Developing a Code of Ethics amongst Social Workers in Supported Employment: Exploring the Socio-ecological Model

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Abstract

This study reveals the ethical dilemmas encountered by social workers who mentor workers with intellectual and developmental disabilities that work in the free labour market through supported employment frameworks. The aim of the study is to examine the social workers’ ethical dilemmas, while extracting rules of conduct and ethical codes that are unique to supported employment frameworks, through team simulation training. The study included forty-eight social workers who attended nine sessions in the course of one year. The findings, which were analysed using a qualitative methodology, revealed that the dilemmas, rules of ethical conduct and the derived ethical codes ranged from flexible solutions to setting firm boundaries. It emerged that the ethical dilemmas were associated with interactions that take place on all layers of the socio-ecological model. The contribution of the study is in developing an ecological approach to coping with the multidimensional dilemmas that arise in the context of supported employment. The findings will help develop a systemic approach amongst social workers towards coping with the ethical challenges involved in this type of employment.

Keywords: ethical code of conduct, ethical dilemmas, simulations, socio-ecological model

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Introduction

People with disabilities often encounter prejudice related to their ability to function properly in a workplace; therefore, employers often need to be encouraged to hire them (Carvalho-Freitas and Stathi, 2017). There are sheltered employment settings in which people with disabilities are trained to develop work-related skills and behaviours. However, these forms of employment have been criticised as programmes in which people with significant disabilities remain ‘stuck’ for many years, often underpaid, and not exposed to employment in their community (Kregel and Dean, 2001). Therefore, a tendency exists to find jobs for people with disabilities in supported employment frameworks, which seek to help people with significant disabilities enter the nation’s labour force (Coady and Lehmann, 2016).

Supported employment has been reserved for those persons who are unable to work due to the severity of their disability (Almalki, 2019). Supported employment has been used successfully for decades as a personalised model for supporting people with significant disabilities to secure and retain paid employment. The model uses a partnership strategy, enabling people with disabilities to achieve sustainable long-term employment and encouraging businesses to hire valued workers (McDowell and Fossey, 2015). Thus, the supported framework enables people with disabilities to find paid work in the free labour market and to enjoy a normal employer–employee relationship, including all the standard social benefits and, importantly, without losing their disability allowance.

Araten-Bergman (2016) argues that employment is one of the most important issues to be considered when formulating policies related to people with disabilities, because their failure to integrate into the free labour market has negative implications not only for themselves but for society as a whole. In recent years, due to manpower shortages in the labour market and the overburdened welfare system, progress has been made in passing legislation stating that every person with a disability has the right to find work through supported employment frameworks, which provide professional training and a social worker to support the worker with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in the workplace (Almalki, 2019).

IDD is defined as a disability characterised by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and in adaptive behaviour, as expressed in conceptual, social and practical adaptive skills (AAIDD, 2011). In this study, we refer to people with IDD who have the motivation and capability to fit into the open labour market.

Merrells et al. (2018) argue that ~0.5% of the world’s population are people with IDD at varying levels of function, who require life-long
support. Furthermore, Miethlich and Šlahor (2018) claim that while employing workers with IDD reflects social responsibility and generates social benefits, employers experience multiple difficulties and dilemmas related to their employment, which may lessen their willingness to hire them.

In view of all of the above, the aim of the current study is to examine the social workers’ ethical dilemmas, while extracting the ethical codes and rules of conduct that are unique to supported employment by means of team simulation training. Providing specific guidance during the training with regard to coping with ethical challenges encountered by social workers in supported employment frameworks, beyond the generic ethical codes for social workers that exist around the world, will help them cope better with these challenges and, consequently, expand the employment opportunities available to workers with IDD in the free labour market.

**Theoretical background**

**Ethical dilemmas according to the socio-ecological model**

An ethical dilemma is defined as a moral question that is difficult to resolve and has more than one correct and appropriate solution (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2013). Social workers who mentor workers with IDD in supported employment frameworks encounter a wide range of ethical dilemmas that are unique to this type of employment; for example, deciding whether to comply with the wishes of the person with IDD or with those of his family, if the two collide. Making ethical decisions is defined as a process, whereby people consider their own personal values in relation to specific events and come to a decision (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2014).

This study examines ethical dilemmas resulting from interactions between a worker with IDD and his surroundings, including the social worker, based on the socio-ecological approach developed by Bronfenbrenner (2005), which emphasises the constant interactions between an individual and his surroundings. We shall examine the following sub-systems: Microsystem (interpersonal) which describes the relationship between the worker with IDD and the social worker; Mesosystem (organisational) which describes the relationship between the social worker and the workplace’s manager; Exosystem (community) which describes the relationship between the social worker and the parents of the worker with IDD; Macrosystem which describes the relationship between the social worker and the superior of the non-profit institution; and Chronosystem which examines the effects of governmental policies on workers with IDD over time (Figure 1).
These different sub-systems generate ethical dilemmas. In the present study, we have focused on a range of ethical dilemmas that emerge from the different layers (sub-systems) of the socio-ecological model encountered by social workers who mentor workers with IDD in supported employment frameworks.

**Ethical rules of conduct and derived code of ethics**

The ethical rules of conduct are a collection of values and rules of behaviour which facilitate the implementation of the desired organisational culture (Kaptein, 2015). The purpose of the ethical rules of conduct is to develop and preserve the ability of staff members to make decisions, and behave according to the organisation’s moral standards. The ethical codes, which are derived from these ethical rules of conduct, recommend...
how to act properly. An ethical code does not replace the law; rather it supplements it and addresses questions that the law does not adequately answer (Çelik et al., 2015).

Social workers who mentor people with IDD in supported employment frameworks confront ethical challenges that are unique to this type of employment which, in turn, make it difficult to implement the general ethical codes for social workers that exist around the world. Therefore, in this study, we investigate the unique ethical rules of conduct and their derived codes of ethics that may be elicited in supported employment during team simulations.

Training through team simulations

Training is a process of imparting content-based skills and abilities in an organisation, or of motivating people to act by means of a trainer (Pattnaik and Sahoo, 2018). Training is meant to contribute to employees’ professional and personal development, to enable them to think independently, exercise self-criticism and alter their attitudes, if necessary, in order to cope with challenges and dilemmas that require initiative and decision-making skills (Ogilvie et al., 2017).

The process of training through team simulations is defined as a practice based on role-play which enables participants to share authentic events that occur within the various systems of the organisation, in a supportive environment (Benckendorff et al., 2015). The simulated role-play is followed by a discussion designed to expose trainees to the conflicts of everyday life, and to develop their critical and creative thinking. Olejniczak et al. (2016) stress that simulation workshops expose trainees to alternative strategies and enable them to experience the different possible outcomes and develop deeper insights regarding key aspects and dilemmas in the real world, while strengthening their social awareness.

Training by means of simulation workshops yields a unique advantage: examining ethical events without the time pressure that characterises everyday work (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2015). Furthermore, practical training makes a greater impression on trainees and the learnt content remains with them longer. Simulation workshops also enable trainees to discuss emotional aspects, which may also impact the process of making ethical decisions (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2013).

The relationship between training and developing ethical codes

One of the ways to promote ethical conduct in an organisation is to develop a code of ethics, which contains dedicated rules of ethical conduct for specific events and for certain types of employment
Sung and Choi (2014) argue that training is a tool which enables learners to cope with ethical dilemmas that require flexibility, initiative, creativity and decision-making skills. Through simulation workshops, participants can cope with various critical ethical events while developing rules of ethical conduct for the group, which may enhance their readiness to cope with similar dilemmas in their daily work (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2018). In view of this, the present study will examine the various ethical rules of conduct that emerged in the simulation workshops, and the ethical codes that derived from them.

**Methods**

**Sample and study procedure**

The research team obtained a list from the Israeli Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services of all social workers who mentor workers with IDD in supported employment frameworks in Israel. Out of this list, forty-eight participants who are employed in different non-profit institutions were selected randomly. The participants included twenty males and twenty-eight females, whose average age was 36.93 (SD = 10.45), average years of education totalled 15.5 (SD = 0.86), and average years of experience came to 5.64 (SD = 3.83). Each social worker accompanied an average of 8.45 (SD = 2.82) employees with IDD and maintained contact with an average of 15.10 (5.11) organisations (note that these are potential organisations for the employment of people with IDD.) Table 1 displays the participants’ profile.

The participants represent a variety of districts and social sectors in Israel. They were guaranteed anonymity upon publication, and therefore the names of all the participants in the study are pseudonyms. Permission to perform the study was obtained from the PI’s university’s ethics committee. The participants signed an informed consent form after they understood the study goals, process, and their ethical rights.

The first stage was an exploratory field study. Interviews were conducted with social workers that participate in supported employment frameworks. This was done in order to gain an understanding of the background, characteristics and causes of dilemmas that often arise in these organisations. This process led to the second stage, eighteen dilemma-events were formulated by the authors, according to the socio-ecological model. In the third stage, the National Centre for Simulation trained actors to play different characters based on the dilemma-events that had been compiled, so as to ensure an authentic and convincing role-play.
### Table 1. The study participants’ profile

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**Notes:** (1) In order to guarantee anonymity, all the participants’ names are pseudonyms; (2) the number of organisations does not match the number of employees with IDD, due to the fact that these are only potential organisations for employment, with which the social workers have an on-going relationship.
Training through workshops at the National Centre for Simulation

The research team randomly divided the forty-eight participants into two groups of twenty-four, and each group was assigned a different filming studio and workshop trainer. Each group met nine times in the course of one year, and participated in two different role-play simulations in each session. This division ensured a relaxed and open atmosphere, which enabled all social workers to take an active part in the workshop. The training took place in two adjacent rooms: a workshop room where the participants and trainer watched the role-play simulation on a monitor and subsequently analysed it, and a simulation room where some of the participants joined an actor in performing the role play, which was filmed and broadcast live in the workshop room. The simulation room was staged according to the chosen dilemma, and the actors were trained to play different roles, such as a worker with IDD, the worker’s parents, an employer and a manager. This helped create a sense of authenticity. After the simulation, the social worker and the actor returned to the workshop room and watched the filmed dilemma together with the rest of the participants. The participants then analysed the dilemma and discussed possible ways to resolve it, until ultimately formulating ethical rules of conduct and an ethical code inspired by the simulation.

Data analysis

The study uses a qualitative methodology to examine the main categories of dilemmas and of ethical rules of conduct and code of ethics that emerge from the transcripts of the simulation meetings (Gentles et al., 2015). The qualitative data analysis was carried out by the following stages: First, the research team carefully read the entire compilation of research material. Second, a content analysis was performed using an encoding process whereby the text was divided into categories based on recurring themes. In the third stage, the categories of the dilemmas and of the rules of conduct were examined and grouped according to common interactions. In addition, the categories were assigned to varying layers of the socio-ecological model. Finally, the content categories that had been identified in the simulation workshops were cross-referenced, in an attempt to detect identical recurrent themes (Bernard et al., 2016). As a method of internal assessment of the qualitative analysis, the analysis described above was performed separately by each of the researchers in order to increase the reliability of the findings. Following this, the research team met to discuss the results obtained by each of them separately and ultimately reached a consensus about the findings.
Findings

Ethical dilemmas, rules of conduct and ethical codes according to the socio-ecological model

The ethical dilemmas commonly encountered by social workers in the context of mentoring in supported employment were classified according to the five layers of the socio-ecological model. The following findings describe the rules of conduct and ethical codes derived from these ethical dilemmas.

1. **Microsystem (interpersonal) – ethical dilemmas resulting from interactions between the social worker and the worker with IDD**

   **Background:** Boaz, a worker with IDD, has been employed in a flower shop for six months. During the holiday period, which entails high pressure and a heavy workload, Boaz was unable to meet the required level of productivity. Consequently, the shop manager wants to dismiss him.

   **The ethical dilemma derived from the event:** the interests of the worker with IDD, who wishes to continue working, versus the interests of the shop manager to increase productivity.

   **The ethical rules of conduct derived from the event:** some of the rules of conduct suggested by the participants favoured a firm solution, emphasising the need to maintain the shop’s financial profit:

   “It should be made clear to Boaz that if his performance does not improve, he will be dismissed. But on the other hand, it’s important to find a way to say this without offending him” (Tal, male, age 38, three years’ experience).

   However, most of the suggestions favoured a flexible solution:

   “I think we need to speak to the employer and try to explain that Boaz may feel under pressure because of the heavy workload, which may affect his performance, and try to get the employer to give him another chance. At the same time, talk to Boaz and his parents to try to help him regain his previous level of productivity, or try to ask the employer to demonstrate some patience and empathy, while promising to augment the presence of the social worker at the shop” (Orit, female, age 50, eight years’ experience).

   **The ethical code of conduct derived from the event:** “I believe we must help every person with disability to support himself in dignity” (Yaarit, female, age 28, four years’ experience).

2. **Mesosystem (organisational) – dilemmas resulting from interactions between the social worker and the employer**

   **Background:** Yafit, a female worker with IDD, gives the factory’s male manager a ‘morning hug’ every day she comes into work. This involves
inappropriate physical contact which might be interpreted as sexual harassment on her part.

The ethical dilemma derived from the event: equal treatment of all employees in the factory versus considering the special needs of the worker with IDD.

The ethical rules of conduct derived from the event: the ethical rules of conduct suggested by the social workers demonstrated flexibility by attempting to reach a solution together with the factory manager.

For example, a meeting could be held together with both parties in order to understand the source of Yafit’s behavioural problem in the factory: “Have a conversation with both the worker and the factory manager to try to find ways to help and enable the continuation of her employment. If required, write up a ‘contract of behaviour’ which the worker with IDD and the employer will both sign” (Chava, female, age 45, ten years’ experience).

Another suggestion was to meet only with the factory manager, to try to explain Yafit’s difficulties:

“I would talk to the factory manager and try to describe how a disability like the one Yafit suffers from can manifest itself. People with IDD may be unaware of what an inappropriate behaviour is, and many of them cannot control strong inner impulses. However, I would make it clear that I understand that Yafit’s behaviour is unacceptable. I would follow up on Yafit’s conduct in the factory and maintain full transparency vis-à-vis the factory manager, because I understand his level of exposure” (Shoshana, female, age 55, seven years’ experience).

The ethical code of conduct derived from the event: “I believe that every person with IDD must follow the factory’s accepted rules of conduct” (Sarin, female, age 50, 10 years’ experience).

3. Exosystem (community) – ethical dilemmas resulting from the interactions between the social worker and the parents of the worker with IDD

Background: Tomer, a worker with IDD, has been employed in a laundrette for a year without receiving monthly payslips, due to a financial crisis suffered by the owner. Tomer and his family are happy with the workplace because it gives him a sense of meaningfulness; the monthly salary is not important to the family, which is financially well-off. However, the state laws pertaining to labour and wages do not permit employment without payslips, so the family is, in effect, engaged in their son’s unlawful employment.
The ethical dilemma derived from the event: complying with the wishes of the worker with IDD and his family versus protecting him and the employer from being implicated in unlawful employment.

The ethical rules of conduct derived from the event: the ethical rules suggested by the social workers demonstrated setting boundaries; i.e. attempting to reach a solution together with the employer without violating the law:

“Check with the employer how he can continue employing Tomer, and if it isn’t possible, then help Tomer to gradually find another workplace. Support his transition and strengthen his sense of competency” (Efrat, female, age 30, four years’ experience).

In addition, “It is the social worker’s role to protect the worker with IDD, and s/he must do everything possible to prevent unethical behaviour toward him. The law requires paying regular salaries to all employees, regardless of having [any form of] disability” (Shalom, male, age 28, three years’ experience).

Nonetheless, most of the suggestions sought a flexible solution:

“The employer should only pay wages and health insurance, or maybe we can look into the possibility of reducing his work hours instead of dismissal” (Amos, male age 40, ten years’ experience in the non-profit organisation, social worker).

In addition, it was suggested to have a talk with the parents:

“Assuming the employer decides to dismiss him, I would speak to the parents and explain to them that employing him without wages is illegal. And as a social worker, I cannot allow it. At the same time, I would talk to Tomer about the change in circumstances and look for other alternatives for him. “ (Lior, male, age 45, seven years’ experience).

It was also suggested to convince the parents that this arrangement is not only illegal but also harmful for their son: “Not paying him for his work is improper conduct, even if Tomer is happy there. This is true from the legal aspect, but also from the aspect of his self-perception, because Tomer may see himself as someone who does not deserve to fit into a normative work life” (Tali, female, age 25, three years’ experience).

The ethical code of conduct derived from the event: “I believe that upholding the law is more important than employing a worker with a disability” (Ahmed, male, age 32, three years’ experience).
4. Macrosystem – ethical dilemmas resulting from the interactions between the social worker and the superior at the non-profit institution

**Background**: Yair, a man with IDD, works in a food-producing factory. The factory provides a well-stocked lunchroom which is open all day. The accessibility of food caused Yair to develop eating disorders; consequently, he is suffering from health problems.

**The ethical dilemma derived from the event**: the superior at the non-profit institution who had placed Yair in this factory believes that he should be transferred to another workplace, contradicting the opinion of the social worker.

**The ethical rules of conduct derived from the event**: the ethical rules of conduct suggested by the social workers ranged from firmness to flexibility in finding a solution:

"Yair should not be allowed to stay in a workplace that may put his health and life in jeopardy. That is, excessive eating will lead to diabetes which will lead to his dismissal, so we can prevent this by transferring him in advance to another workplace" (Shlomit, female, age 40, five years’ experience).

"The worker's health should not be compromised, and his well-being and health must take priority above all else, so we must consider other options and perhaps even transfer him to another workplace" (Dan, male, age 35, five years’ experience).

Some participants demonstrated a certain level of flexibility in solving the dilemma, for example:

"I believe that the most important thing is for the person to work in a place that meets both his physical and his emotional needs" (Dana, female, age 28, two years’ experience).

"Other options should be considered in consultation with the employer rather than giving up immediately, so the manager and social worker should work together for the benefit of the worker with IDD” (Tamer, female, age 26, 2 years’ experience).

**The ethical code of conduct derived from the event**: “I believe that the well-being of the worker with IDD and his health should be the topmost priority” (Ariel, male, age 52, 12 years’ experience).

5. Chronosystem – examining the impact of changes in governmental policy on the development of the worker with IDD over time

**Background**: Michal, a female worker with IDD, has been working at a restaurant as a dishwasher for six months. An assessment committee appointed by the Ministry of Welfare and Social Services had
determined the appropriate hourly wages for her job. After a while, the manager of the restaurant gave Michal added responsibilities, such as clearing tables and even helping out in the kitchen. Any change in one’s job description must be coordinated with the assessment committee, which must determine a suitable, higher salary. Insisting on Michal’s legal rights, however, is liable to lead to her dismissal, because the higher salary may exceed the restaurant’s budget.

The ethical dilemma derived from the event: abiding by the rules of the assessment committee versus preventing the worker with IDD from losing her job.

Ethical rules of conduct derived from the event: the social workers had definitive views with regard to the rules of conduct in this case:

“She’s very pleased with her work; she’s happy, her guardians are very happy, but I must explain something about employing defenceless people: an effort has been made to define her disability, and the terms of her employment must meet all the rules set by the state employment laws” (Chaya, female, age 45, ten years’ experience).

“The well-being of the worker with IDD is more important than any difficulty or dilemma, with the exception of violating salary laws” (Gadi, male, age 50, eight years’ experience).

And also:

“If the employer wishes to change the job description of a worker with IDD, he should discuss this with the social worker and make sure the new job corresponds to the worker’s abilities and wishes” (Shoshana, female, age 55, seven years’ experience).

The ethical code of conduct derived from the event: “I believe that the worker with IDD must be paid according to his job and the length of his employment at the workplace” (Dan, male, age 35, five years’ experience).

Dilemmas associated with all layers of the socio-ecological model

The study findings highlight the problem of “multiple loyalties”. For example, in a conversation between a social worker and a worker with IDD, the worker requests to leave the sheltered employment and find a job in supported employment (Microsystem, representing the relationship between the social worker and the worker with IDD). The social worker asks his superior to allow the worker with IDD to find a job in supported employment (Macrosystem, representing the relationship between the social worker and his superior at the non-profit institution). However, this move contradicts the decision of the assessment
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<td>Microsystem (Interpersonal)</td>
<td>Employing a worker with IDD in a flower shop where he is unable to work under pressure.</td>
<td>Micro: Attempt to solve the dilemma in a conversation between the social worker and the employee with IDD. Meso: Attempt to solve the dilemma in a conversation between the social worker and workplace management.</td>
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<td>Mesosystem (Organisational)</td>
<td>Inappropriate physical contact by an employee (with IDD) towards a manager in the organisation.</td>
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<td>Exosystem (Community)</td>
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<td>Cronosystem (Governmental policy)</td>
<td>Employing workers with IDD in the organisation beyond the role defined by the diagnostic committee.</td>
<td>Meso: Attempt to solve the dilemma in a conversation between the social worker and workplace management. Crono: Attempt to solve the dilemma between the social worker and the guidelines of the governmental policies.</td>
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committee (Chronosystem, representing the governmental policies on workers with IDD over time). In addition, the social worker knows that supporting the worker with IDD in a new job will demand many working hours, which may reduce the time he will be able to dedicate to other workers with disabilities. His reduced availability to support other workers in supported employment may cause problems with the manager of the workplace in which they work (Mesosystem, representing the relationship between the social worker and the workplace management). Thus, all the solutions to ethical dilemmas that were examined during the study involved several combined layers of the socio-ecological model.

Solutions to ethical dilemmas in the socio-ecological model

Table 2 presents the ethical dilemmas according to the dominant layer (based on the number of participants’ narratives) in the socio-ecological model and its connection to other layers in the model based on the participants’ solutions. The findings illustrate that a social worker accompanying employees with IDD in supported workplaces is faced with constant consideration of ethical aspects and complex professional dilemmas. In addition, the social worker examines the diagnoses he makes, the treatment approach and interventions he chooses, as part of his professional thinking, in order to provide an optimal solution for the IDD employee.

Discussion

Finding ways to include workers with IDD in the free labour market through supported employment is a prominent issue for public policy makers around the world. Schur et al. (2016) argue that the right of people with disabilities to participate actively in all aspects of social life is being recognised through legislation that grants equal rights to people with disabilities. Since the day-to-day reality of employing people with IDD is fraught with challenges, in this study we examined ethical dilemmas, ethical rules of conduct and ethical codes that emerge from the different layers of the socio-ecological model, and which are unique to processes of training social workers involved in supported employment. This investigation was done through simulation sessions, which allow participants to experience together authentic events from the world of supported employment, in a supportive environment.

The element common to all the ethical dilemmas inherent in employing workers with IDD is the need to protect their rights and wishes while facing various conflicting factors, which may originate on any layer
of the socio-ecological model. The main ethical dilemma, which was common to all social workers and is unique to the context of employing workers with IDD in supported employment frameworks, arises from the conflict between the principle of equality, which applies to all employees, versus the necessity to consider the unique needs of the worker with IDD. On the one hand, the worker with IDD is unequal to the other employees in his cognitive and motor skills; on the other hand, according to his job description, he is expected to perform his duties and meet the organisation’s requirements. If the worker with IDD still fails to comply with the rules of behaviour, the social workers voiced the opinion that he should be dismissed from the workplace, because other employees must not be harmed by unacceptable behaviour. Another important consideration was the need to maintain a good rapport with the employer, so that other workers with IDD will have the opportunity to work in the same workplace in the future.

Another unique dilemma related to supported employment emerged in the context of the perceived autonomy of the person with IDD, and his ability to exercise control over his own life. On the one hand, there is the wish to expand the autonomy of the worker with IDD by helping him leave the sheltered employment and join the free labour market, which offers higher wages and greater financial security. On the other hand, the worker with IDD, who may feel safe and secure in the sheltered workplace and enjoy the social activities it offers, may be reluctant to leave it.

The world of employment may also conflict with the wishes of the family, an issue which raises some unique ethical dilemmas related to the monthly salary of workers with IDD. Some families are financially well-off, and their motivation to find employment for their son or daughter derives solely from the sense of meaningfulness and self-worth that this employment would give him/her; in some cases, they are even willing to relinquish the salary, even though this would constitute illegal employment. By contrast, some families struggle financially and need the extra income earned by their son/daughter with IDD. In such cases, the family may demand that s/he leave the sheltered workplace and find work in supported employment, where s/he can earn a higher salary that would improve the family’s financial situation and well-being, even if this goes against their child’s wishes.

This study shows that social workers who have interactions with workers with IDD are faced with a wide range of ethical dilemmas that are unique to the world of supported employment and which emerge from all layers of the socio-ecological model. From these aspects, we can derive ethical rules of conduct and formulate an ethical code for supported employment.

The ethical rules of conduct suggested by social workers participating in this study ranged from a flexible approach, which involved trying to
find a creative solution together with the employer, or talking with the parents and supporting them, to a firm solution, such as immediate dismissal from the organisation. However, all the social workers suggest that the desired ethical rule of conduct should be in compliance with the laws, based on the understanding that the law protects all parties involved – the worker with IDD, the social worker and the employer – from lawsuits.

In general, the solutions suggested by the social workers in response to ethical dilemmas were creative in nature. The social workers challenged the norms and conventions of the workplace, sought to define problems in a variety of ways, collected and organised new information, and revealed the complex relationship between the person with IDD and his/her employer and family. They examined the expected outcomes in the short and long terms and the advantages and disadvantages of each alternative. In some instances, they decided to modify the original plan, for example, by changing a decision made by the assessment committee and adjusting it to the changing reality of the workplace. This decision-change reflected the fact that the real-life situations encountered by social workers are ethically complex and raise conflicts between different values or between contradictory ethical demands.

Therefore, it is important to develop training programmes for social workers using simulation sessions, where they can experience situations and demonstrate creativity by examining the ethical dilemmas on the backdrop of all the interactions in the socio-ecological model, using solutions that range from the flexible and creative to the firm and definitive. This range of solutions was made possible thanks to the open discussion in the simulation workshops, in addition to the diversity of ages and years of experience amongst the social workers described above.

The study findings indicate that there are unique ethical dilemmas related to all layers of the socio-ecological model. These findings demonstrate the multidimensional nature of the ethical dilemmas inherent in employing workers with IDD; for example, dilemmas revolving around the ‘multiple loyalties’ of social workers, which emanate from their interactions between the different sub-layers of the socio-ecological model. Namely, where should the social worker’s loyalties lie in situations of conflict between the different parties that interact with the worker with IDD, or when a conflict arises between the social worker’s social responsibility and the wishes of the worker with IDD, or the organisation’s financial interests?

**Contribution**

The *study's theoretical contribution* is in examining the socio-ecological model based on accepted academic theories and updating it in the
context of training social workers who mentor workers with IDD in supported employment frameworks. In addition, the study will help broaden the existing knowledge related to coping with ethical dilemmas that are unique to supported employment. This knowledge will be valuable to job-holders across the different layers of the socio-ecological model: from the social worker and free market employer up to the public policy-makers.

The practical contribution of the study is in formulating an ethical code that is unique for supported employment frameworks by means of simulation training workshops. This ethical code may reduce the number of incorrect decisions that may negatively impact the employment of workers with IDD and result in their dropping out or being dismissed from the workplace.

The study’s limitations

It cannot be conclusively argued that the training through simulation was indeed the factor that enabled the social workers to come up with a varied range of solutions, although it is apparent that this strategy did facilitate a wide range of suggestions. However, it is also possible that the range of views reflects the participants’ education and perhaps other training they had undergone at the non-profit institution, their past experience with workers with IDD, and the experience they gained by participating in the study.

Another limitation is that the study would have been broader if people with IDD had also been interviewed. Unfortunately, due to our university ethics committee constraints, we were not permitted to include them. In future studies, in compliance with the authorities’ approval, we will strive to add to our research people with IDD in supported employment.

Conclusions

The employment of people with IDD in supported employment raises some unique ethical dilemmas resulting from the various barriers they encounter. In order to encourage an organisational culture that welcomes the inclusion of workers with disabilities in a variety of organisations, it would be appropriate to use team-based simulations in social workers’ training. These simulations enable the development of ethical rules of conduct and ethical codes, which may contribute to the willingness of both social workers and employers to cope with the diverse dilemmas inherent in supported employment. In view of the multidimensional nature of the ethical dilemmas, which are associated with all
layers of the socio-ecological model, it is advisable to develop a code of ethical conduct that is specific to training for supported employment, with the collaboration of all interested parties: the worker with IDD, his family, social workers, employers and public policy-makers. Such a collaboration will encourage social workers to feel committed and loyal to the ethical code, which they themselves will have helped to formulate.

References


