

**THE CONCEPT OF HUMAN DIGNITY AS A HINDRANCE TO UNDERSTANDING THE LINK
BETWEEN HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE PROFESSION OF SOCIAL WORK: THE POSSIBILITY OF
A SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION BASED ON HUMAN RIGHTS**
SOSYAL HİZMET MESLEĞİ VE İNSAN HAKLARI ARASINDAKİ BAĞI
ANLAMAKTA BİR GÜÇLÜK OLARAK İNSAN ONURU KAVRAMI: İNSAN
HAKLARI TEMELLİ SOSYAL HİZMET MESLEĞİNİN OLANAĞI

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Review Article

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to determine the relationship between social work and human rights in the context of human rights. In this framework, how the concept of human dignity, which is a requirement of the idea of human rights, has been defined since the day it emerged will be stated and what the concept of human dignity means in the context of human rights. It will be explained how human rights are defined in the USA, where it is not accepted as a professional value for workers, and in countries where it is accepted as a social work professional value. The possibility of a social work profession based on human rights will be discussed in the context of the current situation in Turkey.

Key Words: human dignity, human rights, social work

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, sosyal çalışma ve insan hakları arasında kurulan ilişkinin bağlamını insan onuru kavramı üzerinden ortaya koymak amacıyla olup bu çerçevede insan hakları fikrinin bir gereği olan insan onuru kavramının, kavramın ortaya çıktığı günden bu yana nasıl tanımlandığı ve insan hakları bağlamında insan onuru kavramının ne ifade ettiği ortaya konulacak, insan haklarının sosyal çalışma mesleği için mesleki bir değer olarak kabul edilmediği Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nde ve insan haklarının sosyal çalışma mesleği için bir değer olarak kabul edildiği ülkelerde insan onuru kavramının nasıl tanımlandığı açıklanacak, Türkiye'de mevcut durum çerçevesinde insan hakları temelli sosyal çalışma mesleğinin olanağı tartışılacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İnsan onuru, insan hakları, sosyal çalışma

Introduction

Although respecting human rights is one of the central principles of the social work profession according to the global definition made by international social work organizations, there may be difficulties in meeting the requirements of human rights which is one of the principles defining the professional relationship between the social worker and the client and providing guidance in professional activities by informing the specialist of the nature of the moral activity" (Özateş, 2010: 88), thus social work practices may not always be based on human rights.

To be able to understand the relationship between human rights and social work profession, the concept of human dignity must be properly explained. Although it is necessary to accurately describe the concept of human dignity, there are difficulties in explaining the concept of human dignity in the context of the social work profession. One of these difficulties is the improper definition of human dignity as in the USA. In countries where the social work profession is developing the knowledge, skills and value of the social work profession produced from the USA has been taken as reference. Therefore the concept of human dignity may be misidentified not only in the USA but also in the countries where the social work profession is developing. In this context, in this study, first the development of the concept of human dignity and the relationship between social work profession and the idea of human rights in the USA will be explained. Then, current situation in Turkey and how human right- based social work may be implemented will be discussed.

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1. Concept of Human Dignity

With the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the concept of human dignity has become as well-known a concept as that of human rights. The concept of human dignity was derived from the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (McCrudden, 2008, .655-656). Before the publication of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the concept of human dignity was included in the constitution of only five countries, and in 2012 it was included in the constitutions of 83% of the countries constituting the United Nations. Thus the concept of human dignity became a subject of study in many disciplines including legal studies, psychology, political science, political studies, bioethics, human rights and international legal studies (Shultziner & Carmi, 2014: 460-461).

Although the concept of human dignity became as well known as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the definition of human dignity, or in Latin, human dignitas, is explained in different ways at different times. According to Schulman (2008:6), the concept of human dignity can be explained under four headings as the "classical antiquity, biblical religion, Kantian moral philosophy, and 20th century constitutions and international declarations".

1.1. Classical Antiquity

The word "dignity" was used in this period by the Roman philosophers, Cicero and Seneca (Sulmasy, 2007, s. 11). Continuing the views of the Stoics, Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BC) stated the need for man to see himself as a citizen of the world and explained the concept of human dignity in the work entitled, "De Officiis":

"in every investigation into the nature of duty, it is vitally necessary for us to remember always how vastly superior is man's nature to that of cattle and other animals: their only thought is for bodily satisfactions. . . . Man's mind, on the contrary, is developed by study and reflection. . . . From this we may learn that sensual pleasure is wholly unworthy of the dignity of the human race." (cite in Rosen, 2014: 12).

1.2 Biblical Religion

When the historical development of human rights is considered, it can be said that human rights did not emerge on the basis of a specific religion. On the contrary, human rights are an achievement of the secular autonomous mind which was completely freed from the tutelage of religion during the European Enlightenment. For a long time, the Christian church, especially the Catholic church, rudely rejected the idea of human rights, especially the idea of freedom of religion, and even struggled with these ideas (Thurner, 2005)

Although human rights seems to be a concept which may be struggled with in respect of religion, there are statements related to human dignity in both Christianity and Judaism (Rosen, 2014:4). The concept of human dignity, which developed in the Roman period, has been accepted as a high value in Christianity, and in this context, demands for human dignity have increased (Stoecker, 2011:8). According to Christian belief, man is a reflection of God (Schulman, 2008:6). Rather than merely existing, a single person is intended to have individuality by God, and therefore carries the meaning of existence within himself. In Christian understanding, man has not come from a philosophical assumption, but is the basis of the explanation of God himself in Revelation (Heiznman, 2005:30).

The view of human dignity expressed as the Christian Bible view above is seen in all the sacred texts of the major religions¹². In this context, it is possible to define the concept of human dignity from a religious perspective as man being of value, having been created by God.

¹This is also valid for Islam. Article 1 of the Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam, which was published by the Islam Conference on 5 August 1990, states that all people come from the lineage of Adam and constitute a family with allegiance to Allah. All people are equal in respect of basic liabilities and responsibilities without any discrimination on the basis of race, colour, language, beliefs, gender, religion, politics, opinions, social status and other points. It is said that real religion guarantees an increase in this true path of dignity, each person is Allah's subject, the most useful subjects are greatly loved by Allah, and nobody is superior to others except in religion and good works. Thoughts related to human worth can be seen in the Koran. Verse 70 of the Isra chapter states, "We have honoured the Children of Adam and carried them on land and sea, and provided them with good things, and preferred them greatly over many of those We created", and in Verse 4 of Tin chapter, "We indeed created Man in the fairest stature". In the Alak chapter it states, "read in the name of the Lord! He created man from a clot." In Verse 13 of the Hucurat chapter, "O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)" (Islam City, n.d)

²In the Torah, the Hebrew term 'Kavod Habriyot' refers to God having created man in his own image, showing that the source of human dignity is God (Düzgün, 2013:24)

³The task is an obligation to act because of respect for the law (Kant 2013:15, cite in Kılıç, 2009, s.95).

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1.3. Kantian Moral Philosophy

Kuçuradi (2003: 85) explained the concept of Kant as “to comply unconditionally with a good moral law, or it is good to comply unconditionally with the moral law”. In other words, for a statement to be good, it must come from an unconditional task, but free will determined by the task is good (Gökberk,1998:361).

According to Kant, for morality to provide goodness, it must be stated in the form of rules, “the absolute imperative is that there is a single God, at the same time, live by the maxim that you would wish to be the universal law” (Kant, 1995; cite in Özateş, 2010:89)

According to Kant, there is no unconditional good other than goodwill. The single motif of goodwill is to undertake a task simply to do the task. Whatever is intended to be done, goodwill is the intention for the task to be done (MacIntyre, 2001, cite in Özateş, 2010:89). It can be said that Kant shaped human dignity in the above framework. As stated by Öktem (2007:4), “according to Kant, each person has a sacred asset as a carrier of humanity. Therefore, we should see each person as the final aim of humanity, as an aim in their own right, and never as the means to an end, and thus it is a categorical imperative to show respect to the dignity of each person.

1.4. 20th Century Constitutions and International Declarations

The political change following atrocities experienced in the 20th century such as the First and Second World War, brought about documentation of human rights and institutionalisation based on documentation.

Immediately after the Second World War, the concept of human dignity provides the foundation of the idea of human rights in national laws and international agreements. In the post-war period, many human rights documents were drawn up to respect many people. Several documents emerged in the post-war period that demanded respect be shown to human rights by compliance with the basic area of human dignity (Misztal, 2012:104).

Of the international agreements, the most important document passed on the concept of human dignity was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 1 of the Declaration states, “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.” Kuçuradi (2013: 101) explains this as:

Human dignity consist of the philosophical/anthropological knowledge of the value of the human species, i.e., the knowledge of certain of its specificities and of the achievements of the human species in history resulting from them and which secure its special of the human species in history resulting from them and which see its special place in Single human rights are practical implication of human dignity. They demand from all individuals a kind of treatment for all individuals, which protects the value of the human being.”

In the framework of the definition of human dignity and human rights by Kuçuradi (2013), it can be said that it was necessary to take the concept of human dignity as the reference in a form which defined the 20th century Constitutions and Agreements, when implementing human rights, which could be defined as regulations for the protection of and requirements for human dignity and human rights and the things that man possesses just because he is a man in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was used as reference for the creation of Constitutions and International Agreements.

However, as stated by Kuçuradi (2013: 100),above all when explaining the idea of human rights, the concept of human dignity may be defined differently from the definition in 20th century constitutions and international agreements. Although this provides the opportunity of relating an idea to human rights, rather than understanding the whole idea of human rights, the explanation with a concept referencing the idea of human rights can make it difficult to implement the requirements of the idea of human rights, which was defined by Kuçuradi (1982:3) as “the confusion of thoughts related to the criteria of a single human right results in confusion on the subject of the content of various single rights just as much as the content of this concept” and thus it could lead to concept confusion.

2.Social Work Profession Ethics and the Idea of Human Rights in the USA

The concept of human dignity applied by the NASW can be seen as follows: although a connection has been established between the social work profession and human rights, if the basic notion of the profession is accepted, it is most certainly not possible that the relationship was formed since the emergence of the profession. By assuming that the idea of human rights started with the publication of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1945, it is necessary to say that the relationship established between the social work profession and human rights was established in 1945.

In researching the history of the relationship between the social work profession and the idea of human rights, Healy (2018:744) stated that the idea of human rights emerged in the social work profession after the 1980s. In this context, the policy document published in 1988 by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) reported that the social work profession had developed with the relationship with human rights.

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Although it can be seen that the concepts of human rights and human dignity were included in the ethics documents of some countries and specific professional rules were determined according to these concepts, the social work profession and associated ethical principles and values in the USA are not based on human rights.

This can be seen in the historical classification of Reamer related to the development of professional ethics and in ethics documents published in the USA. According to the Reamer (2014: 166-167) classification, the historical development of professional ethics in the USA can be discussed as the moral period and values period, ethics theory and the decision-making period, and the digital period.

In the period starting from the end of the 19th century, the concerns of many clients related to morals were predominant rather than the practitioners and professional ethics or moral values. In the values period, concerns about the future of the profession replaced the concerns of the clients related to morals (Reamer, 2014: 166), and human rights in these two periods encompassing the time before the publication of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights did not play a role in determining social work ethical principles and values.

On the other hand, in the ethics theory and decision-making period, which was shaped by discussions related to bioethics and professional ethics, ethical standards were implemented with regulations. In the risk-management period and digital period (Reamer, 2014: 167) no regulations were made related to human rights.

In the USA, where human rights are not accepted as a professional principle, the NASW defines social work professional values as service, social justice, dignity and worth of person, the importance of human relationships, integrity and competence (NASW, 1999, cite in Barksy, 2009:21). However, in 2008, with the revision in the Concil on Social Work Education, Educational Policy and Accreditation document, although human rights and scientific research values were added to the six values published by the NASW, these two values are not in the ethics documents (Barksy, 2009:26). Thus, when the social work profession values accepted in the USA are examined, it can be seen that human rights are not accepted whereas the concept of human dignity is accepted as a value. This can be seen in the definition of dignity and worth of the person

“Social workers treat each person in a caring and respectful fashion, mindful of individual differences and cultural and ethnic diversity. Social workers promote clients’ socially responsible self-determination. Social workers seek to enhance clients’ capacity and opportunity to change and to address their own needs. Social workers are cognizant of their dual responsibility to clients and to the broader society. They seek to resolve conflicts between clients’ interests and the broader society’s interests in a socially responsible manner consistent with the values, ethical principles, and ethical standards of the profession” (NASW,2017).

As seen in the NASW definition of dignity and worth of the person, human dignity is related to individual differences and helping to meet the needs of the individual with respect to cultural diversity. Protecting and meeting the requirements of human dignity entails increasing opportunities for change and the capacity of clients to determine their own destiny, while also meeting their needs. However, with the concept of human dignity, a process emerges which could cause conflict between the client and society, and social workers take responsibility for resolving this conflict.

The primary target of social workers is to help those in need and to deal with social problems in the framework of the service principles, and human dignity and values specified. When the social work ethics of the USA are considered, a utilitarian ethical approach is thought to be predominant in social work ethics. When the social work profession is examined with a utilitarian approach, it can be seen to be necessary to establish a balance between client welfare and societal outcomes, while providing benefit with equal distribution of resources, as a necessity of human respect, and this is a result of compromise with societal freedoms.

The necessity to establish a balance between societal outcomes and client welfare entails professional practices directed to the client who is defenceless and/or under pressure. These practices are implemented in accordance with the principle of social justice, explained by the NASW as:

“Social workers pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people. Social workers’ social change efforts are focused primarily on issues of poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and other forms of social injustice. These activities seek to promote sensitivity to and knowledge about oppression and cultural and ethnic diversity. Social workers strive to ensure access to needed information, services, and resources; equality of opportunity; and meaningful participation in decision making for all people. (NASW,2017).

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In this context, although there is a pathway for social workers, such as implementing professional practices directed at providing social justice to meet the needs to fulfill the requirements of human rights of individuals, when social work ethics are examined with a utilitarian principle, as stated by Öztürk (2009:110), there can be a dilemma in terms of the priority of individual or societal benefit, and when social justice principles are not implemented, clients remain weak.

In this framework, when the social work profession in the USA is examined, it can be said that the professional focus is on achieving a state of well-being, there is no professional focus on the idea of human rights, and although human dignity and worth is emphasized in the regulations related to ethical principles and values, this emphasis defines the utilitarian relationship rather than the basis of human rights.

This situation related to ethical principles and values is not specific to the USA. According to a 2014 study of ethical guidelines of different countries, there was found to be no emphasis on human rights in the USA, Israel, Singapore and Iceland, whereas there was seen to be emphasis on human rights in the social work professional guidelines published in Australia, Canada, Finland, the Republic of Ireland, Japan, Russia, North Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Portugal and Spain (Keeney et al. 2014). In the documents where this was emphasized, human rights were defined as a professional principle. This can be seen in the Code of Ethics published by the British Association of Social Workers (BASW). The Code states, "respect for human rights and a commitment to promoting social justice are at the core of social work practice throughout the world..... Human rights and social justice serve as the motivation and justification for social work action" (BASW,2014). In the same document:

"Social workers should be prepared to challenge discriminatory, ineffective and unjust policies, procedures and practice. They should challenge the abuse of power and the exclusion of people from decisions that affect them. Social workers should not collude with erosion of human rights or allow their skills to be used for inhumane purpose such as systematic abuse, detention of child asylum seekers and threats to family life of those in vulnerable positions" (BASW,2014).

Switzerland is another country that has defined human rights as a professional principle. In the section related to human rights in the Code of Ethics published by the Swiss Association of Social Workers, social work practices are stated to be based on human dignity and rights based on human dignity (Avenir Social, 2010).

The Code of Ethics of the Canadian Association of Social Workers states, "Social workers are committed to human rights as enshrined in Canadian law, as well as in international conventions on human rights created or supported by the United Nations". Thus, the social work profession is committed to protecting the human rights of individuals and groups as stated in the Canadian Charter of Rights and the Declaration of Human Rights, by stating that this is a long-standing commitment to human dignity and the values of people (CASW, 2015).

In countries that have accepted human rights as a principle, the concept of human dignity taken as the foundation of the relationship between the social work profession and human rights, is seen to be a concept related to all people and to the protection and supervision of all human rights.

3.The Current Situation in Turkey

Regulations related to professional ethics in Turkey are defined in the Ethical Principles and Responsibilities document published by Turkish Association of Social Workers. The concept of human dignity is defined as "every person has their own specific worth and this worth must be shown respect" in this document (SHUDER,2014). In relation to human rights, there is also the statement, "respect must be shown to the basic human rights of individuals and groups, as stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international documents which have taken this Declaration as the source" (SHUDER,2014).

Although it is stated that respect must be shown to human rights in the Social Work Professional Ethics and Values document, which was drawn up from examination of the ethics documents of the IFSW, NASW and the Czech Republic Association of Social Workers (Çilga, 2004:74), taking into consideration the conditions for professional practices, the social structure and cultural characteristics of Turkey, there is a conflict of the individual and societal responsibilities of social workers in the Turkish Social Work Professional Ethics and Values document, similar to that of the social work ethical principles and values document published in the USA. This can be seen under the heading of ethical responsibilities to clients in the article of commitment to clients. The article states:

The basic responsibility of social worker is to develop the well-being of clients based on their needs, without neglecting societal responsibilities. Recommendations should be presented to clients when there is a conflict of responsibilities towards the client and society (SHUDER,2014).

In professional practice based on human rights, it is not possible for there to be a conflict of individual and societal responsibilities

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of social workers. In this context, even if a regulation is recommended related to compatibility with societal outcomes in client-society outcomes conflict, in the Turkish social work professional ethical principles and values document, as in the ethical principles and values document published in the USA, it can be assumed that there could be a conflict of individual and societal responsibilities of social workers, and this causes concept confusion related to human rights.

In addition to this concept confusion, another difficulty in establishing a connection between human rights and social work in Turkey, is that as in other countries where specific social work information has not been produced, the social work professional ethics information of the USA is taken as the reference for the development of the social work discipline in Turkey.

Taking the social work professional ethics information of the USA as the reference in Turkey means that in contrast to accepting human rights as a principle for the social work profession, the professional ethics information produced in the USA is accepted, which is not based on human rights and does not accept human rights as a central principle. This can be seen in studies related to professional ethics which have been conducted in Turkey. In the article entitled, "Ethical Decision Making Process in Social Work Practices" by Gökeaslan-Çifti and Gönen (2011), no statement was found related to human rights in the explanations of social work professional values with reference to the study by Reamer (2006) which evaluated the American National Social Work Principles. In the book, "Social Work: Foundations and Intervention Methods", Duyan (2016) explained the social work professional ethical principles with reference to the professional ethical principles in the USA. Moreover, the book published by Reamer (2018) on the subject of social work ethics has been translated into Turkish and the social work ethics in this book are explained taking the USA as reference.

4. Conclusion: How Can the Social Work Profession be Based on Human Rights?

For the social work profession to be implemented based on human rights, there is a need for professional practices to provide justice in the individual freedoms and rights of all people, primarily the clients (Banks, 1995:40). This makes it necessary for there to be professional focus on fulfilling the requirements of the concept of human dignity. In addition to implementing professional practices related to the protection and development of human rights, this provides the benefit of questioning whether or not the social workers meet the requirements of human rights. In this context, this removes the discrimination between micro and macro for social workers, as stated by Işık (2011). However, when evaluating the profession of social work to be able to base it on human rights, behaviors must be demonstrated in the form of value attribution as defined by Kuçuradi (2006:18) as, "the evaluator considers the action to be valuable or worthless (good-bad) because of his own random specific interest, and his own special circumstances" and value behaviors defined as "the predominant group membership of the evaluator and the action of the opposing person are psychological reasons on one side in respect of conforming to the general value judgements of the moral to which 'yes' is said, as behavior only contributing as natural behavior" in a single situation or to allow a universal professional view of the event.

While this enables practitioners to behave in the same way in the same situations, it overlooks the fact that every client does not behave in the same way. Despite being members of the same group (women, children, the elderly etc), preventing the generally valid behavior of clients with a greater need for protection and development of human rights allows the needs of clients to be met. In this context, the relationship between social justice and social work is seen in the professional practices of the social worker to fulfill the requirements of human rights in a single situation of many clients rather than attempting to benefit the client in the conflict that emerges between client and society, and the professional practices of the social worker implemented not only at the macro level but also at the micro level also provide social justice.

To be able to remove the concept confusion related to the concept of human dignity and human rights taken as reference in the social work profession, there is a need for correct understanding of the idea of human rights in the field of social work. This requires a definition of the idea of human rights as a principle of professional ethics (it is used as professional morality) which can be defined as a judgement system (Kuçuradi, 2003:21) of the various values required which are generally valid or at a specific time in a group related to behaviors in interpersonal relationships. This need is thought to be met in the Declaration of Ethical Principles and Values of the IFSW. Under the heading of inherent human dignity:

"Social workers recognize and respect the inherent dignity and worth of all human beings in attitude, word, and deed. We respect all persons, but we challenge beliefs and actions of those persons who devalue or stigmatize themselves or other persons"(IFSW, 2018)

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In the same Declaration under the heading of Promoting Human Rights:

“Social workers embrace and promote the fundamental and inalienable rights of all human beings. Social work is based on respect for the inherent worth, dignity of all people and the individual and social /civil rights that follow from this. Social workers often work with people to find an appropriate balance between competing human rights.”(IFSW, 2018).

Thus, while regulating ethical principles and values, by taking the professional ethical principles of the IFSW as reference, similar to the acceptance of the social work definition by social work associations at the international level, it is possible to prevent the concept confusion related to the relationship between the social work profession and human rights. However, even if the concept confusion in ethical principles and values documentation allows the connection to be seen between human rights and the profession of social work, it is not sufficient to determine the value of the idea of human rights in social work. For a social work profession based on human rights there must be professional elements which can evaluate human rights other than the ethical principles and values mechanism. Social workers need to have an awareness of human rights to be able to make evaluations with human rights, and thus there is a need for knowledge, skills and values to be acquired at degree level. Therefore, changes should be made to the social work degree curriculum, and further professional training courses should be organized for social workers who have not undergone training according to the new curriculum.

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PROFESSION OF SOCIAL WORK: THE POSSIBILITY OF A SOCIAL WORK
PROFESSION BASED ON HUMAN RIGHTS**

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