

Ethical Dilemmas in Social Work: Using Technology in Practice Settings

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Abstract

Social work often presents ethical dilemmas in practice settings, and most of such dilemmas stem from the implementation of technology. It is mandatory for professionals associated with social work to abide by the National Association for Social Workers (NASW) code of ethics. The major codes of ethical conduct mandated by the NASW include service, dignity, and worth of the person, competence, social justice, integrity, and pursuing the importance of human relationships. The present study explored the ethical dilemmas related to the hosting of online podcasts that aim to help socially and mentally distressed individuals. The study showed that online podcasts could surface ethical dilemmas for social work because such platforms often disclose the identity of the individual who shares their experience. Hence, it not only violates the integrity of the individual but also threatens their confidentiality. Moreover, online podcasts often express the views of an individual that might not be ethically or clinically accepted.

Keywords: online podcasts, social work, ethical dilemmas, NASW, code of conduct.

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Currently, the field of social work no longer remains an act of volunteering but plays an active role in influencing various social and clinical outcomes. Hence, it is not surprising why social workers often face professional dilemmas in their practice settings. Fortunately, the National Association for Social Workers (2009) has framed certain ethical codes of conduct that provides a roadmap for social workers to overcome such dilemmas. The NASW Ethics Code is broadly divided into six heads, service, dignity, and worth of the person, competence, social justice, integrity, and pursuing the importance of human relationships. Social workers should abide by the NASW Code of Ethics under all circumstances while implementing ethical decision-making. However, technological advancements and its unquestionable acceptance in the field of social work could impose further dilemmas in ethical conduct (Perron, Taylor, Glass, & Margerum-Leys, 2010). This is because social workers or social work websites present a wide array of traffic on their websites, blogs, podcasts, and social accounts to help clients. The present article critiques one such popular podcast, "The Mental Illness Happy Hour," maintained by Paul Gilmartin. Although the owner of the podcast does not have a formal degree in social work, he hosted this site, where comedians, artists, individuals, and physicians are being interviewed.

The online podcast is hosted weekly, and each episode explores issues related to mental illness, trauma, addiction, and negative thinking. The aim of the podcast is to develop coping among the affected individuals that would help to overcome the social, mental, and clinical menaces. Considering the aim and objectives, the intent of the podcast cannot be questioned. However, there are certain dilemmas that arise out of such podcasts. Individuals share their case studies without any fear of retaliation, and it could be argued that it is something similar to

Alcohol Anonymous (AA) programs. The dilemma pivots around the fact that the individuals could share different coping strategies that could violate ethical considerations related to clinical or social practice. For example, the moral injury article shared by the Iraq war veteran Tom Voss is a unique narration that could help those who suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders (PTSDs). The article provides a strong bias toward the role of meditation in alleviating PTSD. This article is against the NASW ethics of competence because it would be unethical to assume that all individuals could gain from meditation. However, the podcast could influence the target stakeholders in refraining from clinical advice and carry on with meditation, which could lead to negative health outcomes, including suicidal tendencies. It could so happen that some of the target audiences might need psychocounselling, or psychiatric medications for overcoming their depression and related PTSD.

Likewise, the article by Fallon Chavez on physical transitioning violates the NASW ethical code of dignity and worth of the person. The article depicts the identity of the individual (Fallon Chavez) is publicized, which is against the NASW code of ethics. The article depicts the way Chavez feels about her body image after transitioning. Such narration further creates ethical dilemmas because it could erode the dignity of the viewers who have undergone similar transitions. These findings suggest that social workers or organizations related to social work should be cautious while using technology in their practice settings. The rule of the thumb is to comply with the NASW code of ethics to avoid ethical dilemmas arising out of such situations.

References

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