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FACTORS INFLUENCING PROFESSIONAL DECISION-MAKING BEHAVIORS OF SOCIAL WORKERS AT SOCIO-ECONOMIC SUPPORT SERVICES IN TURKIYE

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the factors affecting the decision-making behavior of social workers based on their professional experience. Based on this purpose, qualitative research method was preferred. In addition, among the research designs, the case study design was used and face-to-face interviews were conducted with twenty participants. Another data collection method is observation. Eight key factors that influenced the decision-making process of the participants were identified and consisted of: social workers' opinions (clients, poverty, socio-economic support services), the evaluation process in practice, their subjective experiences, their worldview. and ideologies, professional training, professional experience in the workplace, consultation with colleagues, and expectations from institutional and non-institutional organizations. The identified factors point to the complexity of decision-making behavior when social workers are expected to reach reasonable and reasoned decisions. There are also subjective evaluations in their decisions. Therefore, it raises the possibility of different decisions about the same case. Therefore, social workers must be able to distinguish between their own values and professional boundaries. Thus, social workers will be able to distinguish between their own values and professional boundaries. Particular attention should be paid to the maintenance of professional standards. As a result of the research, implications for further research are discussed. And it is aimed to provide guidance on decision-making methods of social workers.

Keywords: Psychology of Religion, Social work, Decision-Making Behaviors, Field Practice, Socio-Economic Support

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TÜRKİYE'DE SOSYAL HİZMET UZMANLARININ SOSYAL VE EKONOMİK DESTEK HİZMETLERİNDE MESLEKİ KARAR VERME DAVRANIŞLARININ BELİRLEYİCİLERİ

Öz

Bu çalışma, sosyal hizmet uzmanlarının karar verme davranışlarını etkileyen faktörlerin mesleki deneyimlerine dayalı olarak incelenmesini amaçlamaktadır. Bu amaca istinaden nitel araştırma yöntemi tercih edilmiştir. Ayrıca araştırma desenleri arasından durum çalışması deseni kullanılmış ve yirmi katılımcıyla yüz yüze görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Bir diğer veri toplama yöntemi gözlemdir. Katılımcıların karar verme sürecini etkileyen sekiz temel faktör belirlenmiştir. Bunlar: sosyal hizmet uzmanlarının görüşleri (müşteriler, yoksulluk, sosyo-ekonomik destek hizmetleri), uygulamadaki değerlendirme süreci, öznel deneyimleri, dünya görüşleri ve ideolojiler, mesleki eğitim, işyerindeki mesleki deneyim, meslektaşlarla istişare, kurumsal ve kurumsal olmayan beklentiler. Belirlenen faktörler, sosyal hizmet uzmanlarından makul ve gerekçeli kararlara varmaları beklendiğinde karar verme davranışlarının karmaşıklığına işaret etmektedir. Ayrıca kararlarında subjektif değerlendirmeler de mevcuttur. Bu nedenle aynı vaka hakkında farklı kararların olma ihtimalini ortaya çıkmaktadır. Bu, sosyal hizmet uzmanlarının mesleki uygulama ile kişisel değerler arasında bulanık olabilecek sınırları tanıyabilmesi gerektiği anlamına gelmektedir. Bu nedenle sosyal hizmet uzmanları kendi değerleri ve mesleki sınırları arasında ayırım yapabilmelidir. Mesleki standartların korunmasına özel dikkat gösterilmelidir. Araştırma sonucunda daha ileri araştırmalara yönelik çıkarımlar tartışılmıştır. Ve sosyal hizmet uzmanlarının karar verme yöntemlerine ilişkin rehberlik yapması hedeflenmektedir.

[Geniş Öz, çalışmanın sonunda yer almaktadır.]

Anahtar Kelimeler: Din Psikolojisi, Sosyal hizmet, karar verme davranışları, saha uygulaması, sosyal ve ekonomik destek



Introduction

Assessments address a specific situation that one experiences or an issue in its scope in social work (Kucuradi, 2018). Social work interventions are predicated on assessments and systematic observations regarding a client, which makes assessments and following procedures important in practice. Defined as an ongoing process, an assessment is developed by the interaction between a social worker and a client (Bartlett, 2003). Social

workers strive for understanding clients' actual agenda, their presenting problems, and develop an intervention plan through this interaction (Webb, 2017).

In relation to the process of assessment in social work practice (ASWP), some classifications have been developed. Parker (2015) proposes that ASWP is a dynamic process where social workers concentrate on "what" and "how" questions concerning a case. He contends that ASWP relies on some norms and standards having some specific and firm principles but that they are subject to change over time. Along with this, Kucuradi (2018) brings forward that an assessment should possess two components: value attribution and value appraisal. The former stands for a subjective evaluation that a social worker imposes a meaning on what (s)he assesses whereas the latter purports an unselective evaluation which doesn't reflect the value of what is assessed but is dependent on several criteria including rules and norms.

Likewise, ASWP should have preconditioned questions in compliance with a framework specifying who will participate in an assessment procedure and what methods can be utilized (Holland, 2004). A social worker, accordingly, should possess some skills to be able to meet the aforementioned requirements of ASWP. These skills consist of active listening, summarizing, paraphrasing, interpretation, empathy, unconditional positive regard, gathering data, and analyzing/keeping data safe (Martin, 2010). Moreover, ASWP should begin with an understanding of a client's life conditions, identify critical points in her/his life, and focus on situations which deserve closer attention by making use of current approaches (Crisp et al., 2005; Taylor et al., 1990). Milner et al. (2015) suggests that ASWP should be designed as five stages described below where social workers:

1. obtain brief information related to a case,
2. gather data from a client (sociodemographic info, psychosocial history, the client's worldview, presenting problems, and attempts to cope with them)
3. interpret the obtained information pursuant to professional standards and their theoretical orientations,
4. review the outputs upon their interpretation such as a client's relational styles, needs, risky situations, expectations of care and safety, coping skills, strengths for a potential change,
5. develop a plan or arrive at a decision based on this assessment for

further work.

ASWP comes to an end when there is a need to decide among possible options for a client. This decision can be defined as the irreversible use of available resources by a social worker (Horvitz et al., 1988; O'Sullivan, 2011). As social workers' final decisions influence clients' lives, social activities, even their destiny, reaching a decision or developing a plan may be compelling (Proctor, 2002; Robison & Reeser, 2002). To handle this challenge, it is of importance to regularly perform stages of decision-making. In this respect, Llewellyn-Thomas and Crump (2013) identify five decision-making stages which can be followed:

First stage: It should be known that there will be a choice at the end of this process and possible options should be considered.

Second stage: Positive and negative aspects of possible options should be regarded.

Third stage: Personal significance attributed to positive and negative options should be analyzed.

Fourth stage: All resources available to a client should be used..

Fifth stage: An action plan should be developed and a final decision should be clear.

In a similar vein, Congress (2000) maintains that professionals' values, institutional values, and societal values should be considered in the first stage. Subsequently, ethical principles, applicable laws, and regulations should be taken into consideration. In the view of such information, social workers should develop decisional hypotheses, and reflect on their possible consequences. They also should understand who will benefit or be harmed by these decisions. Ultimately, they should have consultations with supervisors or colleagues to arrive at the most ethical and correct decision (Congress, 2000: 10).

It seems to be clear that social workers' decisions about their clients require an ethical aspect (Osimo & Landau, 2001). In this regard, in order to minimize ethical violations and personal subjectivity, they must know how to turn a client's rights into her/his self-determination in practice and redress a balance between their own professionalism and collaboration with that client. In parallel with this purpose, if they also benefit from clients' reference frames will be helpful (Cuzzi et al., 1993; Barsky, 2010). It is important to note that existing models of decision making support objective and ethical decision-making. These models offer opportunities by which a

professional can compare alternatives based on some information provided and develop an action plan. However, social workers can still have personal decisions without professional judgments (Harren, 1979; Mattison, 2000). Walden et al. (1990) proposes that these models encompass:

1. **System-oriented model:** suggesting that social expectations and organizational demands determine social workers' decisions.
2. **Client-oriented model:** suggesting that a client's self-determination is influential on social workers' decisions.
3. **Combined model:** suggesting that social expectations, organizational demands, clients' needs and rights influence social workers' decisions.
4. **Non-decision making model:** suggesting that social workers do not decide among possible options and expect that others or other organizations will have this responsibility.

On the other hand, Harren (1979) previously addressed decision-making in another context. He emphasized the importance of understanding people's mental backgrounds, and asserted three decision-making styles: rational, intuitive, and dependent. The rational decision-making style means that people deliberately and reasonably arrive at their decisions depending upon accurate information they look for and realistic self-evaluation. They endorse themselves as the source of their own decisions, which facilitates us to describe them as "self-actualizing decision makers". However, the intuitive decision-making style is characterized by attention toward feelings, and emotional self-awareness. People cannot explain why they pursue those decisions when asked, and this style is more likely to result in ineffective decisions compared to the rational style because of internal affective fluctuations over time. Along with these, the dependent decision-making style considers that people do not take any responsibility to reach a decision. They are affected by external expectations such as authorities and are inclined to show passive-obedient personality traits that may reduce the anxiety of decisions. Nevertheless, they experience dissatisfaction and incompetency. Additionally, Scott and Bruce (1995) also identified an avoidant decision-making style in which people avoid decision-making behaviors and expect that other people or authorized bodies will have required decisions.

A. The Goal of This Study

The fact that children and minor young people who are in need of protection are not prioritized to get care by official bodies in Turkey makes them vulnerable and requires them to live with families (if available) (Social

and Economic Support Regulation, 2015). In this context, the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services of the Republic of Turkey's General Directorate of Child Services provides the Socio-Economic Support Services (SESS) in which social workers deliver professional services in order to solve children's problems and to meet their needs. According to the Ministry's year-end annual report; 198,907 children and minor young people benefited from SESS in 2019 (Ministry of Family and Social Services of the Republic of Turkey, 2020).

The Social and Economic Support Regulation (2015) defines purposes of social workers' practice, duties and responsibilities. Social workers can choose what service(s) to be provided regarding this regulation (see also. 7(1), 9(1), and 10(2) articles of the regulation). Although there has been a growing interest in how social workers make decisions in their professional practice, few studies have attempted to understand this phenomenon in terms of socio-economic support services, especially in Turkey as required and justified by the regulations. For this reason, how and in what way social workers do assessments and make decisions about their cases will further our understanding of their decisions and promote the quality of services. The main goal of this study is to investigate factors influencing professional decision-making behaviors of social workers working at Socio-Economic Support Services in Turkey based on their experiences. To the best of our knowledge, no study directly and comprehensively investigated decision-making behaviors of social workers in Turkey. Thus, we expect that the present study will provide a basic decision-making framework for social workers, will facilitate decision-making processes in social work practice, and will lead to further studies.

B. Research Method

1. Research Design

A qualitative research method has been conducted in the present study, which enables us to understand any possible subject from the participants' viewpoints, to comprehend their attributions to behaviors, events or objects, and to analyze their interpretations. Hereby, it concentrates on participants' experiences, perceptions, beliefs, and motivations (Hennink et al., 2020). It also explores why people act in some ways (Rosenthal, 2016). Thus, in order to answer "what are the factors influencing case assessments and professional decisions of social workers working at the SESS organizations?", a qualitative research method is more appropriate. We made use of a case study design whose features include

addressing an event or phenomenon, trying to understand its complexity considering several factors (Merriam, 2018), and construing it without manipulative attempts (Rowley, 2002).

2. Participants

Purposive sampling method has been used to select participants. Researchers can identify participants who can share the most relevant and reliable information on a topic and get in touch with them by way of the method (Guarte and Barrios, 2006). Researchers can also have interviews with people who they may know as participants for research reasons, which is called purposive convenience sampling (Merriam, 2018). Therefore, researchers interacted with social workers who could be reachable (n=9), and contacted social workers actively working (n=11) at the SESS departments in Istanbul by phone to have an interview. They were informed about the goal, content, and methodology of the study, and they gave their approval to the study. The sample included 20 participants (social workers) whose ages were between 27 - 36 years, and their average age was 28 years. They graduated from different universities. Their work experience at the SESS departments differed from 3.5 years (the longest) to 4 months (the shortest). They have been working there for 2 years on average.

3. Data Collection Tools

During the data collection process, in-depth interviews have been conducted to determine the participants' views and to ensure that they are directly observed (Creswell, 2017). The interviews included a sociodemographic info sheet and a semi-structured interview form. Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to concentrate on important points occurring either naturally or unexpectedly and to learn more about hidden meanings during interviews. It also enables participants to freely respond to questions asked in interviews (Sant, 2019). Initially, the semi-structured interview form consisted of sixteen questions proposed by the researchers. Upon being reviewed by a group of academics and two actively working social workers, some questions have been replaced by the new ones. The latest form included questions searching answers for:

- How do social workers describe the characteristics of clients at the SESS?
- How do social workers describe clients who are exposed to poverty?
- What factors influence social workers' decision-making processes?

To evaluate the quality of the questions, and their relevance to the

objectives of the study, pilot interviews were performed with seven social workers actively working in different provinces via a convenience sample method. In consequence of analyzing the data obtained, the objectives of the present research were clearly defined, and the latest form of the questions were specified.

4. Data Collection

We conducted in-depth interviews with social workers whom we have got in touch with and who have given their consent to the study at the places and time intervals they preferred. Ethical approval has been provided by the Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee of Istanbul University-Cerrahpasa Rectorate based on the committee's evaluation (the document number: 86909). The study has been carried out in line with the regulations of the committee. During the interviews with the participants, a tape recording has been used to completely record the interviews, which also allows researchers to observe participants (Merriam, 2018). In case some participants didn't approve of having an interview through the tape recording, the researchers took notes while interviewing. Each interview has lasted 45 minutes on average. The total time of the interviews is 859 minutes, 13 seconds.

5. Data Analysis

The tape recordings and the notes were deciphered to MS Word. The materials included 289 pages in total. The researchers and a social worker read materials and defined some categories by an open coding. The categories were classified and named based on their common features. Finally, eight factors were identified. We utilized descriptive analysis whereby we can analyze the data to get answers for "why and how" questions (Nassaji, 2015) considering the fact that it is ideal since we had interviews with the participants (Magilvy and Thomas, 2009). And we presented the participants' common interpretations regarding the factors as numerical data (n=...).

6. Validity and Reliability

A pilot study was carried out with 5 participants to test the consistency of the questions. The data obtained were analyzed separately by all researchers and then brought together. The results of the combined analyses were shared with 2 different social workers to evaluate the consistency with both textual and practical observations.

7. Limitations

The present study has the following limitations:

- The participants on average worked at the SESS departments for two years.
- The participants did not have much professional experience.

C. Results

1. Participants' Views

a. Clients

Most of the participants (n=11) described clients in two general terms: a) clients who are in need of social and economic support and b) clients who seek to earn income by applying to the SESS departments even though they do not need it:

"Well, I principally classify these people by two categories. Some people really need this support while some just try their chance to get more." (P17)

"Half of the clients apply for the support thanks to children who really need protection, but half of them try to deceive us." (P13)

Considering the conditions of the SESS departments, it is well-known that each client has unique characteristics and needs. However, many participants (n=16) described clients more by concepts such as "vulnerable, victim, and needy". Additionally, other characteristics to which they prefer to attribute was:

- Clients applying for the SESS department to get support are shy or hesitant because of their poverty (n=2),
- They could not dress well based on the seasonal conditions (n=2), or
- They are undernourished.

Participants also stated that some clients had a history of crime and imprisonment, that they did not have family integrity, and had difficulties in dealing with problems in their lives:

"You know, I can describe them as beaten, exhausted, demanding solutions, stuck, and burned out." (P1)

"In many interviews, clients are destitute and bedraggled." (P8)

"In these districts, The possibility of being sent to prison is very high. Crime rates are especially on the rise." (P9)

b. Poverty

Another factor influencing social workers' professional decisions is

the way they perceive poverty. The fact that there are no guidelines on how to understand if a client is in need of support leads social workers to describe clients' poverty based on their own experiences and observations, which makes this factor important in decision-making. From the viewpoints of many participants, clients' poverty stands for "an inability to meet basic needs" (n=16). However, some participants focus on the relationship between poverty and needs considering some circumstances. For instance, they evaluate "clients' poverty" compared to clients' standards:

"Those who do not have a regular income and cannot meet their basic needs... poverty means living bad and applies to those people." (P6)

"Poverty depends upon the way one perceives it. For example, my father has a very high income, but he still thinks his salary is not enough for our family." (P5)

Participants expressed some observations in a cultural context considering some clients' poverty as suspicious. Some of them do not consider some support applications by people who live in some districts as they believe there is no poverty or no situation which requires a social work intervention. They do not take these applications into consideration in cultural contexts where poverty is dominant because even if the socioeconomic support services are provided, clients' life conditions do not change; they convey "poverty" as a way of living to next generations (n=3), are not able to manage financial requirements (n=2), embark on poverty as a way of life (n=3), or have too many children and do not desire or attempt to improve their own lives. Furthermore, participants maintain that substance abuse is prevalent among clients who have such conditions, that they have adjustment issues such as unemployment and crime, and that they live in houses lacking-quality (n=1):

"For example, children will someday do the drug thing. Or their fathers can commit a crime and go to prison. And their mothers may undergo a completely different life." (P15)

"There are seven or eight people living together in a room. There are places where there is no air outlet and you can feel a pang of grief because of the smell there. We are trying to rescue these people from those houses and provide a multifaceted support. However, after one or two months, people cannot pay their rent, or they just return to their neighborhoods because they aspire to their own culture." (P11)

Some participants expressed the cultural poverty mentioned above by referring to Gypsy/Romany families. It seems that these families benefiting from the SESS are not welcomed:

“When you go to Gypsy/Romany families to understand if they need socioeconomic support... I mean, of course, it is an example just to clarify. You go there and realize that they can live well under those conditions via our socioeconomic support. But, instead, they prefer not to receive it.” (P6)

“There are six children. I heard from a colleague saying that: “These are Gypsy/Romanian people. That’s why I can only provide support to one of them so that they would not exploit this opportunity.” (P8)

c. Socioeconomic Support Service

Social workers can influence how their clients can benefit from the SESS. All participants expressed that the SESS should not be provided to “children in need of protection” but it should support their familial care, which should be considered apart from social aid. They also pointed out that the SESS is a tool for therapeutic communication and case follow-up, a preventive service, a temporary support to clients, but it should lead to positive changes in clients’ lives:

“If we considered the SESS just approval or rejection, it would be wrong... since it is a preventive service.” (P14)

“That client is a mother. She is bedraggled and needs something to get better. As a social worker, you encourage her through an economic support program but it is temporary.” (P19)

One participant said that applications made to the SESS are not suitable for its purpose and that when her clients apply to the SESS for support, most of them are rejected, which affects her decisions:

“Let’s say I have forty cases and they applied to the SESS. I will reject thirty five applications. Then, they give me a nickname, “naysayer” or something like that... I suggest that the SESS should definitely be closed down by the Ministry... or the SESS and its service model should be changed completely. So, nobody should come here just because they don’t have money.” (P5)

2. The assessment process in practice

The assessment process is one of the main factors influencing social workers’ decision-making. They assess clients’ life conditions in order to decide if they will provide the SESS to those clients by an objective evidence-based approach. Accordingly, they visit their clients so that they can have a better understanding of their life conditions, which helps them gather some information or evidence to facilitate making decisions. They can also get in touch with clients’ neighbors, shopkeepers, and local authorities to get more information. In this sense, social workers should observe their clients and gather information or evidence about their income, health status, family

characteristics etc. in order to make the most appropriate decision regarding their cases. These lie behind social workers' decisions by influencing their intellectual and behavioral struggles related to cases.

a. Field practice

All participants (n=20) said that the most important factor in decision-making processes is field practice. But which factors social workers pay attention to differ. Some participants (n=3) place importance on where a child lives or sleeps, while others (n=3) prioritize the hygiene status of the house that child lives in. Some participants (n=6) emphasized that the importance of performing a field practice becomes salient when making decisions:

"I pay attention to where the children sleep whether they can undergo an incestuous relationship or not." (P2)

"Home visits can give you clues if where they live is clean or hygienic... or about familial problems and their severity." (P15)

b. Household goods

We have found that social workers pay attention to how many household goods are found in where clients live and to how they acquired those goods in the assessment procedure. Some social workers (n=4) emphasized that they focus on the adequacy of necessary household goods such as refrigerators and washing machines, while others (n=12) stated that they put emphasis on how and when they are provided, instead of their quality and practicability during the assessment procedure:

"The condition of their houses or the physical conditions are important, is there any furniture there to meet the needs of this family?" (P9)

"For example, they bought a kitchen utensil when they had better conditions. But they cannot afford something like that right now, so what? Should we expect that they have to sell that utensil and just live there without that?"

c. Client perceptions

The participants expressed that some clients stood out and affected their decisions. We have described these clients in three groups. The first group consists of clients "who are in need as social workers expect or whose conditions are congruent with what is expected by them". Some participants (n=9) stated that they can benefit from the SESS only if they are hardworking, committed, and fulfill some conditions even though this group of clients are in need. The conditions identified below may help social workers have a better assessment process:

- if these clients are willing to work,
- if they are eager to change undesirable life conditions,
- if they make efforts to have sanitary living conditions,
- if they are aware of how they will use the SESS support in case it is provided,
- if they have a positive relationship with their social worker(s).

Some participants (n=9) described this group of clients like:

"If that client just prefers to stay at home, wastes his/her time, and has no thought of working... and if I figure this out, I will reject their applications to the SESS." (P6)

"I feel uncomfortable with some clients. I feel that when I see them... I feel like it is hard to contact them. But I do not have this feeling when I have some other clients and we get on with them during the process. These things influence how I treat them" (P5)

"Sometimes you have to say to some clients: "You should first tidy your house or you may not have support from the SESS." (P18)

The second group of clients are those who lie to or misinform social workers about their life conditions (n=12). These clients apply to the SESS to get support despite the fact that they do not need any. However, it is not uncommon that some clients who are really in need also can have some similarities with this group of clients and can try to manipulate or misguide social workers. Both these clients try to convince social workers of the "support" they need to get and to present some plausible explanations in order to influence their decision-making behavior. It has been understood that some social workers are keen on a constructive dialog in such cases, try to empathize with clients, and prefer to consider some necessary conditions. Nevertheless, when clients lie to them or try to manipulate them, this may raise doubts and negatively affect their decision-making process:

"Why does a woman come to me and say 'my husband doesn't take care of me'? You know, if this person intentionally becomes destitute like that, I think there must be something else." (P18)

"She wants to prove her life conditions are different from what they actually are. When I figure this out, it has a negative impact on me. So, I reject (her application to the SESS)." (P2)

The third and last group of clients are "demanding clients" (n=4). Some participants (n=2) exhibit different attitudes towards these clients who are demanding and who reapply to the SESS even though their previous

application is rejected. It must be noted that one subgroup of these clients is those who consider the SESS as a source of income. Some participants (n=6) alleged that some clients apply to the service just because they want to have a regular salary. It turns out that it is highly unlikely for these clients to get support if social workers figure this out:

“You close their file but they reapply. Then, you close it again. That’s the reason I become irritated.” (P5)

“I usually reject those applications as they consider the service as a way of getting money. They apply to it for that reason. They think it is their right or apply to it just because there is a service that helps people.” (P19)

d. Gathering information

Social workers embark on a framework where they can integrate objective evidence, clients’ information and their own professional approaches, and endeavor to exclude personal factors such as conscience and attitudes in the assessment procedure. Some participants (n=13) concentrate on gathering information in their interviews with clients:

“You ask yourself, “did I make a mistake when I rejected their application?” We try our best to get more information to be sure about our decisions when we visit clients or do a field practice”(P15)

“You collect some information about clients’ background through a field practice and realize that some of them misinform you.” (P16)

3. Subjective experiences

Social workers may experience countertransference when they interact with their clients. This happens when they have traumatic memories and experience distressing feelings during interviews especially when clients have similar stories. However, it is not desirable to analyze countertransference during interviews because of limited opportunities to get information from clients. Considering that countertransference is a fact from the past, social workers should stay focused on gathering data (Greenon, 2017). In our interviews, we have found that some participants have confused empathy with sympathy because of their countertransference and have assigned a role to clients based on their perceptions. Some participants (n=15) stated that this situation can have an impact on their decision-making processes:

“A social worker is also a human being. They have traumatic experiences, they may not have clear boundaries or feel difficult emotions... Sometimes some colleagues get affected by these, they may have a disturbing emotional cycle for days. This may occur because of what they experienced before. It

negatively affects decision-making... it frequently does.” (P3)

Some participants (n=5) expressed that they related their subjective experiences to some clients’ experience, that their decisions have been influenced or they have entrusted some applications to other colleagues. Some (n=2) uttered that they were emotionally affected by these cases, but they did not let this situation affect their professional decisions:

“I have a seventeen-year-old brother who was born in 2002. And all this thing is about children who are in need of protection at the age of 17 or who have been abused or pushed to crime, or who are orphans... I am inclined to feel an emotional weakness when I see these children. You know, it is especially about boys. If applications are exactly like these, I don’t want to work with them because this situation turns into a moral dilemma rather than a professional issue. (Her eyes filled with tears and her voice trembled while describing these).” (P10)

4. Worldviews and ideologies

A worldview stands for the way an individual makes sense of his/her life whereas an ideology is a term used to express a framework in which some ideals are set and those ideals give shape to people’s behaviors. Worldviews and ideologies may affect various aspects of people’s lives in several ways. We found that some participants (n=2) had some patterns of meaning-making in life and resources to decide among options. These patterns and resources originated from spiritual and religious values which affect social workers from the very first interaction to the assessment procedure and decision-making. Moreover, some participants (n=5) made their decisions regarding cases based on their own subjective opinions about politics, productivity, employment, gender equality, and humanism:

“A social worker should treat people well asking for help because of his/her own belief in Allah. It is already so hard for them to ask for help and you shouldn’t directly say no. It also is a cultural thing.” (P3)

“We have to work to live. Everyone thinks that people in European countries live well but actually, they try hard. I think our problem in Turkey is the fact that we do not want to work and that we do loaf while working.” (P5)

5. Professional education

One of the conditions of healthy decision-making is having a strong theoretical background in that and practical competency to adapt theory into real life. Despite the fact that undergraduate curricula can provide some level of competency when they are completed, social workers need more to reach mastery in their profession, which can be enhanced by postgraduate training,

in-service training activities, and individual therapy. Thus, educational backgrounds of social workers influence decision-making processes. In this sense, some participants (n=5) emphasized the importance of professional activities and expressed that having a high level of training can directly influence social workers' relationships with clients and the quality of their decisions:

"Working with people... understanding people's complexity requires some skills which can be acquired through professional training" (P1)

"The way social workers work today is influenced by their educational experiences including: their professors, those professors' theoretical orientations, personal development (acquiring skills to understand ideologies, societal dynamics, and social changes)... All is about education and training. Professors especially affect our orientations on how to work." (P19)

6. Professional experience at workplace

Most of the participants (n=13) said that they had difficulties in decision-making in their early years at the SESS, and that they could not decide what options were better in terms of effective practice due to their limited professional experience. So, it seems that professional experience facilitates how to make decisions better:

"Well, when I began working at the SESS, I underwent hard times. I had difficulties deciding in which circumstances we would approve clients' applications to the SESS or reject them. I gained experience by interviewing clients, and consultations with my colleagues." (P11)

"As I became more familiar with clients or families, I learnt how to treat them and to conceptualize their cases... So, to some extent I can predict what social work intervention will be delivered to them." (P14)

7. Consultation with colleagues

Some participants (n=10), struggling with making professional decisions, report that they receive support from their colleagues or other professionals at their institutions, which helps them make a final decision. However, the support received could also be insufficient and supervisory support may be needed:

"When I don't know what to decide, I consult my friends to whom I trust in their professional practice. I get supervision from them. And then, I can make a decision." (P6)

8. Expectations of institutional and non-institutional organizations

The SESS model includes a financial aspect which is often perceived as social aid by lay professionals or clients. This leads to a range of challenges that social workers have to resolve. Many participants (n=15) stated that their institutional managers and other institutions, organizations or government bodies may manipulate or try to control the decisions they will make.

Some participants (n=4) have expressed that they had difficulties in this context and that they couldn't put their intervention plans into practice because of some reasons. They have been exposed to mobbing and stigmatization, and even threatened by some sanctions such as being appointed to another institution to which they do not consent. Also, some participants (n=2) uttered that their decisions which do not meet higher authorities' expectations can be questioned:

"Political pressure is something that we experience in every stage of our practice . It may affect our decisions. Here the problem is nepotism... Even local authorities can try to control our decisions. But I will not let that happen." (P4)

"Political pressure does not apply to our institution in general. Did it happen before? Yes. Did I comply with that pressure? No. Did they do something? Yes, they changed my workplace eleven or twelve times."

"Someone from Ankara calls you. 'What happened? Why did you do this?' They investigate your report. They get your information from that file because it includes some information about who reported it. And then, they say: 'Pay attention to these points in your report.'" You are even sometimes getting scolded." (P10)

Some participants stated that political or any other type of pressure may be present, but how to deal with this may vary from person to person, and that the responsibility of decisions which are made under pressure still belongs to social workers. Some expressed that they could not cope with this situation, that either complied with that pressure and wrote their reports as requested decisions or left final decisions about their cases at the discretion of an institutional commission at their workplace, meaning that they transferred their cases to other professionals:

"I hear from some saying that the mayor has directed this case so we should grant the service (SESS) to that client... You don't have to do what they ask. If you want to get along well with your administration, then do it!" (P5)

“Some officials exercise control over others. Then, those people try to manipulate me. Even though I don’t want to confirm some applications, sometimes it happens. I send some cases to a commission, which confirms approval of delivering the service, and then I confirm. Repression... There is a lot of repression in this job.”

“For instance, during the election period... (after six seconds of silence) I mean, we provided the SESS to people who did not deserve it... (silently and slowly) I mean... we approved some people’s applications to the SESS who did not need it. (P17)

On the other hand, some executives who only care about the quantity of files resolved monthly considerably increase the workload of social workers and cause them to make decisions about exceeding numbers of cases in a very limited time. However, we also found that social workers were required to “limit their decisions about their cases in terms of approval or rejection”, and they struggled with implementing their intervention plans in practice. Hence, some participants (n=5) expressed that when their institutions and executives get involved in the decision-making process, this situation affects their decision-making behaviors:

“It is our routine. Clients apply to it, you close. They apply to it, you close. Either approval or rejection... either approval or rejection. So, make 30, 40, or 50 applications... this month should be low, this month should be high... To be honest, I can’t say that I can effectively help that family” (P5)

Discussion

Social workers who make professional decisions are influenced by a range of factors including their subjective evaluations, their professional roles, their subjective life experiences, attitudes, perceptions, and applicable laws (Mattison, 2000). In this sense, social workers’ decisions regarding the SESS applications influence themselves, clients, and institutions, which are three factors that altogether have an impact on social workers’ decisions (Cuzzi et al., 1993). In regard to clients’ perspectives on social workers’ decision-making behaviors, three factors basically are salient: 1) someone who is really in need of support, 2) people who do not need support, but are eager to earn income, and 3) people who will be supported if they meet requirements to benefit from the SESS. On the other hand, considering social workers’ views on their decision-making behaviors, it seems that their own perceptions of poverty affect their decision in terms of providing the SESS to some clients. In a similar vein, Başer and Kırlioğlu (2020) has demonstrated that undefined criteria to decide if someone is deprived of meeting basic needs or to elaborate on what poverty is, leads to difficulties to reach

professional decisions. Social workers' views of the SESS affect these decisions.

Social workers' assessment of cases also influences their decisions. The assessment is the basis of professional judgment, which designates the nature of decisions (Bolger and Walker, 2014; Pollack, 2010). The present study has found that social workers made decisions regarding cases based on gathering objective information (i.e. obtained evidence and observations during visits to clients' living space). Another study confirmed the importance of evidence and maintained that case assessments might not be performed without evidence as well as observations since the quality of assessments depends on the quality of evidence collected about clients (Collins and Daly, 2011; Milner et al., 2015). Here a hierarchical order is recommended based on the labeling theory proposing that a hierarchy should be ordered by virtue of the information and evidence obtained. Referring to these resources, negative impressions of clients and negative information or evidence become superior to positive evidence. Also, as social workers' gain experience in their work, the process of gathering negative evidence or information and its frequency contribute them not to decide to provide socioeconomic support services to clients. The labeling theory maintains that when clients misinform social workers, lie to them or manipulate them, social workers become inclined to have a negative impression about clients, which also causes not providing possible services (Case and Lingerfelt, 1974). In the present study, we identified some factors that may lead to negative results for clients, which happens when clients become manipulative and misinform social workers, when they make false statements, or when social workers detect that clients are hiding their life conditions. Therefore, social workers should consider clients' capabilities, strengths, inclinations, and risk factors when gathering evidence (Bolger and Walker, 2014). By this way, social workers will be able to discern discrepancies and to objectively put forms of intellectual and behavioral approaches into practice when clients try to manipulate or misinform.

Social workers' belief systems, ethical values, and mindsets are individual characteristics which directly influence their decision-making behaviors (Barsky, 2010; Mattison, 2000). Their subjective life experiences, emotional fluctuations, and cultural background also have influence over their decision-making behaviors. These factors are common and complicate rational decisions for social workers (Nutt, 1979; Proctor, 2002) since they may face prejudices about clients' physical, personal, and social characteristics as well as their identities and worldviews (Robison and

Reeser, 2002). In our interviews, the participants stated that their own life experiences and worldviews influence their decisions. Namely, they may not impartially make their decisions and it paves the way their subjective values, attitudes, and opinions become influential for decision-making. In order to avoid these effects, social workers are advised to clarify their personal and professional values, and to take action (National Association of Social Work, 2011). Moreover, it is desirable that they realize their downsides and take care of their own psychological health through professional support so that they can minimize their personal effects on professional decisions and on their interactions with clients (Osimo and Landau, 2001). Also, social workers should support clients' autonomy, values, goals, and meaning resources. This will promote clients' self-determination which is considered their right (Dolgoft et al., 2012; Nicholson and Matross, 1989).

The present study also pointed out that consultation with colleagues was a solution method when social workers were indecisive about decision-making. This finding is consistent with Collins and Daly's (2011) results which showed that social workers had consultations with their colleagues in case they couldn't arrive at decisions regarding some cases. We also found that the educational levels of social workers (i. e. undergraduate and graduate) influenced their decisions. Hence, we suggest that social workers should have supervisory support and tailored training so as to remain neutral when making decisions.

Having said that, other professionals and institutional executives in relation to the SESS can also affect social workers' decision-making behaviors. Some can pressure social workers to decide as they ordered (i. e. higher authorities). Social workers can feel anxious about the consequences of their decisions such as being accused by other professionals or colleagues, losing their job, or getting bullied by them (Boehm, 2013; O'Sullivan, 2011). As a consequence of our interviews, we explored that other departments or authorities perceive the SESS as not more than a social aid program to which they direct possible clients, which leads to an organizational crisis and pressure on social workers in terms of caseload. This finding is consistent with O'Connor and Leonard's (2014) study which revealed that organizational pressures influence social workers' decisions. We also uncovered that executives who focus on the quantity of cases instead of their quality influence social workers' decisions, and they are forced to make decisions under some conditions about cases or applications.

Eventually, we explored that social workers who are actively working

at the SESS departments are influenced by several factors when they make professional decisions related to cases or applications. Performing research in this line of study will further our understanding of factors influencing social workers' decision-making dynamics in different departments or institutions. In this context, further research will contribute to the scientific literature of social work and to professional practices by tapping into factors which are influential on social workers' decisions.



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This work is original.

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TÜRKİYE'DE SOSYAL HİZMET UZMANLARININ SOSYAL VE EKONOMİK DESTEK HİZMETLERİNDE MESLEKİ KARAR VERME DAVRANIŞLARININ BELİRLEYİCİLERİ

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Geniş Öz

Sosyal çalışma müdahalesi temelde müracaatçının değerlendirilmesini ve sistematik olarak gözlemlenmesini içermektedir. Bu nedenle yapılan değerlendirmeler ve devamındaki aşamalar özellikle üzerinde durulması gereken konulardır. Değerlendirme sürecinde müracaatçı ve sosyal çalışmacı arasında bir ilişki kurulmaktadır ve bu süreç değerlendirme aşaması bitene kadar devam etmektedir. Kurulan bu ilişkide sosyal çalışmacı müracaatçının gündeminde olan sorunun nedenini anlamaya çalışmakta ve çıktı olarak bir müdahale planı düzenlemektedir. Değerlendirme aşamasının sona erdiği, karar verme ihtiyacının ortaya çıkmasıyla anlaşılmaktadır. Sosyal çalışmacı, kararına ilişkin çoğu veriyi ön değerlendirme aşamasında toplamaktadır. Bu bilgilere göre planlama ve uygulama aşamalarını yürütmektedir. Dolayısıyla sosyal çalışmacı için değerlendirme aşaması, oldukça kritik öneme sahiptir. Bu aşamanın çıktıları ise karar verme aşamasında görülmektedir. Zira sosyal çalışmacı kararı doğrultusunda rol ve sorumluluklarını yerine getirmektedir. Sosyal çalışmacıların kararının önemli olması ise, müracaatçının yaşamını yönlendirme etkisi olmasına bağlıdır. Nitekim çoğu sosyal çalışmacının kararı, müracaatçının kendi yaşamları üzerindeki etkilerini, sosyal yaşamdaki etkinliklerini ve hatta yaşam düzenlerini şekillendirmektedir.

Karar verme aşaması için çeşitli modeller üretilmiştir. Bunlar arasında rasyonel, sezgisel, bağımlı ve çekingen karar verme gibi farklı modeller yer almaktadır. Hangi model kapsamında bulunduğu fark etmeksizin, her karar

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çeşitli parametlerden etkilenmektedir. Etik kurallar, kurum normları, bireysel özellikler vs. gibi değişkenler bunlardan bazılarıdır.

Sosyal ve Ekonomik Destek (SED) Hizmetleri’nde çalışan sosyal çalışmacıların mesleki deneyimleri üzerinden karar verme davranışlarına etki eden unsurların araştırılması bu çalışmanın temel amacını oluşturmaktadır. Ülkemizde sosyal çalışmacıların mesleki karar verme davranışlarına yönelik kapsamlı ve doğrudan ilgili bilimsel bir araştırmanın yapılmadığı tespit edilmiştir. Bu nedenle çalışmanın Türkiye’deki uygulayıcılar için bir çerçeve sunacağı ve gelecek çalışmalara da ışık tutacağı düşünülmektedir.

Çalışmanın amacına bağlı olarak nitel araştırma yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Nitel araştırma konuların katılımcıların perspektifinden anlaşılmasına, davranışlara, olaylara veya nesnelere yükledikleri anlamların bilinmesine ve konular hakkında yaptıkları yorumların analiz edilmesine olanak sağlamaktadır. Bununla beraber durum çalışması desenine uygun olarak araştırma süreci yürütülmüştür. SED birimlerinde çalışan toplam 20 sosyal çalışmacı ile derinlemesine mülakat ve gözlem yapılarak veri toplanmıştır. Ses kaydına alınan ve not tutulan tüm görüşmeler yazıya aktarılmış, 289 sayfa yazılı doküman elde edilmiştir. Elde edilen verilerle yazılı dokümanlar ilk olarak araştırmacılar ve bir sosyal çalışmacı tarafından okunmuş, açık kodlama yapılarak kategorilere ayrılmıştır. Ardından bu kategoriler ortak yanları göz önüne alınarak sınıflandırılmış ve isimlendirilmiştir. Bu süreç sonunda toplam 8 adet ana tema belirlenmiştir. Veri analiz yöntemi olarak betimsel analiz tercih edilmiştir. Bununla birlikte tespit edilen durumlara ilişkin kaç katılımcının ortak söylemlerde bulunduğu araştırmanın bulgular kısmında sayısal veri olarak parantez içlerinde (n= ..) sunulmuştur.

Araştırma sonucunda sosyal çalışmacıların müracaatçı tanımlamalarına, yoksulluk algılarına ve SED hizmetine yönelik tutumlarına dair veri elde edilmiştir. Katılımcıların çoğu müracaatçıları en genel anlamda iki şekilde tanımlamıştır: a) sosyal ve ekonomik desteğe ihtiyacı olan ve b) ihtiyacı olmadığı halde başvuruda bulunarak gelir elde etmek isteyen müracaatçılar. Birçok katılımcının müracaatçıları daha çok “*tehlikeye açık, mağdur ve muhtaç*” gibi kavramlarla ifade ettikleri görülmüştür. SED birimine başvuran müracaatçıların yoksulluklarından ötürü utangaç oldukları, buldukları mevsim şartlarına uygun giyinemedikleri veya yeterli ve dengeli beslenme noktasında imkan bulamadıkları gibi söylemler sosyal çalışmacıların dile getirdiği diğer müracaatçı özellikleridir. Katılımcılar, müracaatçıların bir kısmının suça bulaşma öykülerinin de bulunduğunu, aile bütünlüklerinin

bulunmadığını, yaşamlarındaki problemler ile baş etme noktasında zorluklar yaşadığını da belirtmişlerdir.

Birçok katılımcı için yoksulluk “temel ihtiyaçların karşılanamaması” şeklinde anlam kazanmıştır. Bazı sosyal çalışmacılar ise yoksulluk ve ihtiyaç sahibi olmak ilişkisini özel durum ve şartlara indirgeyici bir yaklaşım sunmuşlardır. Katılımcılar, bazı müracaatçıların yoksulluk durumlarını şüpheli kabul ederek kültürel yoksulluğa dair gözlemlerini paylaşmışlardır. Belirli semtlerden veya belirli kültürel kodlara sahip bireylerden gelen başvuruların, mutlak bir yoksulluk veya müdahale gerektiren bir durum olarak görülmediği anlaşılmıştır. Bu bağlamda roman ailelerinin de SED hizmetinden yararlanmasının olumlu karşılanmadığı belirlenmiştir.

Çocukların “korunmaya ihtiyacı olan çocuk” statüsünde değerlendirilmemesi ve aile yanında bakımlarının desteklenmesi amacıyla bu hizmetin verildiği, bu açıdan da sosyal yardımlardan ayrı ele alınması gerektiği her sosyal çalışmacı tarafından ifade edilmiştir. Bununla birlikte SED hizmetinin iletişim ve vaka takibi için bir araç olduğu, önleyici özelliklerinin bulunduğu, geçici bir destek olduğu ve değişim meydana getirmesi gerektiği gibi tutumlar katılımcılar tarafından belirtilmiştir.

Değerlendirme aşaması karar vermeyi etkileyen temel unsurların başında gelmektedir. Sosyal çalışmacı, müracaatçının bu hizmet modelinden faydalanabilmesi için gerekli gördüğü şartları en doğru/nesnel şekilde ve kanıta dayalı bir yaklaşım içerisinde değerlendirmek istemektedir. Değerlendirme aşamasında sosyal incelemeye gidilmektedir. Konuttaki eşyaların durumu, müracaatçı algıları ve kanıt toplama çabaları bu aşamaya dahil olan unsurlardır.

Bununla beraber değerlendirme ve karar verme sürecinde sosyal çalışmacıların geçmiş yaşam deneyimleri, dünya görüşleri ve ideolojileri, mesleki eğitimleri, mesleki deneyim süresi ve tecrübeleri, meslek arkadaşları ile fikir alışverişi yapma durumları ile kurumsal ve kurum dışı beklentiler de etkili olmaktadır.

Sonuç olarak SED biriminde çalışan sosyal çalışmacıların mesleki kararlar verirken birçok unsurun etkisi altında kaldıkları ortaya çıkarılmıştır. Bu nedenle verilen kararlarda kişiler arası tutarlılığın sağlanmasının ve objektif karar verilmesinin zor olduğu düşünülmektedir. Bu faktörlerin müracaatçıların hak kaybı yaşamalarına ya da destekten haksız yararlanmalarına neden olabileceği ihtimaller dahilindedir. Sosyal çalışma mesleğinde insanın insanla çalışması nedeniyle bu gibi durumlar her zaman varlığını hissettirecektir. Ancak müracaatçıların ve de sosyal çalışmacıların

hakkını korumak adına bu etkilerin en asgari düzeye indirgenmesi gerekmektedir. Bu noktada sosyal çalışmacıların mesleki kararlarında ön yargı, özdeşim kurma, baskı ve iş yükü gibi faktörlerden etkilenmemeleri üzere lisans eğitimleri boyunca desteklenmeleri, akademik olarak bilgilendirilmeleri gerekmektedir. Ayrıca sosyal çalışmacıların bir süpervizörle çalışmalarının da bu etkileri en az düzeye indirgeyeceği öngörülmektedir. Birçok disiplin için geçerli olan süpervizörlük uygulamasının sosyal çalışma meslek ve disiplini için de zorunlu olduğunu söylemek mümkündür. Sosyal çalışmacının etki alanı dışında olan kurumsal ve kurum dışı etkilerin ortadan kaldırılmasının ise ancak düzenlenecek politikalar ve ilgili mercilerin konu hakkında farkındalık kazanmaları ile mümkün olduğu görülmektedir. Bu noktada yasa ve yaptırımların yeniden düzenlenmesinin uygun olacağı belirtilebilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Din Psikolojisi, Sosyal hizmet, karar verme davranışları, saha uygulaması, sosyal ve ekonomik destek.



Teşekkür:

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Beyanname:

1. Özgünlük Beyanı:

Bu çalışma özgündür.

2. Etik Kurul İzni:

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3. Finansman/Destek:

Bu çalışma herhangi bir finansman ya da destek almamıştır.

4. Katkı Oranı Beyanı:

Yazarlar, makaleye eşit oranda katkı sağlamış olduklarını beyan etmektedirler.

5. Çıkar Çatışması Beyanı:

Yazarlar, herhangi bir çıkar çatışması olmadığını beyan etmektedirler.

