


Chapter 2

Opinions of Social Work Students on Technology Use and Ethics in Social Work Practices

Irfan Dogan

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1671-7204>

Gumushane University, Turkey

Elif Gokcearslan Cifci

Ankara University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

The use of technology in social work practices has increased due to the global pandemic of COVID-19. This situation has also revealed new ethical issues and opinions in the field of social work practices. This research aims to explore ethical issues and the increase of technology in social work practices from the perspectives of social work students. Social work students at the undergraduate level in Turkey constitute the sample of the research. The research data were collected through an online questionnaire consisting of students' socio-demographic information and their opinions on technology use and ethics in social work practices. It was tried to reach social work students through the student groups in social media by the typical case sampling technique. Statistical tests including descriptive and comparative statistics were applied in analyzing the data. There was a significant relationship among opinions of the participants on the use of technology in social work practices and ethics by gender, number of practice terms, and taking courses about ethics in social work.

INTRODUCTION

Ethics coexists with the main branches of philosophy which are art, meta-physics, and epistemology and reflects moral choices (Çifci & Gönen, 2011). Ethics and morality have not the same meaning. Morality

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-9187-1.ch002

varies among societies and incorporates a society's value judgments. However, ethics is a set of rules used to distinguish between good and bad, and it has own literature. The social work discipline also has ethical values as in many disciplines. These values are rules within the profession whether deciding what to do or not.

The presence of technology provides convenience in many issues today. It provides fast access for people to communicate with each other, resources, and many things they need. Using technology in human service organizations began in the second half of the 1980s. Computer-based information systems have been used in order to record and organize the information of service users (Tuncay, 2010). Information systems, which were initially used only for record keeping, have been used to apply the information in the system to make the right decision for the applicants, to follow up on social work interventions and practices, and to monitor the continuity and effectiveness of services provided in organizations. It has been used in order to accelerate the communication of social workers in the field with each other and to see statistical information on social issues. Therefore, the services provided by using information systems have continued to increase (Öngen, 2014).

Social work field has an educational structure based on knowledge, skills, and values. Social work students gain knowledge about social work ethics, practices and professional values with the knowledge they obtained in the field (Artan & Zubaroğlu Yanardağ, 2020). Besides, foundations of the profession are formed with knowledge, skills, and value-based theoretical education. In today's information age, while there is no area where technology is not used, the use of technology in the social work profession has become inevitable. Information technologies have increasingly been included in social work practices with these developments. The inclusion of technology in the social work profession has had many positive results such as collecting, organizing, classifying, reporting, sharing, and storing information and accelerating the flow of information among organizations (Yeşilirmak, 2010).

The quest has arisen whether ethical principles have been neglected or not with the increasing use of a wide variety of digital media in the social work profession. The advancement of technology and its involvement in the profession has revealed confidentiality and privacy issues. Another issue is that clients may abruptly terminate their services and may not return to e-mails and phones after the transfer of the interview to the digital environment. Moreover, clients who reach out to social workers may want to be friends with them after the interview is completed. NASW (2017) code of ethics states that social workers should avoid identifying information as much as possible to ensure the privacy of clients in electronic media (Artan & Yanardağ, 2020).

Using information systems in the field has made it easier for social workers to communicate with each other and their clients and accelerated the process. It accelerates and facilitates access of the most disadvantaged population to social assistance in this field (Yeşilirmak, 2010). It is essential that social assistance services are carried out more quickly and effectively in the field of social work. Disadvantages of the easy use of information systems have also been revealed as well as benefits. Ethical violations sometimes occur by clients and social workers in information systems in the field of social work. Therefore, ethical rules should be developed to support the advancing technology in the social work profession. In this scope, there are issues that social workers should pay attention to ethical issues in their studies through information tools. Opinions of social work students on technology use and ethical responsibilities in social work practices are investigated in this study.

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