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## **Perceptions of Personal and Professional Values in Social Work Training**

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# Perceptions of Personal and Professional Values in Social Work Training

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## Abstract

*The process of value formation is a gradual one, the stages evolving in close connection with the individual's development. Values are formed, are developed/strengthened, are modified or replaced. For the future social workers, one of the greatest challenges is to adapt their own values to the values of the profession. Values determine the way society is structured, the way families are organised and operate, social relations, organisational relations, the operation of institutions. Institutions and rules are a translation into practice of dominant values that are manifest in that particular community or society. When forces from outside the community impose new rules, their observance and operation depends on how well they overlap with the existing values. Our study emphasis the challenges a student and a new social worker has to face one he /she has to confront, learn and balance personal and professional values. Two surveys were performed: one during 2003 and another one in 2011; the subjects were students from Social Work specialisation, from all years of studies (386 respondents in 2003 and 230 students in 2011). The aim of the studies was to find the students' values that acted as grounds for their enrolment in the social work courses, as well as the way these values are maintained, changed or replaced during the years of study. We concluded that the students manage, in different proportion, the transition from recognising professional values to internalising these, making also steps in confronting ethical dilemmas. There is a dynamic during years of study. Transforming the knowledge acquired into behaviours is an important aspect of professional development of students from social work studies. Further research can be developed and focus on the professional development of the current students.*

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**Keywords:**

*personal values, professional ethics, social justice, social work training, ethical dilemmas, ethical balance, social worker*

**Introduction. The need of professional values in social work trainings**

The issue we aim to explore is the challenge the future social workers face when searching for balance between personal and professional ethics.

This challenge is the result of differing ethical systems, starting from early socialisation (Ingelhart, 1997, 2000, 2005), up to the socialisation outlined and imposed by the education system, and that supported culturally and multi-culturally (Lee and Greene, 1999; as quoted by Miley, O Melia, DuBois, 2006:93).

Thus, the institutions involved in outlining ethical systems are, on the one hand, the family, socialisation groups, the community, the media, and on the other hand, the formal ones: education institutions (kindergarten, primary and secondary school, high-school and university), education and social protection policymakers, professional organisations (of social work school and of social workers).

As possible causes we have identified the ongoing search for articulations between social policies, theoretical training (social work schools), the employers' demands, the challenges of professional experience, the demands of the national college of social workers as the main body of professional recognition and certification, all these on the background of each social worker's personal history.

Another possible cause of system inconsistencies is the recent history of the Romanian social work system, in terms of institutional organisation, policy design, training professionals according to the standards outlined in the (European) states that have a tradition in the area of social action and social work (Șoitu, D., Șoitu, C., 2011:107-122). The social work tradition in Romania, with noteworthy achievements in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, was interrupted first through the halt in professional training (1962), and later on through the forceful application of the ideologies supported by the political regimes of the 1962-1989 period.

According to the Statutes of the Romanian Social Worker, article 19, the main aim of the social worker's activity is to assist individuals or

communities in need, becoming involved in the identification, understanding, accurate assessment and solving of social problems. Social workers uphold the principles of social justice and ensure equal opportunities for the assisted individuals' access to information, services, resources and their participation in the decision-making process, respect and encourage individual dignity, the uniqueness and the worth of each person.

The Romanian Constitution guarantees the right to social assistance as a universal right, and Law 47/2006 concerning the national system of social assistance reconfirms this guarantee, as well as the right to information concerning the contents of protection/welfare measures and how they are applied. According to the law concerning the national system of social assistance, social assistance, through its specific measures and actions, aims to develop individual, collective or group capacities for meeting social needs, increasing the quality of life and upholding the principles of social cohesion and inclusion.

Social work has therefore the role to promote social solidarity. This social role contributes to the strengthening of unity and specificity of social work and is expressed through the giving of support, through the feeling of compassion, through the encouragement of understanding among people, that is through the entirety of professional activities through which individuals can benefit from the assistance process in order to find a solution to, or a mitigation of their problems, this being, in fact the social work/social assistance process (Roth and Rebeleanu: 2007; Rebeleanu, Șoitu, 2012). Social work encourages or rebuilds a mutually beneficial interaction between individuals and the society, in order to increase the quality of social life, both at individual and familial level, as well as at group and community level (Hepworth and Larsen: 1993).

The American National Association of Social Workers defines social work as the professional activity aimed at providing assistance to people – seen as individuals, families, groups or members of a community – in order to increase and/or rebuild their ability to function in society and to obtain the resources that would ensure their lives are lived with dignity in a given social framework. Other authors (Bocancea and Neamțu: 1999) define assistance action as a rebuilding or a "restoration" of the ability to function normally in society, the normality

sought by social work being the opposite of deviance and of lack of adaptation – the latter being viewed as the inability to adapt to the requirements of society, lack of employment, the commission of acts that harm others, or other deviation from the expectations of the family, group or community.

The social worker's activity is thus an action that supports the assisted individuals in their efforts to identify and clarify their goals, in order for them to choose the best option, and helps strengthen ties between individuals in order to promote, rebuild, maintain and/or improve the quality of life of individuals, families groups, organisations and communities. The social worker acts honestly and responsibly with respect to clients, institutions and society, according to the deontological rules of the profession adopted by the professional community (Șoitu-Gîrleanu, Rădoi-Ciurlică: 2008).

According to the Romanian Statutes of the social worker (Law 466/2006, art. 6.), the training of social workers is carried out in accredited higher education institutions specialised in social work. Universities offer in their curricula a number of theoretical and practical courses, the foundations of the students' training as specialists in the area of social action. These courses cover a large number of domains, from the analysis of social policies, the organisation of social work systems and the deontology of the social worker profession, counselling in social work, to specialised courses that involve the analysis of various protection systems for specific categories of clients. The research carried out by Swindell and Watson (2007) point to the fact that, when universities design curricula, they should take into account the students' capacity to understand as well as their receptiveness concerning the issues in the practice of social work, so that the level of transmitted knowledge corresponds to them. On the other part, the theories of moral development (Gibbs: 2003; Kohlberg, Levine and Hower: 1983) argue that the notions of good and evil are not innate, but instead shaped during various development stages, by copying the behaviour of authority – family, teachers – or by learning norms – be they moral or religious. By analogy, students – the future social workers and social services providers – are not familiar with the ethical standards of the profession. They must understand these norms, as well as the consequences that may follow in case these norms are not observed. The

starting point in understanding them could be the ethical code or the regulations concerning the operation of social work institutions, as norms to be followed, so that the social workers, once developed professionally, are able to make decisions in challenging situations (Kaplan: 2006). Decision making in ethical issues entails more than knowledge, rules and their appropriate use, it also resorts to feelings such as anger, fear, concern, empathy, emotions that are present naturally in any kind of human inter-relation (Gilligan: 1982). Emotional development theories also suggest that emotional intelligence may be cultivated through specific ways of learning – forming and developing self-awareness and social awareness, as well as forming the skills for managing social relationships.

According to one significant Romanian philosopher (Pleșu, 2008: 14) "ethics has the connotation of an academic subject-matter and therefore it may be subjected to sophisticated professionalization. *Morals* is the circumstantial aspect of ethics, particular ethics, a subjective processing of the generic morality that ethics deals with". From other perspective (Navran), ethics may be defined as the study of what we understand to be good and right behaviour and how people make those judgments. In common speech, the terms "ethics" and "values" are used interchangeably. In professional speech, they have separate meanings. "Values" concerns the ideals to which the individual, the family, the group or the community aspires. "Ethics" concerns the rules that define types of behaviour as fair, allowed, desirable, or, on the contrary, as unfair or forbidden. Whereas "values" defines "what is good", "ethics" defines "what is fair" (Dolgoff, Loewenberg, Harrington: 2009).<sup>4</sup>

Concluding, we can say that whereas *morals* represents social conventions (beliefs, practices) related to human behaviour, be it right or wrong, that are so widespread as to be almost universally accepted, *ethics*

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<sup>4</sup> The term "ethics" comes from Greek *ēthos* – custom, tradition, habit. The Latin synonym is "morals" (*mores* – mores). According to the Romanian dictionary, the term is defined as "the discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation", the philosophical theory of moral, as well as the entirety of moral conduct norms corresponding to the ideology of a certain class or society. The term *ethics* is used in order to designate a specialised, structured philosophical discipline dealing with the study of good and the values associated to it, whereas *morals* study day-to-day behaviour in relation to what is good and right at a given moment in time and for a given community.

entails a reflection and a systematic analysis of morality, a generic term for the various ways of understanding what is moral.

Professional ethics outlines the practices, rights and duties of the members of a certain professional group, warning about professional malpractice. Professionals relate to the virtues and the values of their profession as central elements of their professional model. From this perspective, the physician upholds the value of health, the teacher – that of personal growth, the social worker – that of welfare, the lawyer – that of legality, and the psychologist – that of personal autonomy. In a broad sense, the deontology is an ethical discipline at the border between logic, philosophy and the rights of a profession. In a narrower sense, deontology is the entirety of rules that guide an organisation, institution or profession or parts of these, through the activity of professional organisations, which become thus bodies that develop, apply and supervise the application of these rules (Miroiu, Berbea : 2004).

The deontology of a profession establishes the norms that govern a certain institutional activity, in terms of what is allowed and what is forbidden, what is desirable and what is prohibited in the behaviour of that particular profession's practitioners. The deontological norms of a profession are formulated imperatively in deontology codes. As an instrument, a deontology code is a collection of special obligations that derive from the deliberate adherence to a profession. Highly-specialised occupations have formal codes, which prescribe explicitly the principles, values and norms that regulate that particular profession; the responsibilities described usually concern clients, co-workers, authorities and various categories of the public.

In the process of assisting individuals in difficulty, it is oftentimes necessary to involve several categories of specialists, each of them being answerable both to the user of the services, as well as to their own profession, each profession's ethical code regulating this relationship.

Most ethical codes are based on universally-recognised moral principles: the principle of respect for dignity, the principle of respect for autonomy, the principle of justice, the principle of equality, the principle of beneficence, the principle of nonmaleficence, the principle of integrity; and their goal is to guide the behaviour of practitioners in moral issues, to establish a framework of professional discipline rules for the members of a profession, as well as to protect the professional

reputation of all the members of that particular profession, while legitimising a body with control and power rights (Roth-Szamoskozi: 2003).

### **Methodology**

The challenges of the job market, the continued structuring of the social welfare system and the large number of students that have chosen social work as a specialisation in the past 15 years have determined us to start investigating the interest for this domain. Thus, under the broader title "The students' interest for the profession", we started in October 2003 a research for "The case of social work". We opted for the questionnaire-based inquiry and, after pre-test stages and the required adjustments, the team met with 386 students from the first to the final year of study from the Social Work Department<sup>5</sup> of the Faculty of Philosophy, "A.I.Cuza" University (Iași).

The researched aimed to find the students' values that acted as grounds for their enrolment in this course, as well as the way these values are maintained, changed or replaced during the four years of study. These questionnaires had the role to highlight also the part that the education system plays in shaping, developing and changing the notions and attitudes the student has when embarking on the first year of study.

The Social Work student follows a set of values and ethical principles. One of the specific ethical principles is the responsibility the social workers have to use to the maximum their human qualities and professional knowledge in order to help individuals, groups, communities, the society in their development and in solving conflicts at personal and society level. Sometimes the social workers are faced with conflict situations in the very heart of the system ("value clashes" or conflicting interests, ethical dilemma), and in these cases they must be able to rely on a solid culture, firm beliefs and a broad life experience. Confronting the values of social work and the general value system is an

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<sup>5</sup>The Social Work Department of the Faculty of Philosophy at the "A.I.Cuza" University in Iași was established in 1990, operating for a brief period as a three-year College; in 2003, its curriculum spans eight semesters for full-time classes and ten semesters for distance learning. Beginning with the academic year 2005-2006, the duration of studies for all types of study organisation (full-time, extramural studies and distance learning) started to be of three years (six semesters).

essential way of solving such conflicts and of avoiding ambivalent situations in social work, which generate stress and tensions in carrying out the activities specific to the domain. The social workers must respect human rights, defend privacy and confidentiality, use responsibly the information they receive while practising their profession, ensure self-determination, dignity and human growth etc. In the research the fundamental values and ethical principles of social work were considered: social justice, the dignity and uniqueness of the individual, the integrity of the person, self-determination, confidentiality, the importance of inter-human relations, and competent provision of services for the benefit of the clients.

During the year 2011, continuing with the hypothesis that the process of value formation is a lengthy one, strongly influenced by the students' social and cultural background, we attempted another survey, through which we aimed to find the values that constitute the foundation of social work practice, as well as the students' expectations concerning the profession. At the same time we tried to see whether, throughout their studies, the students manage to transition from recognising professional values to internalising them.

Thus, a number of 260 questionnaires were applied to the students from the first, second and third year of Social Work specialisation.

The items used in the questionnaire had their origin in the discussions held with the second year students, starting from the concepts of values, personal values and professional values; the respondents were asked to assess each of them on a seven points scale, going from complete disagreement to a complete agreement.

### **Results**

An essential component of the social worker's professional profile is the development of the capacity for knowing the self and for knowing the other. Indeed, during the first study we carried out, most students, irrespective of year, stated that one of the qualities required for the social work profession – a quality they believed they had – was empathy. Other qualities the future social workers believe they have are: patience (19.9%), active listening (7.8%), sociability (6.7%), desire to get involved (6.2%), communicativeness (5.7%). The qualities the students

believe they have change from one year to the next, as the degree of knowledge and awareness of values change; thus, empathy in the first year scores at around 18%, whereas in the second and third year the value is over 30%. Paraphrasing a Romanian adage, we can say that "the best practice is a good theory", and this should not be ignored in orienting the professionalisation that is specific to the domain of social work. This is illustrated by the high percentages occurring for the second quality listed (professionalism/theoretical training). One may also notice an increase of the degree of involvement in volunteer activities, from 14.8% before enrolment to 37.6% after enrolment. An impressive dynamic develops along the study years concerning these activities, as interest increases over the years from 15.5% in the first year to 67.4 % in the fourth year. Almost one third (32.9%) of the students taking part in the survey declared that they were not influenced in choosing their specialisation. Of those who acknowledged an influence, most were listening to suggestions coming from their families: 27.1%; the next most persuasive categories are friends (23.3%), people working in the social work domain (13%), teachers (7.3%) and classmates (6.7%). One of the students chose this course because he had been moved by people's problems, one had followed the suggestion of a priest and another had listen to a neighbour's idea.

Despite these answers – better yet "alongside them" –87.8% of the students in the survey stated that the decisive elements in their choice of career were their qualities, skills and desires. A percentage of 55.2% assumed there would be a demand for social workers on the employment market, and nearly half of them believed and still believe that there are multiple opportunities for finding work in the domain. Thus, the majority – 97.7% – would like to work in the area of social work after graduation. Regarding self-assessed qualities, most students believe they have empathy, many of them want to prove at the beginning they are calm and patient – a quality that no longer features that prominently in the third and fourth year –, some of them state they are sociable, understanding, or that they possess other required skills. The dynamic across the years of the self-assessed qualities related to the future profession provides a picture of the influence the studied disciplines had on the students and of the acquired experience. Most of the interviewed students (83.2%) believe that, in order to become a good

social worker one needs a great deal of practice in the domain, whereas one-fifth of them believe it is important to seek out as much information as possible.

In the second complementary study, attempted during 2011, personal values and the values pertaining to family life (70% first year, 90%– second year and 73,3% – third year), friends, happiness and personal fulfilment, as well as autonomy and the ability to make decisions (76,6% – first year, 80% – second year and 70%– third year) are appreciated by all students. However, the values oriented to the other – specific to social work – such as social justice (63,3%– first year, 56,6%– second year and 40% – third year), community responsibility (56,6% – first year and 50%– second and third year), freedom of expression, nature conservation appear as less important. Similar to the value attached to their future employment, material achievements become less essential for the students (53,3% – first and second year and 26,6%– third year).

When talking about their expectations concerning their future jobs, students from all years would prefer a job that comes with appreciation rather than with high pay; nonetheless, prestige (36,6% – first year, 56,6% – second year and 26,6% – third year) is a less appreciated value, the lowest scores being given by final-year students. For the years one and two, a well-paid job scored 43,3%, whereas an appreciated (rewarding) job scored 66,6% and 73.3% respectively; third-year students gave a score of 16,6% for a well-paid job and 46,6% for a rewarding job.

In terms of climate in the workplace, students appreciate a job in which they can use their creativity (56,6% first year students, 73,3% – second year students and 63,3%– third year students), based on equality, where decisions can be made democratically (76,6% – first year, 80% – second year and 50% – third year); despite this, autonomy does not seem to be too much appreciated, recording lower scores: 53,3% – first year, 56,6% – second year and 36,6% – third year. Although they recognise the importance of rules (46,6% first year, 73,3% – second year and 40% –third year), students, especially those in the third year, give a low score to a job where the rules would be imposed by their superiors (43,3% – first year, 26,6% – second year and 23,3%– third year).

### Discussions

Ethics implies the existence of rules that dictate which types of behaviour are appropriate and which are not. Applying these rules depends on how formalised they are and is carried out through the application of laws, established as a system of rules dictated and imposed by the state (governments, courts of law etc.). Many of these have ethical grounds (Knapp et al.: 2007).<sup>6</sup> Identifying the aspects of a law that may harm a certain population category, and altering them accordingly are key aspects of the social workers' job – it is their obligation to uphold social justice (Furman, Langer, Sanchez, Negi: 2007).

Social work is carried out in an institutional framework in which right and wrong are defined by laws, general norms, institutional policies, professional values, best practices. Taking on the role of social worker means accepting responsibility in relation to the clients, to the profession, to the employer and to society, and implicitly acknowledging that conflict situations may occur (Banks: 1995).

According to the law, the Romanian national social work system is founded on the following general *values* and *principles* (the Framework Law concerning social work 2011):

a) social solidarity – according to this principle, the entire community takes part in supporting the vulnerable individuals that require support and social protection measures in order to overcome or mitigate the effects of difficult situations, in order to ensure the social inclusion of these categories of population;

b) subsidiarity – in the situations where the individual or the family cannot provide entirely for their own social needs, the local community and its associative structures are called in to intervene, while the state acts complementarily;

c) universality – each person is entitled to social assistance under the conditions stipulated by the law;

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<sup>6</sup> For instance, the laws that criminalise theft, kidnapping, murder and violence in general, are founded on the ethical principle of not harming others. The laws that regulate divorce are founded on the principle of the child's superior interest. Medical and social services provided for individuals who have attempted suicide have as a starting point the principle of protecting life. Not all laws are founded on ethical principles (for instance, the laws that discriminate against minorities or against various ethnic or cultural minorities), and in certain circumstances a law may be considered ethical only by a segment of the population.

d) respect for the human dignity – each individual is guaranteed the free and full development of his/her personality, his/her individual and social status is recognised, and he/she is entitled to privacy and protection against any kind of abuse, be it physical, mental, intellectual or economic;

e) the individual approach – social protection measures need to be adapted to the particular life situation of each individual; this principle takes into consideration the character and the causes of certain emergency situations, individual abilities, the physical and mental condition, as well as the level of social integration of that particular person; the support provided in a situation of individual difficulty also includes support measures for the user's family;

f) partnership – the central and local public authorities, the public and private institutions, the nongovernmental institutions, the religious institutions recognised by the law, as well as the members of the community establish joint objectives, work together and mobilise all the required resources in order to ensure decent and dignified living standards for vulnerable individuals;

g) user participation – the service users take part in the formulation and implementation of policies that directly impact them, in designing individualised social support programmes, and become actively involved in the life of the community, either through organisations that are specific to the association movement, or directly, through volunteer activities carried out for the benefit of vulnerable individuals;

h) transparency – guarantees the raise of the degree of responsibility in relation to the citizen of the central and local public administration, as well as the stimulation of the active participation of clients in the decision-making process;

i) non-discrimination – vulnerable individuals are guaranteed social protection measures and actions without restriction or preference due to race, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, social category, opinion, gender or sexual orientation, age, political views, disabilities, chronic diseases, HIV infection or inclusion in a disadvantaged category, against any restrictions that aim to or would result in a restriction of use or exercise in conditions of equality of human rights and/or fundamental liberties.

j) efficiency – the use of public resources is based on the best cost-benefit ratio;

k) respect for the right to self-determination, according to which an individual has the right to make his/her own choices, irrespective of his/her social values or lifestyle choices, ensuring that the latter do not jeopardise the rights or the legitimate interests of the others;

l) activation – the ultimate goal of social assistance measures is to encourage employment, with the purpose of integrating/reintegrating the individual in the society and of increasing the individual's quality of life;

m) lack of duplication in terms of welfare benefits – for one need or social risk situation only one welfare benefit can be paid;

n) proximity – services are organised as close to the user as possible, for ease of access and in order to keep the individuals as much as possible in their own environment;

o) complementarity and integrated approach – in order to ensure the full potential of social functioning for the individual as a full member of his/her family, community and society, social services must be correlated with all the user's needs and provided in an integrated manner, together with a broad range of measures and services in the economic, educational, health, cultural domains;

p) competition and competitiveness – public and private social services providers must be constantly concerned with increasing the quality of the provided services and with having an equal treatment on the social services market;

q) equal opportunities – the users, without discrimination, have equal access to opportunities of personal fulfilment and growth, as well as to social protection measures and actions;

r) confidentiality – in order to respect private life, the users are entitled to confidentiality on their personal data and on the information concerning their private life and the difficulties they are facing;

s) equity – all the individuals that have similar social and economic resources for similar types of need are entitled to equal social rights;

t) focus – social assistance measures are directed towards the most vulnerable categories of individuals and are provided after the individuals' income have been tested.

These twenty principles are a real challenge for a new social worker.

Rules specify *what the social worker must or must not do*, without leaving room for interpretation, whereas standards explain *how the social worker could or could not do certain things*, based on the principles of the profession. Adherence to the standard that says that the social worker must respect the client's right to self-determination suggest that this principle may be subject to exceptions, practice showing that there are many exceptions to it: the value of protecting the client's life is stronger than that of respecting the client's self-determination. Due to the fact that values reflect, as a rule, what is perceived as "good" by people and not what is right or fair, it falls to the social worker to listen to the individual with open heart and mind even when there are significant differences between value systems (Reamer: 2006, Strom-Gottfried: 2007). One method for seeing values in relative terms is to place values in a continuum instead of in a category.

Both the rules and the standards or the ethical principles are guidelines for the professionals' behaviour. Although the meanings of these concepts may be interchangeable, Beauchamp and Childress (2009) say that rules and standards tend to be guidelines, action avenues for professionals, whereas principles have a more general character, orienting the action. Most codes include both principles and standards; principles provide the general framework for action – they apply to most welfare systems – and standards point to the direction of action, the way of applying rules in specific situations (Rădoi, 2008).

The relationship between the social services user and the specialist includes in fact three main actors: the person specialising in service provision (who has moral duties), the patient/client (who has moral rights and duties), as well as the society, which, through its bodies, contributes significantly to the success of the social intervention. Thus, the system of social policies founded on a set of principles regulates both the activity of social assistance institutions, as well as the way they operate, at the same time laying the foundation of the direct relationship between the user and the social worker. The system of professional values guides the social worker's intervention in such a way so that as a result of the action the rights of the social services user are respected.

The specialist's moral duties	Moral rights of the service user	Social policies
The duty to help, heal The duty to inform The duty to observe confidentiality The duty to respect life The duty to respect autonomy The duty to respect privacy The duty to respect dignity	The right to high-quality services The right to be informed The right to make decisions on one's own behalf The right to education and health The right to autonomous choices The right to privacy The right to dignity	Institution rules      The specialist-client/patient relationship

Lipsky (1980: 17) points out that, on the one hand social assistance services are based on direct human interaction, whereas on the other hand the services are provided in a formalised, bureaucratised framework, which implies detachment and equal treatment, given that both the human and the material resources are limited.

Most ethical dilemmas occur in the situations where social workers are placed in the situation of defending at the same time the individual's rights and the institution's values, in situations that involve the simultaneous exercise of responsibilities to the client and of responsibilities to co-workers or to the institution, or in situations where granting the client the right to choose clashes with the institution's policies (McAulliffe and Sudbery: 2005). The principle of information confidentiality raises such ethical dilemmas, due to the fact that there are many situations where upholding it can greatly harm the client.

Musil et al. (2004: p. 317) identify two ways in which social workers can solve the situations that involve ethical dilemmas: avoiding dilemmatic contexts and negotiating with the actors who created these situations in the first place.

### **Conclusions**

Bearing in mind the diversity of the manifestations of exclusion present virtually at every level of society and in all the forms of the social domain, as well as the great variety of forms of support, the expectations concerning social work are manifested in all segments of society. In this context social work/social assistance is an integral part of the social fabric, subject to the confrontations between economy and politics, between personal and professional values, between personal and institutional options and resources.

The necessary funding of services provided by employers produces new ethical challenges in the social action system: on the one hand the employers in the public system are conditioned by budget allotments, and on the other hand the activity of the private system is determined by policies and by the possibilities of attracting funds. Oftentimes employers request previous experience in the domain, but are reluctant to recognise volunteer work as a source of legitimate and certified experience. Other surveys carried out so far at national level point out it is necessary that institutions know each other's capabilities and develop public-private, private-private and public-public partnerships, through more intense and concrete cooperation. There are attempts at such partnerships, but they are developed mostly unilaterally, through the subcontracting of services by local public authorities to private institutions – which are specialised in a distinct intervention domain or in a service aimed at certain categories of users.

Continued education in social work, carried out in a coherent manner, could also include applied courses in professional deontology. Currently no masters' degree exists in our country in this area.

The new social workers need support in challenging ethical dilemmas. From our research there are evidences of a dynamic ethical balance during years of study. The students manage, in different proportion, the transition from recognising professional values to internalising these, making also steps in confronting ethical dilemmas.

One of the paradoxes of social assistance is that, having as its main concern the most vulnerable categories of society, it also has the role of maintaining social balance and social order, preventing mass movements and crises of the social systems (Davies: 1994). This function is expressed in reparatory actions (concerning social equity) as well as in

coercive actions, aimed at regulating the behaviour of individuals according to the current legislation and to the rules of the organisations – support is provided only under certain conditions; their breach results in the loss of a certain form of welfare.

The changing of values, according to Rochon (1998) is a lengthy process, a continuous one. In any community, various groups may develop new values, which can then be adopted by the entire community, becoming dominant values; in other cases, the values are adopted only by small groups, becoming characteristic of subcultures. Given this process of continuous change, in a single community there will always be several types of values, their structure and forms of manifestation influencing social development, while the cultural features of societies will determine to a great extent the value orientations of individuals (Hofstede: 1980; Gavriliuță, 2011).

The goal of social workers trainers is to help them integrate in an accurate and balanced manner their own values into the values and standards of the social work profession. Transforming the knowledge acquired into behaviours is an important aspect of professional development; the fact that a social worker can find the correct solution to an ethical problem does not necessarily mean that he/she will also act ethically. Social workers know it is not ethical to impose their own cultural values to their clients; however, they may do it unwittingly; conversely, although they may know the correct way of action in a given situation, they may act differently, out of fear of losing their job. For this reason, the future social workers must learn how to act appropriately and to manage any possible negative feelings.

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