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**Roksoliana ZOZULIAK-SLUCHYK,**
Doctor of Pedagogical Sciences, Professor, Head of the Department of Social Pedagogy and Social Work, Vasyl Stefanyk Carpathian National University (Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine)

**Роксоляна ЗОЗУЛЯК-СЛУЧИК,**
доктор педагогічних наук, професор, завідувач кафедри соціальної педагогіки та соціальної роботи, Карпатський національний університет імені Василя Стефаника (м. Івано-Франківськ, Україна)
*roksoliana.zozuliak-sluchyk@cnu.edu.ua;*
*ORCID ID 0000-0001-6066-590X*

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# SOCIAL WORK WITH DIVERSE CLIENT GROUPS: THE ETHICAL ASPECT AND CHALLENGES OF THE MODERN STATE OF WAR

**Abstract**. The article provides a comprehensive analysis of the ethical and deontological foundations of social work under the conditions of full-scale martial law in Ukraine. It is substantiated that the moral activity of a specialist, based on the categories of goodness, conscience, and humanity, is the cornerstone of professional assistance. The author emphasizes that during a period of acute socio-economic crisis, ethics ceases to be a merely theoretical construct and becomes a practical guarantee for protecting the dignity of the individual.

Special attention is paid to the transformation of social work under the influence of war. Key contemporary challenges are identified: massive traumatization of the population, loss of housing and resources, and the need to integrate millions of internally displaced persons (IDPs). The paper details the specifics of interaction with various client groups. In particular, the ethical aspects of supporting veterans and their families are revealed, where resocialization and respect for combat experience are priorities. The features of socio-pedagogical support for children affected by war are described through the prism of the «best interests of the child» doctrine. Moral dilemmas arising during the provision of assistance to low-mobility groups and the elderly in conflict zones are considered.

A separate emphasis is placed on the implementation of international experience (the «social cohesion» model and the trauma-informed approach) into national practice. The author proves that the «Ethics of Social Work» course is fundamental in personnel training, as specialists form the nation's spiritual potential, asserting the ideals of justice in spite of aggression. It is concluded that the combination of professional skills with high ethical standards is a prerequisite for the successful adaptation of society to wartime realities and overcoming the consequences of trauma.

**Keywords**: social work ethics, professional ethics, professional training, client groups, martial law, internally displaced persons, moral values, social pedagogue sphere specialist, social worker, social social work specialist.

# СОЦІАЛЬНА РОБОТА З РІЗНИМИ ГРУПАМИ КЛІЄНТІВ: ЕТИЧНИЙ АСПЕКТ ТА ВИКЛИКИ ВОЄННОГО СТАНУ

**Анотація**. У статті проведено комплексний аналіз етико-деонтологічних засад соціальної роботи в умовах повномасштабного воєнного стану в Україні. Обґрунтовано, що моральна діяльність фахівця, яка ґрунтується на категоріях добра, совісті та людяності, є наріжним каменем професійної допомоги. Автором наголошено, що в період гострої соціально-економічної кризи етика перестає бути лише теоретичним конструктом і стає практичним гарантом захисту гідності особистості.

Особливу увагу приділено трансформації соціальної роботи під впливом війни. Визначено ключові виклики сьогодення: масова травматизація населення, втрата житла та ресурсів, необхідність інтеграції мільйонів внутрішньо переміщених осіб (ВПО). У роботі деталізовано специфіку взаємодії з різними групами клієнтів. Зокрема, розкрито етичні аспекти підтримки ветеранів та їхніх родин, де пріоритетом є ресоціалізація та повага до бойового досвіду. Описано особливості соціально-педагогічного супроводу дітей, які постраждали від війни, через призму доктрини «найкращих інтересів дитини». Розглянуто моральні дилеми, що виникають при наданні допомоги маломобільним групам населення та особам похилого віку в зоні конфлікту.

Окремий акцент зроблено на імплементації міжнародного досвіду (моделі «соціальної згуртованості» та травмо-фокусованого підходу) у вітчизняну практику. Автор доводить, що курс «Етика соціальної роботи» є базовим у



підготовці кадрів, оскільки фахівці формують духовний потенціал нації, утверджуючи ідеали справедливості всупереч агресії. Зроблено висновок, що поєднання професійних навичок із високими етичними стандартами є запорукою успішної адаптації суспільства до воєнних реалій та подолання наслідків травми.

**Ключові слова**: етика соціальної роботи, професійна етика, професійна підготовка, групи клієнтів, воєнний стан, внутрішньо переміщені особи, моральні цінності, фахівець соціальної сфери, соціальний працівник,соціальний педагог, фахівець соціальної роботи.

**INTRODUCTION**

**The problem formulation.** Social work in Ukraine today is carried out under conditions of unprecedented challenges caused by a full-scale military invasion and a profound economic crisis. The war has led to the emergence of a large number of individuals who simultaneously found themselves in a crisis situation and require immediate social and psychological support. The role of social work during the war period is extremely important for maintaining social stability and providing humanitarian assistance to those affected by the war. Social workers, social work specialists, and social educators continue to perform their duties despite the difficult conditions, providing aid to those who need it most. It is the specialists of the social sphere who play a key role in supporting vulnerable segments of the population during the war period. They face new challenges that they encounter every day, ensuring interaction with various institutions in providing support to the disadvantaged. Under such conditions, the problem lies in the need to rethink ethical standards through the prism of martial law, where the line between professional assistance and personal compassion becomes extremely thin. Accordingly, the professional ethics of a specialist ceases to be merely a theoretical discipline and becomes a practical safeguard against dehumanization, professional burnout, and social tension among social sphere specialists. After all, it is professional morality that becomes the cornerstone of the profession, guaranteeing the preservation of humanity and social stability in society.

**Analysis of recent research and publications**. The issues of social work with various groups of clients have been analyzed in the works of N. Zemlianska, T. Semigina, O. Kupenko and V. Yaroshenko. Theoretical developments regarding moral categories and principles of activity are presented in the works of I. Zaichenko, S. Marchenko, V. Teslenko, I. Trubavina, L. Kharchenko and others. Professional ethics and moral values in social work are the object of close attention of such scholars as R. Zozuliak-Sluchyk, O. Ponomarenko, N. Sultanova and others. The issues of social adaptation and integration of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the conditions of modern conflicts were analyzed by V. Antonyuk, O. Balakireva, I. Voinalovych, I. Mazur, O. Novikova, I. Titar and other researchers focusing on the interaction of displaced persons with host communities.

Thus, T. Semigina in her studies introduces us to both modern theoretical concepts of social work and the results of research on social assistance to various groups of clients. In her research, she also outlines the issues of values and principles of social work [Semigina T., 2017, p. 139].

In the study by O. Ponomarenko, the professional-ethical culture of a social pedagogue and its formation are outlined, which serves as the basis for the structural components of socio-pedagogical work as a profession (goal, content, organizational forms, principles, professional qualities), as well as the leading socio-cultural principles that determine the nature of this profession. In particular, it refers to the principles of competence, ethical responsibility to society and the client, and professional ethics; the leading trends in the formation of ethics and professional culture related to social work in the children's and youth environment are identified; the psychological and pedagogical conditions for the effective formation of the professional-ethical culture of a social pedagogue are substantiated (familiarizing students with professional knowledge, ethical norms, and humanistic values of socio-pedagogical activity; the presence of a wide range of practical forms of work aimed at developing the skills of professional and interpersonal interaction; combining all components of the process of forming professional-ethical culture into a single purposeful system of educating future social pedagogues in higher education institutions) [Ponomarenko O., 2001].

In contrast, the scientist I. Trubavina revealed the ethical aspects of the work of social sphere specialists with different types of families. Through the prism of the professional morality of a social pedagogue, she characterized the peculiarities of the activities of social sphere specialists [Trubavina I., 2015].

However, we do not encounter a holistic study regarding the role of the ethical foundations of social work with various groups of clients under martial law.

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:** is to theoretically substantiate the ethical foundations of social work with various groups of clients under martial law, highlight the role of moral values in overcoming crisis situations, and analyze the practical challenges faced by social sphere specialists during the integration of vulnerable segments of the population.

**RESEARCH METHODS**

The work utilizes a complex of scientific methods: analysis and synthesis of scientific sources for the description of ethical concepts; a systematic approach for the classification of challenges (economic, psychological, logistical); and the method of theoretical generalization.

**RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH**

Modern social work in Ukraine is work «at the cutting edge of time». The war has changed the structure of the population's needs, bringing issues of survival and basic security to the forefront. Social workers face socio-economic challenges, in particular, infrastructure destruction, mass loss of housing by the population, and a sharp increase in poverty, all of which require immediate solutions. They also face the need for the rapid evacuation of people from dangerous zones of military conflict and the redistribution of humanitarian flows.

New groups of clients have also appeared, to whom it is necessary to apply various forms and methods of social work. Thus, work with internally displaced persons (IDPs) requires from social workers not only professionalism but also high ethical resilience. In solving the series of problems encountered by IDPs during their adaptation in new communities, social workers perform various functions. Acting as mediators between IDPs and the local population, social workers prevent the emergence of conflicts and promote the social cohesion of the community.

One of the primary problems for IDPs is the provision of housing that meets basic standards of safety and comfort. Many IDPs lost their homes as a result of hostilities and found themselves in difficult living conditions. In the initial stages of relocation, the majority of IDPs were accommodated in temporary centers, including schools, sports halls, tent cities, or other specially equipped premises. However, such conditions are often not sustainable and do not provide proper comfort [Balakireva O., 2016, p. 34].

Together with local authorities and charitable organizations, social workers are engaged in finding long-term housing options for IDPs. This may include subsidized rental housing or the provision of temporary benefits for utility payments.

Another serious challenge for IDPs is employment, which simultaneously facilitates their integration. People who have left their homes often lack the opportunity to find work in new communities due to a lack of accessible information about vacancies, difficulties with documents, or the need for retraining. In wartime conditions, the labor market is also changing, which complicates the job search.

State employment services and social workers conduct trainings, seminars, and programs for professional development, retraining, and adaptation of IDPs to new labor market conditions. At the same time, important aspects of social workers' activity in this direction include providing information on vacancies, support in drafting resumes and cover letters, preparation for interviews, and providing guidance due to the absence of their usual social connections [Nadraga V., 2015, p. 135].

In some communities of the western and central regions, problems arise with the overcrowding of schools, as the infrastructure is not always able to accommodate new students. In such cases, temporary classes are created or distance learning forms are introduced to enable all children to have access to knowledge [Mazur I. 2020, p. 128].

A separate priority area of modern social work during the war period is the comprehensive support of war veterans and their family members. The ethical aspect of interaction with this group of clients requires special sensitivity from the specialist and an understanding of the specifics of combat trauma. Social support here is not limited only to assistance in obtaining benefits or processing statuses; it involves creating a safe environment for the resocialization of warriors. An important ethical challenge is overcoming the alienation between veterans and civilian society, where the social worker acts as a mediator helping the family adapt to the defender's new psychological states, while ensuring unconditional respect for their experience and dignity.

Another significant area is socio-pedagogical work with children who have been affected by the war, which is based on the principles of preventing long-term psychological disorders and protecting the rights of the child in conditions of armed conflict. Social sphere specialists encounter categories of orphaned children, children separated from their families, and those who have been under occupation. The ethical doctrine of the «best interests of the child» becomes key when making decisions regarding custody, adoption, or granting the status of a war-affected person. Social work is directed toward restoring a sense of basic security through art-therapeutic techniques, inclusive education, and the creation of child-friendly spaces, where the moral support of a specialist helps the child integrate traumatic experiences without losing faith in humanistic ideals.

It is impossible to leave out such an area of social work as support for the elderly and people with disabilities in the conflict zone. Indeed, under martial law, special attention is required for low-mobility population groups and the elderly, who often remain alone in frontline areas or in places of compact residence for displaced persons. In this context, the ethics of social service manifests in ensuring physical survival and preserving human dignity under conditions of resource scarcity. Social work specialists must resolve complex ethical dilemmas related to the evacuation of persons who refuse to leave their homes or the organization of care in unsuitable premises. Social work with this group of clients requires high self-sacrifice and adherence to the principle of personal autonomy, combining patronage assistance with deep spiritual communication, which prevents the social isolation of the most vulnerable members of the community [Kostyshyn E., 2024, p. 42-43].

Thus, in carrying out social work with various groups of clients, social work specialists, possessing a wide range of knowledge in sociological, legal, psychological-pedagogical, and medico-biological fields, must have a formed professional-ethical competence, which becomes significantly more relevant during the war period. It is this competence that serves as the basic component indicating a specialist's readiness for work in difficult wartime.

Moral activity in the field of social work with various groups of clients is revealed through a complex system of values and virtues. As researchers note, ethics and morality in the context of social work are interpreted in a single absolute sense [Ponomarenko O., 2001]. The social worker acts as a guarantor of humanism, where the category of goodness is contrasted with indifference.

Readiness for effective activity with various groups of clients is characterized by the formation in a social work specialist of such categories as:

- conscience and honor, which outline the internal regulator and allow for making fair decisions in extremely difficult circumstances, resolving many moral dilemmas, and overcoming the modern challenges of the war period;
- the «do no harm» principle, which acts as a fundamental rule requiring a deep analysis of the consequences of each specialist's intervention in the client's life;

- confidentiality, which is a basic ethical obligation regarding the non-disclosure of private information, critical for building trust with people who have experienced trauma;
- goodness and mercy, which act as fundamental professional virtues that clearly distinguish sincere kindness from formal indifference [Zozuliak-Sluchyk R., 2019, p. 234], which becomes especially relevant in wartime when a large number of clients daily experience the horrors of war directly or indirectly.

Ethical foundations in social work with various groups of clients are not just a set of rules; they are the «science of goodness» in its highest manifestation. According to research materials, the moral activity of a specialist is revealed through a system of values where humanity is the main criterion. Every day, the social worker faces a choice between the formal performance of duties and a sincere act of assistance. As Montesquieu noted, knowledge of the sciences can harm those who do not possess the foundations of goodness [Zozuliak-Sluchyk R., 2019, p. 56]. This statement is extremely relevant today, in wartime: technical assistance without ethical fulfillment can be perceived by the client as humiliation.

Therefore, we can assert that the foundation of effective professional activity of social sphere specialists is seen in moral activity, which is revealed through a system of values, the underpinnings of virtues, and goodness in behavior, serving as the primary factor. When it comes to social work, special meaning is embedded in professional morality and ethics. It is the social worker who must understand and nurture morality, internalize it, and clearly distinguish between the qualities of goodness and indifference in relationships with various categories of clients. The effectiveness of analytical-planning, advocacy, intermediary, and educational activities of social workers, as well as other types of social work with various groups of clients, largely depends on the level of formation of professional ethics. Its formation affects the system of future-oriented thinking, that is, the specialist's competence, which runs through the recommendations of the European Parliament and the European Council [Zozuliak-Sluchyk R., 2019, p. 8].

In the context of the above, the professional training of future social sphere specialists acquires particular importance, specifically in the context of forming professional-ethical competence.

Based on over 20 years of personal experience working at a university, I would like to note that the professional training of future social sphere specialists in higher education institutions is defined as a unity of a specially organized, purposeful psycho-pedagogical, professional-ethical, socio-humanitarian classroom and extracurricular educational and upbringing professional system, containing subject-subject, target, motivational, content, and procedural components. Therefore, holistic professional-ethical training consists of separate, professionally integrated processes, types, and forms of activity that have their own specificity but are directed toward a single goal – ensuring the personal-social paradigm of upbringing and the personal professional trajectory of development of future specialists, including the formation of their professional-ethical competence [Zozuliak-Sluchyk R., 2019, p. 258].

Based on theoretical modeling and the generalization of practical experience, a substantive model for the professional-ethical training of future social sphere specialists has been scientifically substantiated. We include the following components in its structure: the goal, which involves the formation of future specialists with a high level of personal and professional-ethical motives; organizational forms and types of activities; functions of the subjects of activity; substantive directions of activity; a set of external (objective) and internal (subjective) pedagogical conditions; and a system of principles and means for forming the morality of social sphere specialists in higher education institutions.

Professional training, specifically the formation of the professional-ethical competence of future specialists, consists of interconnected stages, each having its own goal and content.

Thus, the «establishment» stage is implemented during the first year of study at a higher education institution and involves the gradual introduction of students into the process of forming professional ethics. This is achieved by establishing an initial understanding of the essence of social work or socio-pedagogical activity, its value and moral aspects, the role of the Code of Ethics for social sphere specialists in professional activity, the acquisition of primary knowledge and skills of moral culture, and the fostering of a positive attitude toward the profession of social worker or social pedagogue. At this stage, initial moral-ethical attitudes are formed, and students are integrated into professional-ethical relationships and adapted to the conditions of university life.

At the «individual-correctional» stage, which takes place during the second and third years of study at the higher education institution, there is an accumulation of knowledge, norms, and rules of personal, professional, and professional-moral behavior of the future specialist. This stage involves the acquisition and consolidation of skills and habits of moral behavior by intensifying students' industrial activities and engaging them in all forms and types of activities provided by the professional training educational program. At this stage, which is oriented toward the formation of the intellectual and practical-behavioral components of professional-ethical competence, there is an improvement of humane relationships and a fuller manifestation of feelings of personal and professional dignity and honor, which lie at the basis of the activity.

The third stage – «self-forming» – covers the fourth year of study. At this designated stage, the systematization of students' knowledge regarding professional-ethical competence takes place, along with the practical testing of acquired skills and habits of moral behavior through extensive involvement of students in industrial practice. The goal of this stage is to consolidate the results of the work on forming professional-ethical competence, mobilize and activate self-knowledge, create conditions for self-improvement, and expand students' skills in the field of self-education. The main content involves deepening the experience of moral activity, acquiring stable moral skills, the

ability to make correct decisions in complex situations, and the self-improvement of professionally important and personal qualities.

Thus, the formation of ethical foundations is fundamental to social work with various groups of clients. After all, the moral and mental health of the nation, as well as progressive reforms that will ensure a happy future, depend to a certain extent on the level of moral development of social sphere specialists. Social sphere specialists represent that spiritual potential which, at a secular level, must humanize the inner world of the individual, uphold the ideals of goodness, justice, honor, mercy, and love, and resist moral degradation, aggressiveness, confrontation, and alienation in society – that become especially acute during the times of war experienced by modern Ukrainian society.

The affirmation of the ideals of mercy and justice becomes a form of professional resistance to the destructive influence of war.

**CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS OF FURTHER RESEARCH**

Social work during the war period is a mission of humanizing society. The ethical aspect is decisive, as it is precisely what transforms a formal service into an act of supporting human dignity. The main client groups remain IDPs, veterans, and children, and working with them requires a combination of professionalism and high moral virtues.

Perspectives for further research lie in the development of digital ethical protocols for remote social assistance and the study of the experience of veteran rehabilitation in countries that have survived prolonged conflicts, with the aim of adapting it to Ukrainian realities.

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