

Code of Ethics

for

Professional Social Workers in India

India Network of Professional Social Workers Associations

(INPSWA)

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Code of Ethics for Professional Social Workers in India

By INPSWA

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Preface

A code of ethics stands as an essential requirement and distinguishing characteristic of every profession. The specialized services provided by each profession are rooted in advanced knowledge and skills. A code of ethics for a profession serves to establish standards of conduct and behavior expected from its practitioners. It ensures integrity, accountability, and professionalism in interactions with clients, colleagues, and the public. Ultimately, it fosters trust and promotes the highest standards of service and ethical practice within the profession. These codes, developed and enforced by professional associations, encompass admission criteria, educational standards, examinations, licensing, career opportunities, ethical standards, performance benchmarks, disciplinary procedures, and professional autonomy in practice.

A code of ethics outlines the principles and values that guide professionals in their practice. It typically addresses issues such as honesty, integrity, confidentiality, respect for others, and the responsible use of resources. These codes not only define acceptable behavior but also serve as a framework for resolving ethical dilemmas that may arise in the course of professional practice. They are designed to uphold the reputation of the profession, protect stakeholders, and ensure consistent standards of excellence and ethical conduct across the field. A professional code of ethics serves as a form of internal legislation binding on stakeholders, with specific penalties for violations. It defines acceptable socially desirable behavior and conduct and responsibilities within a professional context, aiming to promote higher standards in education, training, and practice, along with enhanced professional accountability. Ethics within this framework delineates appropriate professional behavior and guides the conduct expected of practitioners in their roles.

Establishment of a professional body is one of the main characteristics of any profession. India has many associations at national level and state levels. It was a concern that there exists less coordination and co-operation between these associations and none of these associations were affiliated to the international organization (IFSW) as there were no associations representing the whole country. Hence INPSWA was formed as an association networking all the existing national and state level associations and serves as a platform for all associations to work together. INPSWA was formed in 2015 and presently it has eight member associations. INPSWA has ISPSK (Indian Society of Professional Social Workers Associations), KAPS (Kerala Association of Professional Social Workers), NAPSWI (National Association of Professional Social Workers in India,

Karnataka State Association for the Professional Social Workers (KSAPSW), PSWA (Professional Social Workers Association) Tamil Nadu, MASWE (Maharashtra Association of Professional Social Workers), Professional Social Workers Association of Jammu and Kashmir (PSWAJK) and Orissa Professional Social Workers' Association (OPSWA)

While the University Grants Commission's Second Review Committee on Social Work Education in India (1975) recommended establishing a National Council for Social Work Education, this initiative has yet to materialize. Consequently, despite over eighty eight years of history in social work education and practice in India, defining its professional identity remains a topic of ongoing debate. Additionally, the profession lacks a formal code of ethics, accepted by all social workers in India, despite being a practice-based human service profession like others. Numerous efforts have been made to establish a National Council for Social Workers in India. In 2020, an expert voluntary group supported by INPSWA drafted a code of ethics that is currently under review by the Government of India. INPSWA remains dedicated to advancing the establishment of the National Council for Social Workers.

This *code of ethics* is the result of tireless work by Drafting Committee consisting of experts in social work constituted by INPSWA Academic Sub Committee. The committee under the leadership of Dr. Cheian P Kurien reviewed the code of ethics of Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW), National Association of Social Workers (NASW) (USA), and the code of ethics published by NAPSWI and KAPS in India. The draft code of ethics was prepared and submitted before the executive committee of INPSWA for comments and suggestion. Simultaneously the draft was send to social work experts from different parts of India and to different institutions. After incorporating suggestions, the modified draft further presented in the executive committee of INPSWA for final consultation. We are grateful to all those who has extended excellent support to the whole process.

INPSWA sincerely acknowledges and expresses gratitude and appreciation to the various associations in India and abroad (names mentioned above) for consulting the sections of their code of ethics while developing this code of ethics.

Prof. Ghandidoss LS and Dr. Ipe Varughese
President INPSWA and Secretary General, INPSWA

On behalf of the

Drafting Committee on Code of Ethics

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INDIA NETWORK OF PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL WORK ASSOCIATIONS (INPSWA) Code of Ethics

1. Preamble

The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty. A historic and defining feature of social work is the profession's focus on individual well-being in a social context and the well-being of society. Fundamental to social work is attention to the environmental forces that create, contribute to, and address problems in living.

Social workers promote social justice and social change with and on behalf of service users. "Service users" is used inclusively to refer to individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Social workers are sensitive to cultural and ethnic diversity and strive to end discrimination, oppression, poverty, and other forms of social injustice. These activities may be in the form of direct practice, community organizing, supervision, consultation, administration, advocacy, social and political action, policy development and implementation, education, and research and evaluation. Social workers seek to enhance the capacity of people to address their own needs. Social workers also seek to promote the responsiveness of organizations, communities, and other social institutions to individual's needs and social problems.

The social work profession has a mission based on a set of important core values. These core values, which have been embraced by social workers throughout profession's history, form the basis of why social work is special and different.

Here are the main values:

1. Service: Helping others and providing assistance is a crucial part of social work.
2. Social justice: Treating everyone fairly and equally, and advocating for fairness in society.
3. Dignity and worth of the person: Recognizing and respecting the value and importance of each individual.
4. Importance of human relationships: Understanding that connections with others play a significant role in people's lives.
5. Integrity: Acting honestly, ethically, and consistently in all aspects of social work.

6. Competence: Possessing the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively help people.

These core values highlight what makes social work special. They should be considered together with the complexities of the human experience, finding a balance that respects and understands the unique circumstances of each individual.

2. Purpose of the INPSWA Code of Ethics

Professional ethics are at the core of social work. It is important for the profession to clearly express its fundamental values, ethical principles, and ethical standards. The INPSWA Code of Ethics outlines these values, principles, and standards to provide guidance for social workers in their conduct. The Code applies to all social workers and social work students, regardless of their roles, work settings, or the communities they serve.

The INPSWA Code of Ethics serves six main purposes:

1. Identifying Core Values: The Code defines the central values upon which the social work profession is built.
2. Summarizing Ethical Principles: The Code encapsulates broad ethical principles that reflect the profession's core values and establishes specific ethical standards to direct social work practice.
3. Addressing Ethical Conflicts: The Code assists social workers in recognizing relevant considerations when faced with conflicts of professional obligations or ethical uncertainties.
4. Ensuring Accountability: The Code provides ethical standards by which the general public can hold the social work profession accountable.
5. Socializing New Practitioners: The Code familiarizes newly entering practitioners with the mission, values, ethical principles, and ethical standards of social work.
6. Assessing Ethical Conduct: The Code sets forth standards that the social work profession can utilize to evaluate whether social workers have engaged in unethical behaviour. INPSWA shall established formal procedures to handle ethics complaints lodged against its members. By subscribing to this Code, social workers are obligated to support its implementation, participate in INPSWA's adjudication proceedings, and comply with any disciplinary rulings based on the Code.

The INPSWA Code of Ethics provides a guide for social workers when they face ethical issues. It includes values, principles, and standards to help them make good decisions and behave appropriately. However, it doesn't give strict rules that tell social workers exactly what to do in every situation. The Code must be considered in the context of the specific situation and may sometimes have conflicting values, principles, and standards.

Ethical responsibilities are important in all relationships, whether they are personal, family-related, social, or professional.

The INPSWA Code of Ethics does not state which values, principles, and standards are more important than others when there is a conflict. Social workers may have different opinions about how to prioritize them. In making ethical decisions, social workers should use their informed judgment and also consider how the profession's ethical standards would be applied in a peer review process.

Ethical decision making is a process and sometimes complex ethical issues don't have easy solutions. Social workers should consider all the relevant values, principles, and standards in the Code when making ethical judgments. Their decisions and actions should align with the spirit and the intent of the Code.

In addition to the Code, social workers can also refer to other sources of information about ethics. They should think about ethical theories, social work theories, research, laws, regulations, agency policies, and other codes of ethics. The INPSWA Code of Ethics should be considered the primary source among all the codes of ethics.

Social workers should be aware of how their personal values, cultural beliefs, religious practices, and the values of their service users can impact their ethical decision making. If there are conflicts between personal and professional values, they should handle them responsibly.

When faced with ethical dilemmas, social workers can seek guidance from professional literature on ethics and ethical decision making. They can consult with ethics committees, regulatory bodies, colleagues, supervisors, or legal experts.

There may be situations where social workers' ethical obligations clash with agency policies, laws, or regulations. In such cases, social workers should try their best to resolve the conflict in a way that aligns with the values, principles, and standards in the Code. If they cannot find a reasonable resolution, they should seek proper consultation before making a decision.

The INPSWA Code of Ethics is intended for use by the INPSWA member organizations and by individual social workers, organizations, and bodies in India (such as licensing boards, insurance providers, courts, agency boards, government agencies, and other professional groups wherever such systems exist in India) that choose to adopt or refer to it. Violating the Code does not automatically mean a legal violation or liability. Legal determinations can only be made in legal proceedings. Alleged violations of the Code would go through a peer review process, which is separate from legal or administrative procedures.

A code of ethics cannot guarantee ethical behaviour or resolve all ethical issues. It cannot capture the complexity involved in making responsible choices within a moral community. Instead, a code of ethics sets out values, principles, and standards that professionals strive to uphold and that can be used to judge their actions. Social workers' ethical behaviour should come from their personal commitment to ethical practice. The INPSWA Code of Ethics represents the dedication of social workers to uphold the values and act ethically. Individuals with good character must apply the principles and standards and make reliable ethical judgments in good faith.

3. Global definition of social work

In July 2014, the Global Definition of Social Work was approved in the general meeting of International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and General Assembly of International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW). This definition is as follows:

“Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous

knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing”⁴.

4. Ethical Principles

The following broad ethical principles are based on social work's important values of helping others, fairness, respect for individuals, meaningful relationships, honesty, and expertise. These principles describe the ideals that all social workers should strive for.

4.1 Value: Service

Ethical Principle: Social workers' main goal is to assist people in need and address social issues. They prioritize ‘service to others’ over their own interests. Social workers use their knowledge, values, and skills to support people in need and tackle social problems. They are encouraged to volunteer their professional abilities without expecting significant financial compensation (pro bono service).

4.2 Value: Social Justice

Ethical Principle: Social workers challenge social injustices in society. They have responsibility to promote social justice for people from all walks of life. They work towards social change, particularly on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups. Their efforts focus on issues like poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and other forms of injustice. These activities aim to increase awareness of oppression, cultural diversity, and ethnic diversity. Social workers strive to ensure that everyone has access to necessary information, services, resources, equal opportunities, and meaningful involvement in decision-making processes. Social workers challenge unjust practices and policies.

4.3 Value: Dignity and Worth of the person

Ethical Principle: Social workers value and respect the inherent worth and dignity of each person. They treat each person with care and respect, considering their individual differences, cultural backgrounds, and ethnic diversity. Social workers promote service users' responsible independence and self-determination. They aim to empower service users, enhancing their capacity to address their own needs and make positive changes. Social workers are aware of their dual responsibility to serve the interests of service users and the broader society in a socially responsible manner that aligns with the profession's values, ethical principles, and standards.

4.4 Value: Importance of Human Relationships

Ethical Principle: Social workers acknowledge the central importance of human connections. They understand that relationships between people are vital for bringing about change. Social workers engage with people as partners in the process of assistance. They work to strengthen relationships among individuals, families, social groups, organizations, and communities, aiming to promote, restore, maintain, and improve their well-being.

4.5 Value: Integrity

Ethical Principle: Social workers act in a trustworthy manner. They are constantly mindful of the mission, values, ethical principles, and standards of the profession, and they behave consistently with them. Social workers act honestly and responsibly, and they promote ethical practices within the organizations they are associated with. Social workers value openness, transparency and accountability in professional practice and avoid relationships where their integrity or impartiality may be compromised

4.6 Value: Competence

Ethical Principle: Social workers practice within their areas of competence and continuously develop and improve their professional knowledge and skills. They strive to expand their expertise and contribute to the profession's knowledge base.

5. Ethical Standards for Professional Social Work

The following ethical standards apply to the professional activities of all social workers. These standards cover

- (1) social workers' responsibilities to the people they serve,
- (2) social workers' responsibilities to their colleagues,
- (3) social workers' responsibilities in practice settings,
- (4) social workers' responsibilities as professionals,
- (5) social workers' responsibilities to the social work profession, and
- (6) social workers' responsibilities to society at large.

Some standards are enforceable guidelines for professional behaviour, while others are aspirational. The extent to which each standard is enforceable depends on professional judgment exercised by those responsible for reviewing potential violations of ethical standards.

5.1 SOCIAL WORKERS' ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES TO SERVICE USERS

5.1.1 Commitment to Service Users

Social workers' main duty is to promote the well-being of service users. In general, the interests of service users come first. However, there may be limited occasions when social workers have to prioritize the larger society or specific legal obligations over service users' loyalty. In such cases, service users should be informed about this. For example, if a social worker is legally obligated to report child abuse or a threat of harm to oneself or others.

5.1.2 Self-Determination

Social workers respect and support the right of service users to make their own decisions and choices. They assist service users in identifying and clarifying their goals. However, social workers may limit the right to self-determination if they believe, based on their professional judgment, that the actions or potential actions of service users pose a serious, foreseeable, and immediate risk to themselves or others.

5.1.3 Informed Consent

(a) Social workers should provide services to service users only within a professional relationship that is based on valid informed consent, when appropriate. They should use clear and understandable language to explain the purpose of the services, any risks associated with the services, limitations due to third-party payers, relevant costs, reasonable alternatives, the right of service users to refuse or withdraw consent, and the time period covered by the consent. Service users should have the opportunity to ask questions.

(b) If service users are not literate or have difficulty understanding the primary language used in the practice setting, social workers should ensure that they comprehend the information. This may involve providing a detailed verbal explanation or arranging for a qualified interpreter or translator whenever possible.

(c) If service users lack the capacity to provide informed consent, social workers should protect their interests by seeking permission from an appropriate third party and informing the service users in a way they can understand. Social workers should ensure that the third-party acts in accordance with the wishes and interests of the service users. Social workers should take reasonable steps to enhance the service users' ability to give informed consent.

(d) If service users are receiving services involuntarily, social workers should provide information about the nature and extent of services and inform them about their right to refuse service.

(e) When providing services through electronic media (such as computers, telephones, radio, television or social media), social workers should inform recipients about the limitations and risks associated with such services.

(f) Social workers should obtain informed consent from service users before recording audio or video or allowing third-party observation of their services.

5.1.4 Competence

(a) Social workers should provide services and present themselves as competent only within the scope of their education, training, license (wherever applicable), certification, supervised experience, or other relevant professional qualifications.

(b) Social workers should only engage in substantive areas of practice or use intervention techniques or approaches that are new to them after they have received appropriate study, training, consultation, and supervision from competent individuals in those interventions or techniques.

(c) When there are no generally recognized standards for an emerging area of practice, social workers should use careful judgment and take responsible steps (including education, research, training, consultation, and supervision) to ensure their competence and protect service users from harm.

5.1.5 Cultural Competence and Social Diversity

(a) Social workers should understand the culture and its role in human behaviour and society, acknowledging the strengths present in all cultures. They should recognize and appreciate the cultural diversity and uniqueness of the Indian context.

(b) Social workers should have knowledge about the cultures of their service users and demonstrate competence in providing services that are sensitive to their cultural backgrounds and respectful of the differences among people and cultural groups.

(c) Social workers should acquire education and seek to understand social diversity and the oppression experienced based on factors such as caste, race, ethnicity, national origin, colour, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, political beliefs, religion, and mental or physical disability, taking into account the specific context of Indian cultural diversity.

5.1.6 Conflicts of Interest

(a) Social workers should be aware of and avoid conflicts of interest that hinder their professional judgment and impartiality. When a real or potential conflict arises, social workers should inform service users and take reasonable steps to resolve the issue, prioritizing the interests of the service users and protecting them to the best extent possible. In some cases, this may require ending the professional relationship with a proper referral for the service users.

(b) Social workers should not exploit their professional relationships or take unfair advantage of others to further their personal, religious, political, or business interests.

(c) Social workers should not engage in dual or multiple relationships with service users or former service users if there is a risk of exploitation or potential harm to the service users. If dual or multiple relationships are unavoidable, social workers should establish clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries to protect service users. Dual or multiple relationships occur when social workers have more than one relationship with service users, whether professional, social, or business, which can happen concurrently or consecutively.

(d) When providing services to multiple individuals who have a relationship with each other (e.g., couples, family members), social workers should clarify with all parties which individuals will be considered as service users and explain the nature of the social workers' professional obligations to each person receiving services. Social workers who anticipate a conflict of interest among the individuals' receiving services or expect to perform conflicting roles (e.g., testifying in child custody or divorce proceedings involving service users) should clarify their role with the involved parties and take appropriate action to minimize any conflict of interest.

5.1.7 Privacy and Confidentiality

(a) Social workers should respect the right to privacy of service users. They should only request private information if it is necessary for providing services or conducting social work evaluation or research. Once private information is shared, confidentiality standards apply.

(b) Social workers may disclose confidential information when appropriate, with valid consent from the service user or a person legally authorized to provide consent on behalf of the service user.

(c) Social workers should protect the confidentiality of all information obtained during professional services unless there are compelling professional reasons to disclose it. The general expectation of keeping information confidential does not apply when disclosure is necessary to prevent serious, foreseeable, and imminent harm to the service user or others, or when laws or regulations require disclosure without the service user's consent. In all instances, social workers

should disclose the minimum amount of confidential information necessary to achieve the intended purpose, sharing only directly relevant information.

(d) Social workers should inform service users, to the extent possible, about the disclosure of confidential information and its potential consequences before making the disclosure, whether it is based on a legal requirement or service user consent.

(e) Social workers should discuss with service users and other relevant parties the nature of confidentiality and the limitations on service users' right to confidentiality. They should review circumstances where confidential information may be requested and situations where disclosure of confidential information may be legally required. This discussion should take place as early as possible in the social worker- service user relationship and as needed throughout the course of the relationship.

(f) When providing counselling services to families, couples, or groups, social workers should seek agreement among the involved parties regarding each individual's right to confidentiality and their obligation to preserve the confidentiality of information shared by others. Social workers should inform participants in family, couples, or group counselling that they cannot guarantee that all participants will honour such agreements.

(g) Social workers should inform service users involved in family, couples, marital, or group counselling about the social worker's, employer's, and agency's policy regarding the disclosure of confidential information among the counselling parties.

(h) Social workers should not disclose confidential information to third-party payers unless authorized by the service users.

(i) Social workers should not discuss confidential information in settings where privacy cannot be ensured, such as public or semi-public areas like hallways, waiting rooms, elevators, or restaurants.

(j) Social workers should protect the confidentiality of service users during legal proceedings to the extent allowed by law. If a court or legally authorized body orders social workers to disclose confidential or privileged information without the service user's consent, and such disclosure could harm the service user, social workers should request that the court withdraw the order or limit it as narrowly as possible or maintain the records under seal, not available for public inspection.

(k) Social workers should protect the confidentiality of service users when responding to requests from the media.

(l) Social workers should safeguard the confidentiality of service users' written and electronic records and other sensitive information. They should take reasonable steps to ensure that service users' records are stored securely and not accessible to unauthorized individuals.

(m) Social workers should take precautions to ensure the confidentiality of information transmitted to other parties through computers, electronic mail, facsimile machines, telephones, and other electronic or computer technology. Whenever possible, disclosure of identifying information should be avoided.

(n) Social workers should transfer or dispose of service users' records in a manner that protects their confidentiality and aligns with the state statutes governing records and social work licensure.

(o) Social workers should take appropriate measures to ensure the protection of service users' confidentiality in the event of a social worker's termination of practice, incapacity, or death.

(p) Social workers should refrain from disclosing identifying information when discussing service users for teaching or training purposes, unless the service user has given consent for the disclosure of confidential information.

(q) Social workers should avoid disclosing identifying information when discussing service users with consultants, unless the service user has provided consent for the disclosure of confidential information or when there is a compelling need for such disclosure.

(r) Social workers should uphold the confidentiality of deceased service users in accordance with the aforementioned standards.

5.1.8 Access to Records

(a) Social workers should provide service users with reasonable access to their records. If there is a concern that such access could lead to serious misunderstanding or harm to the service user, social workers should assist in interpreting the records and consult with the service user regarding their contents. Access to records should be limited only in exceptional circumstances where compelling evidence indicates that access would cause serious harm to the service user. Any requests for access and the reasons for withholding parts of the record should be documented in the service user's files.

(b) When granting access to records, social workers should take steps to protect the confidentiality of other individuals who are identified or discussed in those records.

5.1.9 Sexual Relationships

(a) Social workers should never engage in sexual activities or sexual contact with current service users, regardless of whether the contact is consensual or forced.

(b) Social workers should refrain from engaging in sexual activities or sexual contact with relatives of service users or individuals with whom the service users have a close personal relationship when there is a risk of exploitation or potential harm to the service user. Such activities or contact can be harmful to the service user and may undermine the maintenance of appropriate professional boundaries. Social workers, and not the service users or their relatives, is responsible for establishing clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries.

(c) Social workers should not engage in sexual activities or sexual contact with former service users due to the potential for harm to the service users. If social workers engages in conduct contrary to this prohibition or claims that an exception is warranted due to extraordinary circumstances, it is the responsibility of social workers, and not the service users, to demonstrate that the former service user has not been exploited, coerced, or manipulated, intentionally or unintentionally.

(d) Social workers should not provide clinical services to individuals with whom they have had a previous sexual relationship. Providing clinical services to a former sexual partner can be harmful to the individual and can hinder the maintenance of appropriate professional boundaries.

5.1.10 Physical Contact

Social workers should refrain from engaging in physical contact with service users when there is a possibility of psychological harm to the service users as a result of such contact (e.g., cradling or caressing service users). Social workers who engage in appropriate physical contact with service users should establish clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries governing such contact.

5.1.11 Sexual Harassment

Social workers should not sexually harass service users. Sexual harassment includes making sexual advances, soliciting sexual favours, or engaging in other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.

5.1.12 Derogatory Language

Social workers should avoid using derogatory language in their written or verbal communications with or about service users. Social workers should use accurate and respectful language in all communications with and about service users.

5.1.13 Payment for Services

(a) When determining fees, social workers should ensure that they are fair, reasonable, and proportional to the services provided. Consideration should be given to the service users' ability to pay.

(b) Social workers should refrain from accepting goods or services from service users as payment for professional services. Bartering arrangements, especially those involving services, can create conflicts of interest, exploitation, and inappropriate boundaries in the relationship between social workers and service users. Bartering should only be considered in very limited circumstances where it is an accepted practice among professionals in the local community, deemed essential for service provision, negotiated without coercion, initiated by the service user, and accompanied by the service user's informed consent. Social workers who accept goods or services from service users as payment for professional services bear the responsibility of demonstrating that this arrangement will not be detrimental to the service user or the professional relationship.

(c) Social workers should not request a private fee or other remuneration for providing services to service users who are entitled to those services through their employer or agency.

5.1.14 Service Users Who Lack Decision-Making Capacity

When acting on behalf of service users who are unable to make informed decisions, social workers should take reasonable steps to protect their interests and rights.

5.1.15 Interruption of Services

Social workers should make reasonable efforts to ensure the continuity of services in the event of service interruptions caused by factors such as unavailability, relocation, illness, disability, or death.

5.1.16 Termination of Services

(a) Social workers should end services and professional relationships with service users when they are no longer necessary or beneficial to the service users' needs or interests.

(b) Social workers should take appropriate steps to avoid abandoning service users who still require assistance. Services should only be withdrawn abruptly in exceptional circumstances, considering all factors involved and minimizing potential negative effects. Social workers should help make suitable arrangements for the continuation of services when necessary.

(c) Social workers in fee-for-service settings may stop providing services to service users who have unpaid balances, given that the financial arrangements have been clearly communicated, the service user does not pose immediate danger to themselves or others, and the clinical and other consequences of nonpayment have been addressed and discussed with the service user.

(d) Social workers should not terminate services to pursue a social, financial, or sexual relationship with a service user.

(e) Social workers who anticipate terminating or interrupting services to service users should promptly notify them and seek the transfer, referral, or continuation of services based on the service users' needs and preferences.

(f) Social workers who are leaving their current employment should inform service users about suitable options for continuing services and provide an explanation of the benefits and risks associated with each option.

5.2. SOCIAL WORKERS' ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES TO COLLEAGUES

5.2.1 Respect

(a) Social workers should treat colleagues with respect and accurately represent their qualifications, perspectives, and obligations.

(b) Social workers should refrain from unjustified negative criticism of colleagues in communications with service users or other professionals. Unwarranted negative criticism includes derogatory comments about colleagues' competence or personal attributes such as caste, race, ethnicity, nationality, colour, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, political beliefs, religion, or mental or physical disabilities.

(c) Social workers should cooperate with social work colleagues and professionals from other fields when such collaboration serves the well-being of service users.

5.2.2 Confidentiality

Social workers should respect the confidential information shared by colleagues in the course of their professional relationships. Social workers should ensure that colleagues understand their obligation to maintain confidentiality and any exceptions that apply.

5.2.3 Interdisciplinary Collaboration

(a) Social workers who are part of an interdisciplinary team should actively participate in decisions that impact the well-being of service users, taking into account the perspectives, values, and experiences of the social work profession. The ethical obligations of the interdisciplinary team and its individual members should be clearly defined.

(b) If Social workers have ethical concerns about a team decision, they should try to resolve the disagreement through appropriate channels. If resolution is not possible, social workers should pursue alternative avenues to address their concerns while prioritizing service users well-being.

5.2.4 Disputes Involving Colleagues

(a) Social workers should not exploit a dispute between a colleague and an employer to gain a position or further their own interests.

(b) Social workers should not involve service users in disputes with colleagues or engage them in inappropriate discussions about conflicts between social workers and their colleagues.

5.2.5 Consultation

(a) Social workers should seek advice and guidance from colleagues whenever it is in the best interests of service users.

(b) Social workers should stay informed about colleagues' areas of expertise and competencies. Consultation should only be sought from colleagues who have demonstrated knowledge, expertise, and competence related to the subject of the consultation.

(c) When consulting with colleagues about service users, social workers should share only the necessary amount of information to achieve the goals of the consultation.

5.2.6 Referral for Services

(a) Social workers should recommend other professionals when their specialized knowledge or expertise is needed to fully support service users, or when social workers feel that they are not effectively helping service users and additional support is required.

(b) When social workers refer service users to other professionals, they should ensure a smooth transfer of responsibility. With the consent of the service users, social workers should share all relevant information with the new service providers.

(c) Social workers are not allowed to accept or offer payment for a referral if no professional service is provided by the referring social worker.

5.2.7 Sexual Relationships

(a) Social workers in supervisory or educational roles should not engage in sexual activities or have any sexual contact with their supervisees, students, trainees, or colleagues whom they have professional authority over.

(b) Social workers should avoid having sexual relationships with colleagues when there is a potential conflict of interest. If social workers become involved in or anticipate such a relationship, they have a responsibility to transfer professional responsibilities, if necessary, to avoid a conflict of interest.

5.2.8 Sexual Harassment

Social workers should not engage in any form of sexual harassment towards their supervisees, students, trainees, or colleagues. This includes making sexual advances, soliciting sexual favours, or engaging in any verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.

5.2.9 Impairment of Colleagues

(a) If social workers have direct knowledge of a colleague's impairment caused by personal problems, psychosocial distress, substance abuse, or mental health difficulties that affect their effectiveness, they should try to consult with that colleague and assist them in taking corrective action, if possible.

(b) If social workers believe that a colleague's impairment is negatively affecting their effectiveness and the colleague has not taken sufficient steps to address it, they should report the situation through appropriate channels established by employers, agencies, INPSWA, licensing and regulatory bodies, and other professional organizations.

5.2.10 Incompetence of Colleagues

(a) If social workers have direct knowledge of a colleague's incompetence, they should try to consult with that colleague and help them take corrective action, if possible.

(b) If social workers believe that a colleague is incompetent and has not taken sufficient steps to address the issue, they should report the situation through appropriate channels established by employers, agencies, INPSWA, licensing and regulatory bodies, and other professional organizations.

5.2.11 Unethical Conduct of Colleagues

(a) Social workers should take appropriate measures to discourage, prevent, expose, and correct unethical conduct by their colleagues.

(b) Social workers should be aware of established policies and procedures for addressing concerns about unethical behaviour by colleagues. They should be familiar with national, state, and local procedures for handling ethics complaints, including those developed by INPSWA, licensing and regulatory bodies, employers, agencies, and other professional organizations.

(c) If social workers believe that a colleague has acted unethically, they should attempt to resolve the issue by discussing their concerns with the colleague when possible and likely to be productive.

(d) If necessary, social workers who believe that a colleague has acted unethically should take action through appropriate formal channels, such as contacting a state licensing board or regulatory body, an INPSWA committee on inquiry, or other professional ethics committees.

(e) Social workers should support and assist colleagues who are unfairly accused of unethical conduct.

5.3. Social worker's ethical responsibilities in practice settings

5.3.1 Supervision and Consultation

(a) Social workers who provide supervision or consultation should have the necessary knowledge and skills to supervise or consult appropriately and should only do so within their areas of expertise.

(b) Social workers who provide supervision or consultation should establish clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries.

(c) Social workers should avoid engaging in any dual or multiple relationships with supervisees that may exploit or harm them.

(d) Social workers who provide supervision should evaluate the performance of supervisees in a fair and respectful manner.

5.3.2 Education and Training

(a) Social workers who function as educators, field instructors for students, or trainers should provide instruction only within their areas of expertise and based on the most up-to-date information and knowledge available in the profession.

(b) Social workers who function as educators or field instructors for students should evaluate the performance of students in a fair and respectful manner.

(c) Social workers who function as educators or field instructors for students should inform service users when services are being provided by students on a regular basis.

(d) Social workers who function as educators or field instructors for students should avoid engaging in any dual or multiple relationships with students that may exploit or harm them. It is important for social work educators and field instructors to establish clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries.

5.3.2 Performance Evaluation

Social workers who are responsible for evaluating the performance of others should fulfil this responsibility in a fair and considerate manner, based on clearly stated criteria.

5.3.3 Service user Records

(a) Social workers should ensure that documentation in service user records is accurate and reflects the services provided.

(b) Social workers should include sufficient and timely documentation in service user records to facilitate the delivery of services and ensure continuity of care for service users in the future.

(c) Social workers should protect the privacy of service users in their documentation to the extent that is possible and appropriate. They should include only information directly relevant to the delivery of services.

(d) Social workers should store service user records appropriately after the termination of services to ensure future access. The retention period should comply with state statutes or relevant contracts.

5.3.3 Billing

Social workers should establish and maintain billing practices that accurately reflect the nature and extent of services provided and identify the provider of the service in the practice setting.

5.3.4 Service user Transfer

(a) When an individual who is receiving services from another agency or colleague contacts a social worker for services, the social worker should carefully consider the service user's needs before agreeing to provide services. To avoid confusion and conflict, social workers should discuss with potential service users the nature of their current relationship with other service providers and the potential benefits or risks of starting a new relationship.

(b) If a new service user has received services from another agency or colleague, social workers should discuss with the service user whether consultation with the previous service provider would be in their best interest.

5.3.5 Administration

(a) Social work administrators should advocate within and outside their agencies for sufficient resources to meet the needs of service users.

(b) Social workers should advocate for resource allocation procedures that are fair and transparent. When it is not possible to meet the needs of all service users, an allocation procedure should be developed that is non-discriminatory and based on appropriate and consistently applied principles.

(c) Social work administrators should ensure that adequate agency or organizational resources are available to provide appropriate staff supervision.

(d) Social work administrators should create a working environment that is consistent with and promotes compliance with the INPSWA Code of Ethics. They should take steps to address any conditions in their organizations that violate or discourage compliance with the Code.

5.3.6 Continuing Education and Staff Development

Social work administrators and supervisors should make reasonable efforts to provide or arrange for continuing education and staff development for all staff under their supervision. The

education and development opportunities should cover current knowledge and emerging developments related to social work practice and ethics.

5.3.7 Commitments to Employers

- (a) Social workers should fulfil the commitments they have made to their employers and the organizations they work for.
- (b) Social workers should strive to improve the policies, procedures, and effectiveness of their employing agencies' services.
- (c) Social workers should take reasonable steps to ensure that employers are aware of their ethical obligations as outlined in the INPSWA Code of Ethics and the implications of these obligations for social work practice.
- (d) Social workers should not allow their ethical practice of social work to be compromised by their employing organization's policies, procedures, regulations, or administrative orders. They should ensure that their employing organizations' practices align with the INPSWA Code of Ethics.
- (e) Social workers should actively work to prevent and eliminate discrimination in their employing organizations' work assignments and employment policies.
- (f) Social workers should seek employment or arrange student field placements only in organizations that have fair personnel practices.
- (g) Social workers should responsibly manage the resources of their employing organizations, conserving funds where appropriate and never misusing or diverting funds for unintended purposes.

5.3.8 Labor-Management Disputes

- (a) Social workers can participate in organized action, such as forming or joining labour unions, to improve services to service users and working conditions.
- (b) Social workers involved in labour-management disputes, job actions, or labour strikes should make decisions guided by the values, ethical principles, and ethical standards of the profession. It is important to carefully consider the potential impact on service users before taking any action.

5.4 Social workers' ethical responsibilities as professionals

5.4.1 Competence

- (a) Social workers should accept responsibility for employment or engage in professional activities only if they have the necessary competence or intend to acquire it.
- (b) Social workers should strive to enhance and maintain their professional proficiency and stay updated with emerging knowledge relevant to social work. They should regularly review

professional literature and participate in continuing education related to social work practice and ethics.

5.4.2 Discrimination: Social workers should not practice, support, facilitate, or collaborate with any form of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, national origin, colour, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, political belief, religion, or mental or physical disability.

5.4.3 Private Conduct: Social workers should ensure that their personal conduct does not interfere with their ability to fulfil their professional responsibilities.

5.4.4 Dishonesty, Fraud, and Deception: Social workers should not engage in, condone, or associate themselves with dishonesty, fraud, or deception.

5.4.5 Impairment

(a) Social workers should not let personal problems, psychosocial distress, legal issues, substance abuse, or mental health difficulties affect their professional judgment, performance, or compromise the best interests of those they serve.

(b) Social workers facing personal challenges that interfere with their professional judgment and performance should seek consultation and take appropriate steps, such as seeking professional help, adjusting their workload, terminating practice if necessary, or any other actions needed to protect service users and others.

5.4.6 Misrepresentation

(a) Social workers should clearly differentiate between their private statements and actions and their representation as representatives of the social work profession, professional social work organizations, or their employing agency.

(b) When speaking on behalf of professional social work organizations, social workers should accurately convey the official positions of those organizations.

(c) Social workers should provide accurate information about their professional qualifications, credentials, education, competence, affiliations, services provided, and achievable results to service users, agencies, and the public. They should claim only relevant professional credentials they possess and take steps to correct any inaccuracies or misrepresentations made by others.

5.4.7 Solicitations

(a) Social workers should not engage in unsolicited solicitation of potential service users who may be vulnerable to undue influence, manipulation, or coercion due to their circumstances.

(b) Social workers should not solicit testimonial endorsements without consent or manipulate service user statements for testimonial purposes.

5.4.8 Acknowledging Credit

(a) Social workers should take responsibility and credit, including authorship credit, only for the work they have actually performed and contributed to.

(b) Social workers should honestly acknowledge the work and contributions of others.

5.5. Social workers' ethical responsibilities to the social work profession

5.5.1 Integrity of the Profession

(a) Social workers should work towards maintaining and promoting high standards of practice.

(b) Social workers should uphold and advance the values, ethics, knowledge, and mission of the profession. They should protect, enhance, and improve the integrity of the profession through study, research, responsible criticism, and active discussion.

(c) Social workers should dedicate their time and professional expertise to activities that promote respect for the value, integrity, and competence of the social work profession. These activities may include teaching, research, consultation, service, legislative testimony, community presentations, and active participation in professional organizations.

(d) Social workers should contribute to the knowledge base of social work and share their knowledge related to practice, research, and ethics with colleagues. They should strive to contribute to the profession's literature and share their knowledge at professional meetings and conferences.

(e) Social workers should take action to prevent unauthorized and unqualified practice of social work.

(f) Social Work educators should spend sufficient time for mentoring the trainees in their field work effectively

(g) Social Work educators should provide adequate supervision of the trainees in aspects of training programme ensuring that the trainees attain adequate competencies to practice as social work and follow code of ethics.

5.5.2 Evaluation and Research in the Indian context:

(a) Social workers should regularly assess and evaluate policies, program implementation, and interventions to ensure their effectiveness.

(b) Social workers should actively promote and facilitate research and evaluation activities to contribute to the development of knowledge in the field of social work.

(c) Social workers should critically examine and stay updated with emerging knowledge that is relevant to social work. They should utilize evaluation and research evidence in their professional practice.

(d) Social workers engaged in evaluation or research should carefully consider the potential consequences of their work and follow guidelines set forth for the protection of research participants. They should consult appropriate institutional review boards for guidance.

(e) Social workers engaged in evaluation or research should obtain voluntary and written informed consent from participants, ensuring that there is no pressure or penalty for refusal to

participate. Participants' well-being, privacy, and dignity should be respected. Informed consent should include clear information about the nature, extent, and duration of participation, as well as the risks and benefits involved.

(f) When participants are unable to provide informed consent, social workers should provide an appropriate explanation and seek the participants' assent to the extent they are able. Written consent should be obtained from an appropriate proxy.

(g) Social workers should not conduct evaluation or research without consent procedures unless rigorous review justifies it for scientific, educational, or applied purposes and no equally effective alternative procedures without waiver of consent are feasible.

(h) Participants should be informed of their right to withdraw from evaluation and research at any time without facing any negative consequences.

(i) Social workers should ensure that participants in evaluation and research have access to appropriate supportive services when needed.

(j) Social workers engaged in evaluation or research should protect participants from any unnecessary physical or mental distress, harm, danger, or deprivation.

(k) Social workers engaged in the evaluation of services should discuss the collected information only for professional purposes and only with individuals who are professionally concerned with the information.

(l) Social workers engaged in evaluation or research should ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of participants and the data obtained from them. Participants should be informed about the limits of confidentiality, the measures taken to ensure confidentiality, and the timeline for destruction of research data.

(m) Social workers reporting evaluation and research results should protect participants' confidentiality by not disclosing identifying information unless proper consent has been obtained.

(n) Social workers should report evaluation and research findings accurately, without fabricating or falsifying results. They should follow standard publication methods and correct any errors discovered in published data.

(o) Social workers engaged in evaluation or research should be vigilant about and avoid conflicts of interest and dual relationships with participants. If a real or potential conflict of interest arises, participants should be informed, and steps should be taken to resolve the issue with participants' best interests as the priority.

(p) Social workers should educate themselves, their students, and their colleagues about responsible research practices.

5. 6. Social workers' ethical responsibilities to the broader society in the Indian context:

5.6.1 Social Welfare

Social workers should work towards promoting the overall well-being of society at local and global levels, as well as the development of individuals, communities, and the environment. They should advocate for living conditions that fulfil basic human needs and support social, economic, political, and cultural values and institutions that align with the principles of social justice. They should advocate for the existing services to reach all people in the society.

5.6.2 Ensure participatory approach

Social workers should facilitate informed participation by the public in identifying their needs and shaping social policies and institutions, ensuring that people have a voice in decisions that affect their lives.

5.6.3 Professional services during Public Emergencies

Social workers should provide appropriate professional services to the extent possible during public emergencies.

5.6.4 Engage in Social and Political Action

(a) Social workers should engage in social and political action to ensure equal access to resources, employment, services, and opportunities for all individuals. They should be aware of the influence of politics on practice and advocate for policy and legislative changes that improve social conditions and promote social justice.

(b) Social workers should work towards expanding choice and opportunity for all individuals, with particular attention to vulnerable, disadvantaged, oppressed, and exploited groups.

(c) Social workers should promote conditions that foster respect for cultural and social diversity in India and globally. They should advocate for policies and practices that demonstrate respect for differences, support cultural competence, and safeguard the rights of all individuals, promoting equity and social justice.

(d) Social workers should actively work to prevent and eliminate the domination, exploitation, and discrimination of any person, group, or class based on factors such as race, ethnicity, national origin, colour, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, political beliefs, religion, or mental or physical disability.

References

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