

Genesis Fotiadis

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The National Association of Social Work (NASW) code of ethics is set in place to provide standards that should be held by all licensed social workers. When a social worker violates a code of ethics, they are punished in several ways. A few punishments include having a license suspended, revocation of a license, or a felony. These punishments are established within the codes so that social workers are held liable for their actions. An example of an ethical case in the field of social work includes Mark Patrick Bernardini who violated one of the codes and had to face multiple consequences for doing so.

On December 12, 2017, Mark Bernardini, who was a licensed master social worker and licensed clinical social worker, was found guilty of professional misconduct. He was convicted of a criminal sexual act in the first degree, as well as forcibly touching. The forcible touching is not specified, but it is assumed that it was towards a client. The standards that were violated could have either been C1.10 (physical contact) or C1.11 (sexual harassment). According to the NASW Code of Ethics, the code of physical contact explains how “social workers should not engage in physical contact with clients when there is a possibility of psychological harm to the client...” (n.d., pp. 10). The code of sexual harassment states that how social workers should not “sexually harass clients. Sexual harassment includes sexual advances; sexual solicitation; requests for sexual favors; and other verbal, written, electronic, or physical contact of a sexual nature” (n.d., pp. 11).

The client of Bernardini who was affected by his actions could have been psychological harmed as a result of the sexual harassment. These actions will remain a part of the client's life forever and they will have to learn to live with this situation. This harassment could have also deterred them from wanting to go to a social worker when in need of help. As a result of Bernardini's actions, he was convicted of a criminal sexual act in the 1st degree, received a penalty, and his license was revoked. Bernardini will likely not be able to obtain another license or work in the field of social work. If the sexual contact was with a minor, he will have to register as a sex offender which will automatically make him unable to get a social work job again. The services that Bernardini works with most likely suffered from a bad reputation as they were unable to prevent this serious violation of a code of ethics.

There are several NASW ethical principles that could be applied to this case as a solution. One ethical principle is that social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of a person. The NASW states that "Social workers treat each person in a caring and respectful fashion, mindful of individual differences and cultural and ethnic diversity." (n.d., pp.16). Doing so would prevent a social worker from crossing boundaries and disrespecting a client's personal space. Another ethical principle is that social workers should behave in a trustworthy manner. Specifically, it is stated that, "Social workers are continually aware of the profession's mission, values, ethical principles, and ethical standards and practice in a manner consistent with them." (n.d., pp. 18). Being aware of the code of ethics will allow a social worker to avoid violating them. If they are unaware, they may assume that some behavior is justifiable. However, being aware of such ethics will prevent a violation. In this case, Bernardini would be aware of the ethical codes C1.10 and C1.11.

I will allow professional social work values to guide my social work practice by adhering to the code of ethics and constantly making myself aware of such codes so that I do not forget any. Furthermore, I would also invest in continuing education courses to keep me up-to-date with new ethical dilemmas that may arise within the social work community. Essentially, the code of ethics are in place to serve as a guide. They have several purposes and understanding these purposes will allow me to apply them to my work. The purpose of the code of ethics include broad ethical principles that reflect core values, identifies considerations when conflict arises, standards that hold workers accountable to the public, socialization of new practitioners, and its purpose is to allow the social work practice itself to hold itself and workers accountable to ethical codes of standards.

In regards to Christian values, it is important for social workers to align themselves with a faith-based worldview. However, as Christians, we must tread carefully in this worldview because we do not want to put our own beliefs before our clients. We likely will not always have a client who shares the same faith, which is why it is important to be sure that we protect our clients and their interest in order to best help them.

All in all, the ethical code of standards that the NASW provides for social workers is handy. It serves to protect social workers and their clients, which essentially is the general public. Avoiding the violation of these ethical codes is necessary to have a successful career in this field. The violation of the codes could result in serious consequences as previously mentioned.

References

NASW Code of Ethics. (n.d.). Retrieved from

<https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English>.