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Case Presentation

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Introduction

Multiple or dual relationships refer to situations where a human services professional simultaneously hold two or more roles with a client or another person involved in the service provided by the professional. Dual relationships can occur in various forms, including social, financial, or personal relationships, and can have both positive and negative effects on the client, the professional, and the organization. Reeser (2017) asserts that a dual relationship between a human service professional and a client can happen before, during, or after their meeting in the work setting. Over the years, multiple and dual relationships have been viewed from a negative perspective and associated with client harm through ways such as exploitation, poor judgment, and sexual transgressions. Nevertheless, there are many definitions put forward to explain dual relationships in human service (Boilen, 2020). The definitions are meant to help stakeholders in the human service profession differentiate between ethical and non-ethical dual relationships. Numerous ethical drawbacks result from dual relationships in human service which impact the profession negatively. Almost all the agencies and organizations in the human service profession have addressed the issue of dual relationships in their codes of ethics (Boilen, 2020). The purpose of this paper is to analyze three case studies related to multiple or dual relationships in human services professional practice. The paper will use the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) professional ethical code as a framework for the analysis.

Professional Ethical Code Used Throughout and the Rationale for Choosing it

The NASW professional ethical code is the ethical code used throughout this paper. The NASW Code of Ethics is the standard for the social work profession and guides social workers on ethical decision-making. According to the NASW code, social workers shouldn't become involved in additional relationships with clients since such ties might put the client in danger or

lead to their being exploited (socialworkers.org, 2023). It is inappropriate for social workers to have parallel or multiple relationships with current or past clients, especially if such connections carry the possibility of the client being exploited or harmed in any way. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW), on the other hand, acknowledges that there are circumstances in which multiple partnerships just must be avoided (socialworkers.org, 2023). In situations like these, the code assigns the obligation of safeguarding the client to the practitioners of human service. Besides, they do this by avoiding confrontations that are culturally sensitive, unambiguous, and suitable for the context in which they are working.

The phrase "a danger of injury or possible victimization to the customer" is highlighted several times throughout the NASW code of ethics. Some types of dual relationships do not put the client at risk, such as when a social worker and a client both go to the same church or have children who attend the same school (socialworkers.org, 2023). On the other hand, issues might arise on occasion when the personal connection was established before the professional one. In situations like these, the code entrusts the social worker with the obligation of protecting the client's best interests and ensuring their overall well-being while also maintaining proper professional limits (Rollins, 2020). Even in the case when a client contacts the practitioner with the desire for a secondary connection, this obligation remains in effect. According to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), a social worker's power can intrude on the connection that they share with the client, and the client's fragility and difficulties are brought into the relationship (Rollins, 2020). For instance, a client may run a company selling clothes, and the social worker might choose to purchase her garments from the client since she has her own clothing business. If the customer feels pressured to reduce the selling price for the social worker, this becomes exploitative behavior against the customer. If the social worker complains

about the low quality of services received, the client will suffer negative consequences. This behavior is immoral, and it has the potential to put their working relationship at risk.

The NASW Code of Ethics was chosen as the ethical code for this paper because it is widely recognized as the ethical code for the social work profession. Besides, it is relevant to the topic of multiple or dual relationships in human services professional practice. The NASW Code of Ethics is particularly relevant to the topic of multiple or dual relationships in human services professional practice (Rollins, 2020). The code provides clear guidelines on how to manage potential conflicts of interest that can arise when social workers have multiple roles or relationships with clients. The code acknowledges that dual relationships can occur in some situations, but emphasizes the importance of avoiding such relationships, when possible, to protect the client's best interests (Rollins, 2020). The code also recognizes that the nature and context of the dual relationship must be taken into account in assessing the potential for harm to the client. Social workers are expected to carefully consider the impact of any dual relationship on the client's well-being and to take steps to mitigate any potential harm.

Case Study 1

Summary of Case Study

Dr. Jane attended a graduation party for her client John, who she had been working with for a few months to cope with his recent divorce and career loss. At the party, John introduced Dr. Jane as someone who had helped him through tough times but did not specify that she was his therapist (Moffatt, 2018). John's relatives then began to ask Dr. Jane about the nature of their relationship, leading to confusion and discomfort for Dr. Jane. She ultimately left the party without being able to clarify the situation (Moffatt, 2018). The organization involved in this case

is not specified, but it can be assumed that Dr. Jane is a mental health professional working with individual clients. The human services population involved is John and his family.

Analysis of the Ethical Issues

Macro level

At the macro level, the ethical issue is the importance of maintaining professional boundaries to promote the best interests of clients and prevent harm. The NASW Code of Ethics emphasizes the importance of avoiding dual relationships when possible, and of being transparent and clear about the nature of professional relationships with clients.

Micro level

At the micro level, the ethical issue, in this case, is the potential for a dual relationship between Dr. Jane and John, which could harm the therapeutic relationship and the client's well-being. Dr. Jane attending John's graduation party blurs the boundary between their professional and personal relationship, potentially compromising the trust and respect that is crucial to the therapeutic relationship.

Analysis of Policies, Laws, and Ethical Guidelines Influencing the Ethical Decision-Making Process

The NASW Code of Ethics guides managing dual relationships in the social work profession. Standard 1.06 of the code states that social workers should avoid dual or multiple relationships with clients that could impair their professional judgment or increase the risk of harm to clients (Moffatt, 2018). Standard 1.07 requires social workers to be transparent about their professional role and the nature of their relationship with clients.

Analysis of the Ethical Decision-Making Process Considering Personal Desires and Feelings Intersect with Ethical Obligations

Dr. Jane's desire to support her client and celebrate his achievements at the graduation party may have intersected with her ethical obligations to maintain professional boundaries and avoid dual relationships. In this case, it would have been appropriate for Dr. Jane to clarify her role as John's therapist and the nature of their professional relationship with his relatives at the party, or to decline the invitation to attend altogether. By failing to do so, Dr. Jane potentially put the therapeutic relationship at risk and compromised John's well-being.

Case Study 2

Summary of Case Study

In the case study, a family comprising Mark, Susan, and their children, Judy and Mike, are involved with Child Protection Services due to an incident where Judy got burnt while playing with a fire outlet. The family is directed to undertake counseling sessions, and Lily, a graduate social worker, is assigned as their therapist (Reamer, 2003). During the counseling sessions, Lily tells Mark not to worry about the urinalysis test and involves in a phone conversation with Jasmine, who is a friend of the family. Lily also brags about her accomplishment to colleagues, ultimately leading to the identification of the family by a colleague who is a close friend. When Lily's supervisor invites her for a discussion about the session through email, Lily closes the therapy session abruptly and files a report (Reamer, 2003). She then calls the family to ask them to accept that they achieved goals if her supervisor called to inquire. The family accepts to comply initially but later sends a text message informing her of their plan, to tell the truth as they legally want custody of their children. The organizations involved in this case study are Child Protection Services and the counseling agency where Lily

works, and the human services population involved is the family comprising Mark, Susan, and their children.

Analysis of the Ethical Issues

The ethical issues in this case study are numerous, including the need for confidentiality and privacy, boundary violations, conflicts of interest, and professional competence.

Macro level

At the macro level, the ethical issues are related to organizational policies, laws, and ethical guidelines that regulate the practice of social work.

Micro level

At the micro level, the ethical issues about the specific circumstances of the individual clients.

Analysis of Policies, Laws, and Ethical Guidelines Influencing the Ethical Decision-Making Process

The NASW Code of Ethics provides guidelines for social workers to follow in their practice (socialworkers.org, 2023). In this case, Lily may have violated several ethical standards, including confidentiality, informed consent, and professionalism. Lily disclosed private information about her clients to colleagues, which is a breach of confidentiality. She also did not obtain informed consent from the family before involving Jasmine in their therapy session. Additionally, Lily may have overstepped her professional competence by bragging about her accomplishment to colleagues and disclosing private information about her clients.

Analysis of the Ethical Decision-Making Process Considering Personal Desires and Feelings Intersect with Ethical Obligations

The ethical decision-making process in this case requires Lily to consider her desires and feelings, such as her eagerness to help the family and her excitement at landing her first job after graduation, while balancing her ethical obligations. Lily should have sought supervision from her supervisor when she encountered a difficult situation and strived to uphold professional boundaries and maintain confidentiality. Lily should also have obtained informed consent from the family and refrained from engaging in dual relationships with them, such as attending a family dinner at their invitation. In summary, Lily's actions illustrate the importance of adhering to ethical standards and seeking guidance when faced with ethical dilemmas.

Case Study 3

Summary of Case Study

Dr. Bob is a psychologist in private practice who provided therapy to Allison for relationship issues. After three months, Allison ended therapy with Dr. Bob but they later met again at a mutual friend's party, exchanged phone numbers, and started a romantic relationship. Dr. Bob reminded Allison of their previous professional relationship when she sought services again and referred her to another professional, leading to a confrontation where Allison slammed the phone on Dr. Bob. The organization and human services population involved: The organization involved is Dr. Bob's private psychology practice, while the human services population is Allison, his former client.

Analysis of the Ethical Issues

Macro level

At the micro level, the ethical issue, in this case, is that Dr. Bob violated the ethical boundaries between therapist and client by engaging in a romantic relationship with Allison, his former client. This raises concerns about exploitation, power differentials, and the potential for harm to the client.

Micro level

At the macro level, the issue is whether ethical guidelines, policies, and laws regarding dual relationships in the mental health field are being upheld and enforced.

Analysis of Policies, Laws, and Ethical Guidelines Influencing the Ethical Decision-Making Process

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics prohibits social workers from engaging in romantic relationships with former clients, as it can compromise the client's well-being and the integrity of the therapeutic relationship. Many state licensing boards also prohibit or discourage dual relationships between therapists and former clients, with some exceptions. In this case, Dr. Bob should have adhered to the NASW's code of ethics and state laws by refraining from starting a romantic relationship with Allison.

Analysis of the Ethical Decision-Making Process Considering Personal Desires and Feelings Intersect with Ethical Obligations

Dr. Bob's desires and feelings intersected with his ethical obligations to maintain professional boundaries and avoid dual relationships with former clients. Despite his attraction to Allison, Dr. Bob should have recognized the potential harm and power dynamics involved and referred her to another therapist. Instead, he entered into a relationship with her, which

compromised his professional judgment and ethics. When Allison sought services again, Dr. Bob made the appropriate decision to refer her to another professional, but Allison's reaction highlights the potential harm and consequences of such dual relationships.

Conclusion

In conclusion, multiple or dual relationships are complex and require careful consideration by human services professionals to avoid harm to clients. The NASW professional ethical code guides how to handle these situations while ensuring the client's best interests are protected. In all three cases, the NASW professional ethical code guides how to manage dual relationships ethically and avoid potential harm to clients. Human services professionals must be aware of the potential risks associated with dual relationships and take steps to mitigate them, including clear communication, boundaries, and policies. Overall, the NASW ethical code serves as an important tool for ensuring ethical and professional conduct in the human services profession.

References

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