Southern Adventist University

School of Social Work and Family Studies

Ethics

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In case study number two in which the client makes the statement "I might regret it later, but I think I'm going to kill that guy", the major ethical issues that arise are that of commitment to clients and privacy and confidentiality. There is also the issue of duty to warn and the importance of human relationships. Although there are probably several other issues at hand these are the ones I consider primary at the give time.

The individuals that could be affected by the decision I make could range from the client, his wife, the man with whom she is having the affair, the police, other social workers, and other countless individuals with whom the client may come into contact with on a daily basis. The client could face severe punishment or even death if the issue is left unchecked. The wife and the other man would be in danger; the police department could play several roles from prosecution, investigation and working a murder scene. Other social workers could be affected in that they could get called into court if something did happen. They could have to testify for or against the client if he did in fact act out the threat.

The first course of action I would have to take is to explain to the client the boundaries that we set at the beginning of services on the limits of confidentially. I would probe for more answers such as does he have the means, does he have a plan, is it detailed or is he just speaking out of anger and does he have other support systems in place to help him cope with the situation of the affair. If he did have a detailed plan, the means and I really believed he was a danger to himself or someone else I would have a duty to warn. If I were uncertain I would continue to speak with the client and seek help from colleagues, however if still uncertain I would probably error on the side of caution but only after all other avenues were exhausted. If the client did not have the means in that his wife and the other individual were living in another country or state,

he had no specific plan and his support system could assure his own safety I probably would not follow the duty to warn but would insist on seeing him again within the week.

I would be in favor of reporting the incident due to the safety of all the individuals involved including the client, his wife, and the other man. Under the code of ethics I would be compelled to warn because I believed that serious, foreseeable, and imminent harm to the client or another individual is feasible. Also under the teleological-utilitarian perspective I would probably report the incident due to the consequences of what could happen if I did not report it. In this I believe that reporting it would bring about the greater good in that all parties would be safe. If course of action number two was taken and I did not report the incident the outcome could be grave and several parties could be subject to serious bodily harm. Based on my own personal values I would probably have to break confidentially and comply with the duty to warn law.

Before making any decision which could have the potential to harm my client and I was unsure of what to do I would see if there were also other social workers in the office which I could ask for assistance. Many times other workers with much more experience have faced situations similar to this and would be able to lend me a helping hand sorting out the confusion. I do believe that in the current situation I would follow the duty to warn and notify the appropriate individuals in an effort to keep my client, his wife, and the other individual safe and free from harm. I do understand the client is facing a difficult situation in his marriage however I believe that as stated in the case study where the therapist is unsure of weather the client is going to act out on his threat after asking the specific questions then I would be obligated to warn.