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Ethical Dilemmas of Confidentiality in Clinical Social Work: Typology and Coping Strategies

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Abstracts

Abstract

Confidentiality is a foundational pillar of the relationship between social workers and clients and is widely recognized as a core principle in the profession's ethical codes. evidences, however, suggest that this principle is, in practice, one of the most significant sources of ethical dilemmas—particularly in situations where safeguarding a client's confidences conflicts with preventing serious harm to the client or others, meeting legal and judicial requirements, ensuring organizational accountability, or protecting the rights of third parties. Using a documentary–analytical method and a comparative approach, and drawing on contemporary developments in social work ethics, the present study addresses the following question: What are the primary forms through which ethical dilemmas arising from professional confidentiality and privacy emerge for clinical social workers, and what fundamental ways of dealing with these dilemmas are available? To this end, after outlining the theoretical foundations of confidentiality and ethical dilemmas, four case files are presented and analyzed as representative instances of confidentiality-related ethical dilemmas in social work. The study then examines three modes of ethical reasoning—case-based reasoning, inductive reasoning, and principle-based ethics—in dealing with these dilemmas. Finally, it proposes an eightfold typology and a staged model to guide clinical social workers' ethical decision-making in such situations.

Keywords

Social Work, Professional Ethics, Confidentiality, Privacy, Ethical Dilemma, Ethical Decision-Making.

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