

Ethical Social Work for a Harmonious and Just World

Throughout the history of modern social work, the discipline has been grounded on many different philosophical underpinnings and technical approaches. These have included, for example, the rescue of the deserving poor from deprivation; provision of Freudian based counselling to the middle classes; the protection of those at risk of abuse whether old or young; disaster relief, as for example following the recent earth quake in China, and action to ameliorate the effects of human trafficking around the globe.

Whatever the approach taken social workers are in very powerful positions in respect of the people they seek to help; sometimes attempts are made to control this power through the influence of bureaucracy and professional monitoring; sometimes by expectations of professional responsibility on the social worker; and sometimes and most promisingly by limiting the power through the creation of partnerships with others notably those who use services and other professions. Power may or may not be exercised responsibly in any context; given the vulnerability of many of those who use social work services only the highest ethical standards are acceptable in social work practice.

This presentation will explore the extent and limits of an ethical social work practice, taking account of the different global approaches to social work and will seek to ground social work in the context of human rights.