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ISSUES OF LOYALTY IN SOCIAL WORK INTERNSHIP

Annotation. The goal of the article is to reveal the spheres of ethnic questions related to loyalty emerging during students' internship, as well as the types of questions. The Article presents part of results obtained during the research carried out with a view to identifying the questions of ethics and students' problems during the social work internship. Afterwards issues related to preparation of social workers and quality of services are discussed. The research is based on the analysis of cases accumulated and presented by students during the period of 2006-2008 where they faced problems related to ethics. Questions could be grouped into four categories: loyalty to traditions and culture of an organisation, loyalty to disabled persons, loyalty to rules and orders of an organisation and loyalty to laws.

Keywords: loyalty, social work internship, social work ethics.

Introduction

The increasing tension in the society requires discussions and scientifically based operational recommendations. It also fosters the development of practical ethics and the interest in ethical issues. Ethics has different psychological, educational and citizenship development functions. It is *assumed that in post-soviet countries it is still difficult to combine effectiveness and ethics, usefulness and decency (not only in practice but also in human consciousness)* (N. Vasiliauskienė (2001:321). Quite often moral values developed in Western cultures fall under the influence of different quality of morality, therefore these values stop functioning or acquire different meaning then expected. In the environment where it is common not to obey norms of morality (everyday life can serve as an example) ideals of human rights usually look like utopia or naive idealism (Vasiliauskienė, 2001).

One of the most often used ethical concepts is loyalty. The concept of loyalty is differently described in various sources. In the "International Encyclopaedia of Ethics" loyalty is defined as a feeling of devoted attachment to a person, cause, country or ideal (Pečiulienė, 2010). According to L. Donskis (2005), first of all loyalty means unconditional pursuance of laws and acknowledgement of their power, but today it is often perceived as devotion which originated from the feudal submission to own lord or authority. The concept of loyalty might mean loyalty of both, free and unfree people. The loyalty of an unfree person is the submission easily moving from one object to another. The loyalty of a free person is related to higher values: respect

and love toward other people, friendship etc. According to J. Palidaukaitė (2001), loyalty or devotion means representation of moral principles and values, as well as representation of an organisation, community or person. Loyalty might also hide certain dangers (exaggerations, deviations etc.). Devotion is expressed through person's behaviour (Palidaukaitė, 2001). The danger is that people might be devoted to evil organisations and refuse to pursue their main commitments. Sometimes organisations, top managers and persons require from us higher devotion to them than to personal or professional principles. According to Palidaukaitė (2001), there are two types of devotions: horizontal (to friends) and vertical (to senior people, administration, and organisation). S. Gellerman (1988) highlights that loyalty to the law, society and common morality shall take precedence over the loyalty to an organisation. This sequence of devotion indicates that observance of high moral principles is more important than loyalty to an organisation, top managers or colleagues. But this situation might cause many ambiguities if (according to J. Palidaukaitė (2001) the rules are perceived as morality providing for a possible rise in the career.

Self-determination concerning loyalty and decision-making are closely related to the state of moral development of an individual which could be explained by the so called cognitive theory of "moral development of an individual" (Kohlberg, 1984). The author highlights 6 identifiable development stages: the lowest - avoidance of punishment; a pursuit and entitlement of awards (when a "good person" is "good" for the close ones); co-ordination of personal rights with the interests and rules of a certain group; recognition and coordination of separate groups and interests. The highest moral maturity is living according to own conscience, cosmic and main values and principles through questioning the laws and norms. However, according to Crain (1992) people often are afraid to give preference to own principles over the principles of society and law. Kohlberg (1984) emphasises that stages of this moral development are not a product of maturity or socialisation; however they replace each other because of cognitive activity by contemplating and augmenting moral dilemmas. For the consolidation of loyalty this concept is frequently mentioned in the codes of ethics, and sometimes in job contracts. In the introduction of the Statement of Principles of Social Work Ethics of the International Federation of Social Workers (2004) while discussing the problems of ethically informed decisions arising to social workers, issues of loyalty are identified as key sources of ethical problems. The following is stated: *1) loyalty of social workers is often in the middle of conflicting interests; 2) social workers function as both helpers and controllers; 3) conflicts between the duty of social workers to protect the interests of other people with whom they work and*

societal demands for efficiency and utility; 4) the fact that resources in society are limited. Article 3 of the Code of Ethics of Social Workers of Lithuania (1998) specifies that social worker shall be loyal to the unemployed, but at the same time he/she shall *critically evaluate the behaviour of unemployed persons who violated the norms of social work ethics.* Indirect loyalty is oriented toward an employing organisation (Article 4), laws (Article 2) and personal profession (Article 5).

Pursuant to the international definition of the profession of a social worker (Ethics in Social Work, Statement of Principles, 2004), human rights shall form the basis of ethics of the social work profession. These human rights are based on such values as life, civil and natural freedoms, equality and tolerance, justice, solidarity, social responsibility, evolution, peace between people and balance with nature (Human Rights and Social Work, 2007). According to Global Standards for the Education and Training of the Social Work Profession, 2004, social worker (a) shall be able to make ethically justified decisions and pursue activities on the basis of these decisions, whereas the programmes shall focus on this aspect by establishing clearly articulated objectives and principles of ethical conduct, and, in case of violation of the code, provide assistance and/or take disciplinary measures prior to counselling a student out of the programme (by indicating possible means for conciliation and damages) (Articles 9.1–9.7). Decision-making shall be rational and substantiated thus it requires well developed reflection skills, since systems of personal values and prevailing attitudes might result in emotional breakthroughs. While discussing loyalty dilemmas arising in professional social work, A. K. Solberg (2010) states that they are related to three types of ideal social work practice models (specified by S. Banks, 2006: 136) revealing certain sets of values of a social worker, as well as relevant chosen roles.

Thus, while preparing social workers it is very important to acquire not only substantial knowledge and skills; students also have to be prepared to behave ethically. Internship is organised for the acquisition of complex competences. Until 2008 two study courses have been organised and they included: provision of theoretical knowledge on ethics, analysis of the learning process, and teaching of rational and ethically justified decision-making: 1st year - Social Ethics, 2nd year - Social Work Ethics and Social Teaching in Church (in total 7 (10.5 ECTS) credits). The issues of ethics were also touched upon during social work internships and in other theoretical courses.

It has to be highlighted that the author did not manage to find a research which could reveal the questions of ethics raised by students during internships and formulation of these questions. This research covers a wide spectrum of subjects,

therefore the Article provides a more extensive analysis of only some of the highlighted categories which are related to issues of loyalty.

Goal of the research: to reveal the spheres of ethical questions (related to loyalty) faced by students during their internship, and types of questions.

Questions of the Research:

- 1) Which spheres of loyalty were related by students to ethical questions during their internship?
- 2) How students formulate questions on this subject of ethics?

Research methodology. Pursuant to the constructive epistemological approach stipulating that human understanding about reality is constructed consciously, formulated questions are a logical construct of a subjective personal experience and knowledge. Therefore a qualitative survey and the method of inductive content analysis were chosen for the analysis of cases presented by students (Elo, Kyng, 2007).

Selection. Fourth year bachelor students presented (in writing) the cases reflecting their internship collected as part of their homework while studying “Social Work Ethics and Social Teaching in Church“. By that time students finished the internship complying with the content of the study programme. During the independent work they had to reconsider their experience acquired during the internship, and, having chosen the most appropriate situation where they faced problems related to ethics, to present it in writing. A total of 234 homework have been accumulated during 3 years (2005–2008). 163 case reports were selected for the analysis because in other case reports: 1) situations repeated (35 cases) since two students worked together in the same place, described the same situation and formulated the same questions; 2) students did not manage to select and describe a situation with relevant ethical questions or were not able to formulate questions on ethics according to the reported situation (36 cases).

Analysis. Out of 163 cases appropriate for the research, students’ internship case reports were analysed, including the formulation of ethical questions. After a thorough reading of issues raised in case reports, the analysis consisting of open coding, creation and summary of categories was carried out (Elo, Kyng, 2007: 109). The unit of analysis is a question formulated by students at the end of the case report. The cases were analysed insofar as they helped to understand the context where the question emerged. After analysing all cases and questions and after establishing relevant categories they were grouped into different clusters by themes. Loyalty was specified as a separate theme by abstracting categories.

RESEARCH RESULTS. During the analysis of the loyalty theme, four categories were specified. They are related to several different ethical reflections and tension fields, i.e. the events in an organisation admitting a student; study programme; personal relationship with a beneficiary and student's attitude towards the laws (society). The Article also includes the analysis of specified categories and interpretation of the context in which questions reflecting these categories were raised. Interpretation of the context is based on cases reported by students.

Table 1

Loyalty to culture of an organisation

Category	Sub-category	Statements
Loyalty to traditions and culture of an organisation	Loyalty to relations between workers of an organisation	Interfere or not to interfere? To say that it is not acceptable or not?
	Loyalty to an organisation and protection of clients	To inform on the apparent violence or not to inform?
	Loyalty to home university	To retain the place of internship, or to defend own needs?

Sub-category – **loyalty to relations between workers of an organisation** – is established pursuant to students' observations. If during this process a student identifies unprofessional relations of workers contradicting the professional ethics and personal values, he/she has a natural question: how to behave in such a situation? *Social worker refuses to work with a client of different nationality (the Russian). What to do?* A person wonders: *Shall I interfere or not? Shall I say that it is not acceptable or not?* Some students describe the following complicated situations related to ethics: *“What shall I do when one colleague says inappropriate things about another worker to clients, and I hear that?”*, *“Retelling of clients' situations and confidential details to other clients”*, *“The use of offensive words”* etc. *“Social worker provided incorrect information to the client in order to get rid of him or to sneer him down. What shall I do?”*

Ethical issues related to the sub-category **Loyalty to an organisation or protection of clients** has also been formulated pursuant to observations. Students ask questions when they witness physical and emotional violence against the clients,

rude or negligent conduct, the lies, discrimination of clients on the grounds of nationality, social situation etc. *How to respond to psychological violence of a social worker (threatening, intimidation) observed during the internship? What to do when after a face-to-face conversation suggestion to change behaviour is rejected?* Students formulate dilemma questions: *To interfere or not to interfere? To inform administration on the apparent violence or not to inform? To inform the Division on the Protection of the Rights of the Child or not to inform? How to behave when a tutor uses physical force against the disabled child? Shall I inform about the practice of physical punishments in the care institution if this might result in the lost possibility to pursue internship?*

Sub-category **loyalty to home university** is established on the basis of students' experience in the place of internship where there are many contradictions between the personal and professional honour and culture of an organisation or where there are very few possibilities to pursue internship tasks (*if internship task doesn't comply with requirements, shall I be honest and raise the issue or simply keep silent and do what I was told to do?*), but are aware that administration of the university has problems in finding places of internship for students and try to be in good relations with them. In such a situation a student might feel like a hostage. A student formulates the following question: *Shall I not inform on contradictions identified during the internship? Or shall I act as I feel appropriate?* Usually a student tries to be in good relations with an admitting organisation or university, but his/her own learning needs are also important.

The above sub-categories are more related to problems of ethics which need to be solved by social work students. They have to take the risk and responsibility for consequences to home university, however they shall substantiate the resolution of such a situation and realise at the same time that his/her personal dignity is trespassed: *To retain the place of internship or defend own needs?*

Table 2

Loyalty to persons in authority

Category	Sub-category	Statements
Loyalty to persons in authority	Loyalty to mentor; Loyalty to tutor; Loyalty to head.	<i>Shall I inform if mentor uses force against children or not?</i> <i>Shall I inform administration of faculty on inaccessibility of supervisor or not?</i> <i>Shall I lie to a child's mother as asked by the administration of the place of internship?</i>

Loyalty to mentor of internship. This sub-category reveals quite a complicated situation when a student observes that mentor of the internship commits acts of violence instead of demonstrating the model of behaviour to a social worker. *Shall I defend a client attacked by a teacher or social educator, or shall I not interfere (social educator is my mentor)?* The head of internship (mentor) evaluates a student's work in marks, i.e. has a direct power on a student. If there are no more witnesses of illegal and unethical behaviour of a mentor, there is a huge risk that student himself/herself will be accused of slander or his/her internship might not be evaluated positively.

Similar questions arise also in other situations but their general wording is as follows: *Shall I be loyal to the mentor of internship or shall I defend my personal dignity?* Although in practice the requirement is to behave as other students, this is in contradiction with the principles of a fair conduct, even worse – a mentor might stop communicating with a student. Then a student has a question: *How to behave if my former internship mentor tells bad things about me to the current mentor?* In other situation a student formulates the following general question: *Shall I act as my mentor or shall I not obey and act according to my conscience?*

Sub-category – **loyalty to supervisor (tutor or to own dignity)** – implies that a tutor (formerly in this programme referred to as supervisor) is not interested in student's internship, gives no time for his/her counselling, and is inaccessible. In the above situation a student asks a question: *Shall I inform administration about that or keep silent (the risk to be deprived of learning opportunities, support and counselling)?*

During the internship a student shall be loyal not only to the mentor of internship, but also to top management of the entire organisation (the sub-category **loyalty to the head**). The question is: *Shall I spy on the family at director's order?* Since student is not fully responsible for own activity, he/she might be given the tasks which could be a real headache for responsible workers, e.g. administration gives promises to a client but is not ready to keep the promise and asks a student to convey the incorrect information to a client. A student shall decide to whom he/she will be loyal: to the administration making use of him/her or to client's interests or own dignity. In one of the above situations students formulate the following question: *Shall I lie to the mother and promise that during a certain period (2 weeks) her child could change? Or shall I tell her the truth about the "unofficial preconceived decision" to eliminate the child from school, since this decision was also approved by the social educator?*

Table 3

Loyalty to rules and orders of an organisation

Category	Sub-category	Statements
Loyalty to rules and orders of an organisation	Preference to clients' requests;	<i>If a child asks me, shall I hide parents' violence?</i>
	Acting in collusion with clients;	<i>The patient was caught drinking. Shall I inform the administration? Shall I inform the elder as required?</i>
	Following professional ethics	

Since in social work clients' interests are in the first place and personal interests often imply clients' requests and wishes, the sub-category **preference to client's requests** was specified. Since students usually lack relevant experience, clients might overestimate their power (e.g. protection of all information received from children etc.). For instance, an organisation has very strict rules prohibiting gifts from clients: *How to behave if a person gives a very small gift? If I refuse to accept the gift, helshe might get offended.* In terms of quality of relations between a social worker and a client the following questions arise: which option shall I chose? *To accept the client's gift or to follow the rules of the organisation?* Another example: *The child is about to be eliminated from school because of non-attendance, however, in this particular situation this decision would be wrong. What shall I do? Shall I submit to the school's rules or protect the child and his needs? Shall social worker be impartial when it is necessary to make a decision? Whose interests – the child's or organisation's – shall take preference?*

Acting in collusion with clients. Sometimes rules of organisations seem reasonable and well justified, e.g. not to drink alcohol in health care institutions; to attend school every day; not to miss lessons etc. However, ambiguities might arise when considering personal well-being (e.g. continuity of treatment): *Shall I retain confidentiality in case of violation of internal rules, when situation is detrimental to health (a child smokes)?.* In such situations students formulate a precise question: *Shall I act in collusion with a client, or shall I prohibit such a behaviour and follow the rules of the organisation?* In this case students have a strong feeling that by acting in collusion with clients they violate rules, but at the same time they expect to achieve higher client's trust and positive changes: *Shall I inform patients about their illegal behaviour (drinking) or act in collusion with them and gain trust?*

Another important sphere related to submission to orders of the authorities is **pursuance of the requirements of professional ethics**, e.g. conveyance of

confidential information about families or persons to top managers. It turned out that top managers of certain organisations have issued orders according to which employees working with families and persons shall convey all (including confidential) information to top managers. Students don't know whether these orders are justified and to which extent they shall follow them when they are in contradiction with professional values and principles of ethics. Thus they formulate the following question: *Shall I submit to orders of the head or shall I protect personal or family's dignity? Which is more important: to follow the rules of an organisation or to analyse the situation and provide relevant assistance?*

Table 4

Submission to laws

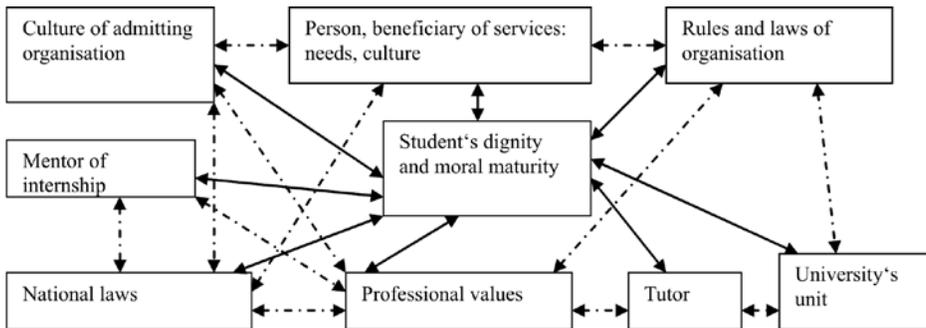
Category	Sub-category	Statements
Loyalty to laws	Confines of loyalty to laws	<i>Shall I inform about the unregistered person (but then a child will not get assistance?)</i>

During the period of independent internship students have many questions related to the submission to laws. While working with poverty stricken families or persons, a social worker has huge power in evaluating the situation of a family. Quite often monetary assistance depends on how a social worker evaluates the situation of a family. When marriage is unregistered, this should be marked in the report, but then the family will not get monetary assistance. In this situation social worker has to decide: what is more important: welfare of all family members or submission to laws (indication of the actual number of family members): *Shall I inform about the unregistered person (but then a child will not get assistance)?* This might be related to the emerging contradictions between the norms of other cultures and Lithuanian laws, thus, students formulate the following question: *What is more important: good relations between brothers and sisters or the laws of the Republic of Lithuania?*

Types of questions. According to Paliduskaitė (2001), there could be three types of questions: ethical problems, dilemmas and questions. While analysing the way how students formulate loyalty issues faced during the internship, it was defined that the most frequent are dilemmas; problematic questions are in the second and open ethical questions are in the third place. Thus, during the studies very few students feel free to pursue really open discussions and are not used to asking questions.

H. Goovaerts (2003) while quoting D. Sommer, says that *expertise in the current environment implies an endless process of asking questions, when from the universal we move to the multivariable understanding, and from a social worker as a role to social worker as a person* (Goovaerts, 2003). In the world of social construction of attitudes asking questions is instrumental (rather than provision of universal answers and the process of learning). Formulation of the dilemma questions reflects the world where there are only two colours: grey and grey, since, after choosing any of the two decisions certain values will be infringed. Such a situation frightens, it does not encourage taking responsibilities and is stressful, since often it is difficult to decide which value is more important. Formulation of open questions or issues stimulates creativity, allows to more extensively analyse opportunities and consequences as well as to search for the additional resources in implementing relevant decisions.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS. According to S. Elo and H. Kyng (2007), during the inductive content analysis the links between categories and sub-categories are specified; afterwards the meta-analysis is carried out. Grouping of the links between the specified categories and sub-categories revealed certain tension fields between different values. They are presented in Figure 1.



Continuous lines connect the spheres where a student faces direct loyalty conflict; broken lines mean the tension while discussing competing choices.

Fig. 1. Tension fields where questions of ethics related to loyalty are formulated during students' internship

According to research results (Fig.1), during the internship students usually relate questions on loyalty to the following spheres: culture of organisation, client's needs, rules of organisation, mentor of internship, national laws, professional values, tutor, university's unit and student's attitude toward himself/herself. Besides, among the eight highlighted structures there are certain competing relations, and every time a

student has to make a decision with whom he/she will co-operate and whose values and behavioural models he/she will choose. While considering questions of loyalty major tensions arise concerning the culture of organisation, national laws, professional values and personal dignity. Fewer questions arise in relation to university's environment (maybe students were afraid to formulate these questions in their homework tasks because they were not sure about confidentiality).

Organisations of social services differ a lot from business organisations which compete for each user of services or goods. Here beneficiaries are most helpless members of the society, they often do not have neither skills nor choice opportunities. Quite often such services are aimed at controlling rather than enhancing certain groups in society. If there are no structures or systems both inside and outside an organisation (e.g. independent ethical audits etc.) ensuring a healthy climate in an organisation and high quality of services, it is difficult to expect different attitude.

Student himself/herself has to choose how to behave in different circumstances. On the one hand it seems that they have to realise what is a professional task, on the other hand there is a risk for a student "to stay alone in the battle field". Here we observe students' doubts, they are not confident in their competences, maybe even afraid of a powerful admitting institution in solving conflicts of the above type. In case of complicated situations they often repeat: "*we are only students*", and this means nothing but their helplessness and avoidance of responsibility. They also might be afraid to become "talebearers". The majority of citizens does not acknowledge the method of exposure or "whistle blowing" as a necessary and ethically justified method. Although legally *in the above situations preference shall not be given to privacy and loyalty commitments against the main duty, which plays the key role in protecting the others from possible harm* (Vyšniauskienė, Rimkutė 2008: 124-125). On the other hand, university shall help a student to deal with complicated situations during the learning process and perform public function by facilitating the implementation of human rights (especially when those rights are violated).

Democratic and liberal society, as well as the codes of professional ethics highlight the tolerance to otherness as one of the main values. However, according to Hirigoyen (1998) quite often *evil is indulged under the pretext of tolerance*. Students' questions about loyalty in many cases are related to the above tolerance. It might be that the culture of conformism stuck in our consciousness from soviet times is still here (when we see one thing, say another and do the third (Putinaitė, 2007)).

The question arise: have all students completing social work studies reached ethical maturity, are they aware of and have access to relevant aid networks for

solving professional integrity and professional ethics issues? It is stated that “only a feeling of security makes us rely on the requirements of books on ethics” (Kavolis, 1996: 50). Are university studies alone capable of establishing a firm and at the same time flexible professional moral system which could teach not to judge, be tolerant to cultural differences, but at the same time not to reconcile to violations of human rights in any environment (study or work), not to be afraid of conflicts, but be able to solve them peacefully by facilitating the change of conditions, bad habits and ill relations? Research results demonstrate that it is not possible to prepare professionals during study programmes; sometimes even well educated persons cannot resist the pressure of public standards and rules of organisations and are afraid to “lose job” “or not be able to seek career” etc.

Questions formulated by students make to reconsider the competence of university workers, as well as the rules and norms of the organisation. Do teachers of social work programmes (and other teachers) and administration staff agree on certain key principles of honour and morality? Can university workers express their thoughts about loyalty without fear? What activities are pursued by organisational structures which shall facilitate implementation of moral values and human rights in an organisations? What are they loyal to?

The research revealed ethical issues on loyalty in social work practice and demonstrated that it is necessary to continue the above work. Research results are challenging and have to be taken into consideration while selecting the fields appropriate for social work, enhancing the co-operation during the learning/teaching process and working according to social work programmes of high schools.

Conclusions

Having analysed loyalty issues emerging during the internship of social work students the following insights and conclusions could be made:

- a) The majority of formulated questions reflect vertical loyalty (obedience to an organisation, laws and top management) and reflect the process of self – determination of a partially deliberate person.
- b) Questions demonstrate attempts of young people to distinguish between the tolerance to evil, personal security, interests and infringed personal dignity;
- c) Majority of tension fields emerge between the culture and rules of an organisation, students’ dignity and requirements of professional ethics;

- d) Questions are often formulated as dilemmas demonstrating the necessity to upgrade qualification skills of a student or graduate in the sphere of ethical considerations and creativity.
- e) Students' questions reveal challenges which have to be taken into account in selecting the places of internship, in providing support during the internship and in developing the programme applied during the internship;
- f) It is necessary to continue the research on ethical issues providing for a better understanding of students' needs arising during the internship.

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