

I. Fees. When setting fees, the social worker should ensure that they are fair, reasonable, considerate, and commensurate with the service performed and with due regard for the client's ability to pay.

III. The Social Worker's Ethical Responsibility to Colleagues

J. Respect, Fairness, and Courtesy. The social worker should treat colleagues with respect, courtesy, fairness, and good faith.

K. Dealing with Colleagues' Clients. The social worker has a responsibility to relate to the clients of colleagues with full professional consideration.