

Editorial: IFSW code of practice in comparison to national codes

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This special issue of *Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics* focuses on the relationship between international and national codes of social work ethics. Ethical awareness is a fundamental part of the professional practice of social workers. The ability and commitment to act ethically is an essential aspect of the quality of the service offered to those who use social work services. In discussions about the ethical base of social work, a distinction has to be drawn between two competing notions. One is of *ethics* as relating to the value base of social work and in providing a set of principles or values on which those involved in social work base their actions—a kind of moral code.

However, *ethics* will also often refer to certain rules and regulations that govern the behaviours of professionals such as social workers. In understanding why this is important, a comparative context is an essential issue. Hence, the purpose of the International Federation of Social Workers statement on ethics is to promote ethical debate and reflection in national member organisations such as the UK, Australia, US, and Canada. Some ethical challenges and problems facing social workers are specific to particular countries. The special issue focuses on international comparisons, namely and predominantly in the UK as well as comparative coverage in Canada, the USA, and Australia.

In the IFSW, social work is based on respect for the inherent worth and dignity of all user groups, and the rights that follow from this. The IFSW code suggests that social workers should uphold and defend each person's physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual integrity and well-being in respecting the right to self-determination. Social workers should respect and promote people's rights to make their own choices and decisions, irrespective of their values and life choices, provided this does not threaten the rights and legitimate interests of others. The IFSW also suggests that social workers should promote the full involvement and participation of people using their services in ways that enable them to be empowered in all aspects of decisions and actions affecting their lives.

Further, through their commitment to the promotion of social justice, social workers should challenge negative discrimination on whatever grounds; recognise diversity whether it be

individual, family, or community based; challenge unjust policies; and work in solidarity by challenging the conditions that contribute to social exclusion, stigmatisation, or subjugation and work toward an inclusive society.

The importance of maintaining a set of core values for social work also contributes to the notion of the professionalisation of social work—that it has its own distinctive ethics and values that demarcate it from other professions. What this special issue serves to do, on comparing national codes of ethics with IFSW code, is to highlight a number of critical implications so that we can understand how ethics plays out in the UK, USA, Canada, and Australia. We hope you enjoy the issue.