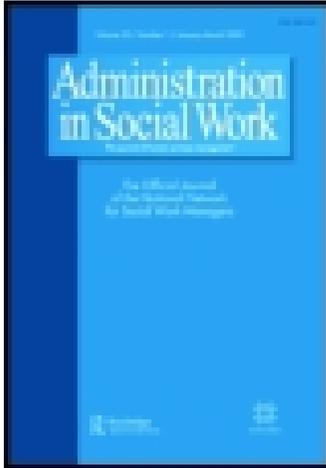


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When Colleague Accuses Colleague

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When Colleague Accuses Colleague: Adjudicating Personnel Matters Through the Filing of Ethics Complaints

Kimberly Strom-Gottfried, PhD

A variety of grievances may arise in the workplace—among co-workers and between employees and administrative or supervisory personnel. These disputes may revolve around performance appraisals, job expectations, compensation, fair treatment, supervisory practices and employee dismissals. Typically, employees have several avenues of redress, depending upon the nature of their complaint. They may raise concerns through supervisory discussions, formal or informal internal grievance procedures, union mechanisms, regulatory bodies (such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission), and through civil litigation. Another alternative involves framing the disputed behavior as a practice issue and pursuing redress through professional adjudication or regulatory boards. Reported here are the findings of a study examining ethics cases filed with NASW for the years 1986-1997. Data are provided on the frequency of collegial complaints and the nature of findings related to personnel matters. Concluding is a discussion of the implication of these findings and the resources available to reduce the incidence of complaints about administrative and supervisory practices.

THE CODE AND COLLEGIAL RELATIONS

The NASW Code of Ethics (1996) contains 155 ethical standards designed to guide practitioners' conduct in their relationships with clients, colleagues,

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employers, and society at large. These standards not only socialize new members to the profession and guide social workers' behavior, but they serve as the basis by which the profession and its members can be held accountable for actions in contravention of the Code.

With regard to collegial relationships, the Code requires that professionals treat each other with respect, that they maintain one another's confidences, that they strive to address cooperatively professional differences and that they not engage in sexual or other dual relationships which might disadvantage or exploit one of the parties. In cases of practitioner impairment, incompetence, or unethical behavior, the Code expects social workers to approach the colleague whom they suspect of impairment and urge him or her to seek help, and, failing that, to take their concerns to those in authority if necessary for client protection.

Social workers serving as supervisors are expected to be competent to carry out the supervisory function, be fair and respectful in conducting performance appraisals, use clearly stated criteria in evaluation, and afford supervisees reasonable access to continuing education. Administrators are expected to take "reasonable steps" to assure that supervisory resources are adequate and appropriate to worker needs, and ensure that their working environment fosters compliance with the Code.

Although it covers a range of conduct, most of the attention paid to the Code, and to professional ethics in general, is targeted at social workers' actions in relation to their clients. Authors such as Reamer (1994, 1995), Houston-Vega et al., (1997), Lowenberg and Dolgoff (1996), and Wells and Masch (1991) dedicate the bulk of their texts to issues such as appropriate boundaries between clients and workers, the proper use of paternalism, adherence to confidentiality, and informed consent. Fewer authors have discussed the ethical dimensions of supervision; others have focused primarily on avoiding conflicts of interest through the maintenance of appropriate boundaries (Bonosky, 1991; Kaiser, 1997; Sherry, 1991).

Research on ethical beliefs, behaviors, and violations is similarly skewed toward the worker-client relationship. In a recent study by Jayaratne et al. (1997), social workers in Michigan were queried about appropriate professional conduct, yet all of the examples used as a basis for the survey involved interactions with clients. In that the study was intended to help develop widely accepted standards and interpretive guidelines for the Code, such a limited focus may contribute to further neglect of the Code's provisions for supervisors and administrators.

Previous research based on NASW-adjudicated cases yields a similar picture, with the bulk of the findings and discussion addressing client-related allegations (Berliner, 1989; "Study Cites," 1993). Only the first study on Code violations (McCann & Cutler, 1979) offered insight into the degree

and nature of colleague-to-colleague complaints. The study covered complaints for the 22-year period following passage of the first Code (1955-1977) and found that of the 154 complaints filed, 36 involved staff firing, 22 involved violations of personnel practices, 17 involved breaches of contracts, and 11 focused on unethical policies. McCann and Cutler reported that 79% of the complaints were filed by employees against their managers, by managers against employees, or by colleagues against each other, indicating scant use of the adjudication process for client-oriented redress. Although the authors did not report on the nature of cases in which there were findings of violation, they did note that "Frequently, the central issue in complaints was only marginally related to the standards set forth" in the Code (1979, p. 8) and suggested that both consumers and practitioners needed to be better educated about the Code and that the Code itself needed to be made more explicit.

Although questions have been raised about the Code's applicability to agency executives (Gummer, 1997), clearly those crafting and enforcing the Code of Ethics consider supervision and administration to be forms of practice, subject to standards of conduct in the same way as direct practice. But, to what extent are supervisors and administrators held accountable to the Code's tenets? What areas of ethical violations emerge? What resources exist to guide social workers in the conduct of their indirect practice roles?

THE STUDY AND METHODOLOGY

As noted above, NASW adjudicates charges of unethical conduct made against its members. It also acts on complaints from members in regard to organizations which fail to maintain or adhere to fair personnel standards and organizations which unfairly discipline workers who have engaged in professional action on behalf of their clients. For the period July, 1986 to December, 1997, a total of 1068 cases were filed with NASW Chapters nationally. Personnel standards and professional action complaints encompassed 167 cases, and were excluded from review, in that they focus on institutional as opposed to individual behavior. Ethics complaints constituted the remaining cases ($n = 901$), and 894 of these were reviewed as the basis for this study. (Because a new Code of Ethics was instituted in 1997, only ethics cases for that year related to the former Code were included in this study. Seven cases were unavailable for review at the time of the research.)

For each case, the author reviewed the case files, all of which contained, at a minimum, the "Declaration of Complaint" and correspondence on the disposition of the case. Hearing panel reports provided information of the outcome of those cases which went to hearings and the resulting findings and corrective actions. Where relevant, correspondence and decision letters pro-

vided information on appeals. Demographic information, where available, was taken from reports, narratives and case correspondence.

Rather than record the tenets of the Code where violations were found, the author recorded the actions, as described in the hearing panel report, which led to a violation finding. In part, this decision was made because the wording used in the Code may not provide readers with explicit or useful information about the behaviors which are deemed unethical. For example, what does it mean, in practice, to “take adequate measures to discourage, prevent, expose, and correct the unethical conduct of colleagues” (NASW, 1996, p. 18)? The use of descriptive behavioral categories was intended to provide more easily applicable guidance to social workers, and to address variability in hearing reports where a particular action might result in a violation of different principles, depending on how the original complaint was crafted.

For the purpose of this research, 61 categories of unethical actions were developed, based on the literature on ethical vulnerability and on earlier research findings. In the course of the research, five additional categories were added when situations emerged that could not be captured in existing categories. Several of the resulting 66 categories can apply to both direct and indirect practice—for example, breaching confidentiality, failing to keep accurate records or reports, poor use of skills, inadequate preparation for job tasks, misrepresentation, or inaccurate billing. Eight categories explicitly and exclusively addressed ethical responsibilities related to administration and supervisory responsibilities. These include sexual or dual relationships with supervisees, unfair employee discharge, unwarranted or inappropriate criticism of a colleague, pay disputes, poor supervision, and creating a detrimental work environment. Because social workers may file complaints against each other for a variety of reasons, this article reports on the demographics of all cases in which complainants made *allegations* against their colleagues, although particular attention is given those which resulted in *infractions* related to personnel matters and other situations in which the fellow social worker was the affected party.

THE FINDINGS

In all, 34.3 percent of the 894 ethics complaints reviewed were filed by respondents' colleagues, employers, or supervisors. As indicated in Table 1, the majority of these (56.6%) were filed by employees against their supervisor or administrator, followed by complaints from colleagues with no apparent hierarchical relationship to the complainant (30.2%), and the remainder (13%) were filed by an employer or supervisor against an employee. These “collegial complaints” reflect cases in which the complainant had a personal relationship with the respondent, as opposed to “surrogate” complaints

TABLE 1. Respondent and Complainant Characteristics in Co-Worker-Generated Ethics Complaints

	All Co-Worker- Filed Complaints (n = 307)		Co-Worker Cases with Findings of Indirect Practice Violations (n = 31)	
	n	%	n	%
Relationship of Complainant to Respondent				
Employee or Supervisee	174	56.6	22	70.9
Colleague	93	30.2	7	22.5
Employer or Supervisor	40	13	2	6.4
Complainant Gender				
Female	164	53.4	20	64.5
Male	111	36.1	7	22.5
Multiple Complainants	32	10.4	4	12.9
Respondent Gender				
Female	166	54	17	54.8
Male	106	34.5	10	32.2
Multiple Respondents	35	11.4	4	12.9
Respondent Work Setting				
Agency	246	80.1	24	77.4
Private Practice	32	10.4	5	16.1
Not Known	15	4.8	1	3.2
College or University	14	4.5	1	3.2
Respondent Degree				
MSW	240	79.7	23	74.1
Other/Multiple Respondents	37	12	5	16.1
PhD	28	9.1	3	9.6
MSW Student	2	.6	0	

which may have been filed by a fellow social worker (not involved with the case) based on published accounts of wrongdoing. They also exclude complaints filed by students, which are addressed in a separate work (Strom-Gottfried, 1998a).

Females were the target of individually directed complaints in 166 cases, and males were respondents in 106 cases. A similar gender distribution is reflected in the cases in which there were findings of violation. This distribution is comparable to the gender representation in the NASW membership, where women constitute 68% of the administrators and supervisors and men constitute 38% (Gibelman & Schervish, 1997).

In this study, "agency setting" includes public, private, not-for-profit, and for-profit settings and refers to the work setting which is the site of the alleged infraction. For example, a social worker may be employed in both an agency and private practice, but if he or she is subject to a complaint regarding supervisory actions in the agency, that setting would have been recorded for the research. In this study, 246 cases (80.1% of all collegial complaints) were filed against social workers in agency practice, and indirect practice violations resulted in 24 of those cases. Only 10% of the collegial complaints ($n = 32$) were filed against private practitioners, and five of those resulted in indirect practice violations. Recent research on NASW members indicates that 62% engage in private practice as their primary or secondary work setting (Gibelman & Schervish, 1997), suggesting that private practitioners are under-represented as the subject of collegial complaints and indirect practice violations. Because private practices are largely solo or small group enterprises, the lower volume of collegial interactions, limited hierarchical relationships, and restricted supervisory responsibilities may all conspire to yield fewer co-worker grievances.

Respondents who had an MSW as their terminal degree were the subject of complaints and findings in approximately the same proportion as their representation in the NASW membership. Persons with PhDs or DSWs, who constitute 4.1 percent of the membership, were over-represented among respondents, and BSWs, against whom there were no recorded complaints, were underrepresented.

As indicated in Table 2, complaints filed by fellow social workers had a variety of outcomes. Seventy-five cases were not accepted because they failed to meet the criteria of timely submission, available evidence, relevance to the Code, or respondent membership. Forty-two cases were accepted for review, then closed, typically because the complainant failed to follow through with the action or because they had pursued other avenues of redress instead of the NASW complaint. In 35 cases, the complaint was withdrawn, typically because the situation had been resolved through other mechanisms. Fifteen cases were still in process at the time the research was concluded, and

TABLE 2. Case Outcome in Co-Worker-Generated Ethics Complaints

Disposition of Case	All Co-Worker Filed Complaints (n = 307)
Complaint Not Accepted	75
Went to Hearing, Had Findings of Violation	66
Went to Hearing, No Findings	59
Case Closed	42
Complaint Withdrawn	35
Case Pending/In Process	15
Mediated Outcome	6
Went to Hearing, Results Pending	5
Proceedings Terminated	4

four cases were terminated because the complainants had violated the confidentiality provisions of adjudication.

Hearings were held in 130 colleague-filed cases, 66 of which had resulted in findings of ethical violations at the time this research was concluded. Of those 66 cases, 35 involved client-related violations, such as sexual contact with clients, confidentiality breaches, or failure to practice with competence. Those practice-related cases and other findings are described elsewhere (Strom-Gottfried, 1998b). The remaining 31 cases resulted in findings of misconduct relative to administrative or supervisory functions and form the basis of the remaining discussion of findings, in that they were filed by colleagues and address colleague-related performance.

VIOLATIONS AND CONSEQUENCES

As described earlier, hearing panels' findings of Code violations were recorded as categories of unethical behavior. Eight categories constituted indirect or personnel practice violations and the number of cases in which violations were found, by category, is indicated in Table 3. Because 24 cases had more than one type of violation, the number of violations exceeds 31. No violations were found in two of the categories—dual relationships with supervisees and supervision of someone with whom there was an earlier intimate relationship.

TABLE 3. Number and Type of Indirect Practice Violations Found

<u>Violation</u>	<u>Number of Cases</u>
Poor supervision	13
Unfair employee dismissal	10
Detrimental working environment	8
Unfair criticism of colleague	6
Unfair compensation	6
Sexual relationship with supervisee	2
Dual relationship with supervisee	none
Prior relationship with supervisee	none

The most commonly occurring violation involved the provision of poor supervision. Typical problems included failure to maintain or share performance standards with workers, using insufficient investigation and documentation in performance review processes, not holding regular supervisory sessions, or holding sessions which were unclear and ineffective.

The second most commonly occurring violation involved employee dismissals which were judged to have been based on insufficient or absent personnel policies, or which diverged from accepted processes of progressive discipline. In five cases, these coincided with findings of premature termination (a "direct practice" violation) because the precipitous employee dismissal detrimentally affected the fired employee's clients.

In 8 cases, hearing panels concluded that the respondent had contributed to a inhospitable work environment, violating the Code provision that "The social worker should create and maintain conditions of practice that facilitate ethical and competent professional performance by colleagues" (NASW, 1993, p. 7). Actions which led to the violation included racist and sexist remarks, vulgar language directed at employees and clients, and fomenting an atmosphere of mistrust by violating co-workers' confidences.

Six cases resulted in findings of unfair criticism of a colleague, based on statements made to others about the fellow social worker or groundless criticisms made in written evaluations. Six other cases resulted in findings of compensation violations, including fee splitting, refusal to pay for contractual services performed, and inappropriately withholding worker salaries. Finally, in two cases, violations were found when co-workers reported having had sexual relationships with their supervisors.

Some of the 31 cases in which there were findings of indirect practice violations also had violations in other categories. For example, in 9 cases there were simultaneous findings of poor record keeping, some of which had to do with the maintenance of supervisory or personnel records. Two cases had findings of incompetent practice, in that the respondents were judged to have carried out their supervisory or managerial functions without application of the appropriate knowledge or skills. Because these infractions are captured in categories that mix client-related violations and indirect practice violations, they are difficult to extrude for examination. Nevertheless, as in the examples cited above, it is important to note that supervisory or administrative violations can take various forms.

Commonly, when NASW panels find ethics infractions, they recommend corrective actions, by which respondents are expected to bring their practice back into compliance with the Code. As indicated in Table 4, a range of corrective action were proposed in response to administrative or supervisory infractions, with many committees recommending more than one form of corrective action. Some of the actions are time- or task-limited—for example, seeking consultation about personnel policies, developing and disseminating compensation guidelines, refunding fees, or issuing an apology. Other actions take place over a specified period of time—for example, obtaining supervision for a number of years or pursuing therapy. Corrective actions that are the responsibility of the respondent are monitored by fellow NASW members for compliance. Other corrective actions are carried out directly by NASW—for example, issuing a letter of censure or notifying a licensing body or employer.

In some cases, respondents' actions are so troubling that committees recommend sanctions, a more severe and less rehabilitation focused disciplinary action. These are most often applied when respondents fail to fulfill the terms of their corrective actions, although in some cases they are implemented immediately in lieu of corrective actions. Five of the cases reported here resulted in immediate sanctions, such as the publication of findings, the termination of membership, or the notification of regulatory bodies. In all of these cases, the respondents had declined to participate in the adjudication hearing, which may have had some bearing on the decision to issue sanctions. NASW by-laws specify that the application for membership includes "an agreement to abide by the Code of Ethics of the association and to submit to proceedings for any alleged violation of the same" (NASW, 1993, p. 5). Thus, the failure to participate in an inquiry is generally viewed with consternation.

ANCILLARY EFFECTS OF COMPLAINTS

Whether or not findings of violation are rendered, the very act of being subject to allegations has serious professional and personal implications for

TABLE 4. Corrective Actions Applied to Cases with Indirect Practice Violations

<u>Corrective Action</u>	<u>Number of Cases*</u>
Seek administrative supervision	9
Miscellaneous	8
Seek ethics supervision	6
Letter of censure sent	6
Seek consultation	4
Continuing education	4
Refund fees/funds owed	4
Correct record/report	3
Write paper or policy	3
Apologize	3
Letter sent to employer	2
Seek clinical supervision	2
Publication of findings	1
Suspension of membership	1
Seek personal therapy	1

* Because some cases had multiple findings of violation, the total exceeds 31.

the social workers who are named as respondents. Being the target of a complaint may lead to rejection from reimbursable provider panels, increased malpractice insurance rates, difficulty securing or maintaining employment, and the extraordinary consumption of time and finances in defending the complaint. In the case of co-worker-generated complaints, the median length of time from the filing of the complaint to its disposition was 267 days (range = 15 to 2188 days), with cases that involved hearings and those that had co-existing litigation naturally requiring more time than those which did not.

In at least 24 of the 130 collegial complaints that went to hearing, there was a co-occurring complaint filed with a regulatory board, and in at least 20 cases legal action had been filed in the form of civil litigation or a human rights complaint with the EEOC. In at least 20 of the collegial cases that went to hearings, respondents had consulted with a lawyer for assistance in prepar-

ing their defense, and in at least 6 cases the complainant had obtained legal counsel as well. It is unclear how many of the cases filed with NASW as Ethics complaints were also filed as allegations of violations under "Personnel Standards" or "Professional Action." Similarly, it cannot be determined how many complaints were taken to other grievance procedures, such as those available through union or civil service settings.

DISCUSSION

The literature on social work ethics focuses heavily on those aspects of the NASW Code which spell out workers' responsibilities to clients. However, the Code as it stands today is a broad and inclusive document, detailing appropriate conduct for social workers in their roles as colleagues, supervisors, and employers as well as in their direct practice functions. The breadth of responsibilities which may be adjudicated under the Code distinguishes it from state regulatory boards, which are concerned primarily with protection of the public, and from other professions' Codes which scarcely focus on responsibilities beyond those to individual clients (Sabin, 1994).

Over one-third of all ethics complaints filed with NASW between 1986 and 1997 were made by co-workers, often involving situations in which the complaining colleague was the aggrieved party. These 307 complaints resulted in 31 cases where the respondent was found to have violated the Code's tenets on supervisory or administrative responsibilities. The finding of so few cases nationally over an 11-year period may be indicative of outstanding practice and adherence to professional standards, yet limitations in the research and other considerations must be examined before extrapolating these results.

The limited number of indirect practice violations might be a result of such practices coming under less scrutiny or having less familiar or well established standards of conduct to which social workers may be held accountable (Munson, 1993). This incidence of misconduct may be deceptive in other ways. NASW can only adjudicate complaints made against the Association's members. To the extent that some managers choose not to affiliate with NASW or (having non-social work degrees) are ineligible for membership, grievances against them would not emerge in the data used for this study. Similarly, given the power possessed by employers and supervisors, potential complainants with legitimate issues may be reluctant to raise them until, having been fired or harmed in some other way, they feel they have little to lose.

The research may also provide a conservative view of indirect practice violations in that some cases (those filed by clients or other parties) were not captured in this review of the data. Others, in which social workers accused

their co-workers of violations not related to administrative or supervisory functions were likewise omitted from the review of violations. Because the nature of *allegations* was not recorded, only the *findings*, it is impossible to determine whether certain types of complaints are screened out or are unsubstantiated at a differential rate.

Another caveat in reviewing the findings stems from the adjudication process itself. Over the time period studied, three of NASW's 55 chapters received no ethics complaints of any type, and another five reported only one complaint. There also appeared to be a good deal of variability in the degree to which chapters found violations in cases. Perhaps differences among chapters (or among adjudication volunteers within chapters) affect the degree to which collegial complaints are received, accepted for review, or are found to have merit.

As noted at the outset, little research has been done to examine this area of ethical difficulty, and previous research studies based on NASW adjudication data have used a variety of methods, making comparisons tenuous. Based on the findings of McCann & Cutler (1979) and Berliner (1989), it appears that the rate of cases filed is increasing, but the proportion filed by colleagues, employees, or supervisees is decreasing. Similarly, it appears that the rate of findings of indirect practice misconduct is decreasing. Berliner (1989) found that 55% of the sustained complaints involved social workers' responsibilities to colleagues, employing organizations, and society. In the current study, only 10% of the collegial complaints resulted in findings of violation. The findings in the current study on the extensive time required to adjudicate complaints are also echoed through the previous research.

The current findings go beyond earlier research in offering detail about the nature and subjects of collegial complaints. MSW-level workers, females, and those in agency settings, are most often the subject of complaints, and they are represented among those with violations at approximately the same rate. While only 10% of the cases filed by colleagues resulted in findings of indirect practice violations, in many of those cases several actions led to violations of the Code. In regard to the latter, while hearing panels are prohibited from finding violations in areas which were not originally established as the scope of the case, those who file complaints may seek to use every applicable tenet of the Code as a basis for their complaint, in effect "throwing the book" at the respondent because of a singular action. Thus, while "poor supervisory practice" was the most common infraction, it likely came to light only as a result of a social worker's being fired or receiving a poor evaluation. Although the latter incidents probably precipitated the complaint, they also opened the door for the complainant to register a variety of concerns about their treatment as an employee.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TRAINING AND RESEARCH

Of the 31 cases in which there were findings, it is interesting to note that the two areas receiving the bulk of attention in the literature on the ethics of indirect practice—the blurred boundaries inherent in dual and sexual relationships—were scarcely evident in the findings. Similarly, areas which receive little attention, at least in the social work literature, reflected the greater number of complaints. These findings of violation, although limited in number, suggest that texts and courses on ethics, supervision, and administration could devote greater attention to personnel management responsibilities and the related ethical imperatives. Reamer (1998) has taken steps to fill this void by offering interpretation and relevant examples for each tenet of the current NASW Code, assuring that administrative and supervisory responsibilities receive attention commensurate with their placement in the Code.

Other sources are available to guide indirect practitioners in carrying out their functions in an ethically appropriate manner. Authors such as Cohen (1987), Shulman (1993), and Weinbach (1998) have elaborated on the supervisory and administrative processes for assuring fair and accurate performance appraisals. They emphasize the use of honest and specific feedback, tracking issues regularly through supervisory sessions, and consistent use of progressive discipline steps. When employees must be terminated, specific, consistent steps should be in place and reviewed by the parties involved prior to discussion of the termination with the employee. Whether the dismissal is due to employee misconduct or agency conditions such as downsizing, administrators must be sure that the basis for reaching that conclusion was fair, accurate, and just (Brody, 1993; Weinbach, 1998). If the circumstances of the dismissal require that the employee leave immediately, the organization must be prepared to assume that employee's functions and ensure that his or her clients are not disadvantaged by the personnel action.

NASW Practice Standards also provide guidance for carrying out administrative functions. Those particularly relevant to this study include *Standards for Social Work Personnel Practices* (1990) and *Guidelines for Clinical Social Work Supervision* (1994). Among other things, such sources encourage delineation of responsibilities, clearly stated evaluation criteria and appraisal processes, avenues for grievances and appeals, current and accurate supervisory record keeping, and clearly stated compensation plans.

Beyond using available standards and current literature, social workers have a variety of other resources at their disposal for assuring ethical practice. These include peer consultation, the use of supervision, risk assessment, and evaluation of the pros and cons of various actions. Yet, because personnel and indirect practice issues may not be cast as ethical dilemmas, supervisors and administrators may be less inclined to seek out and use these resources. Thus, a first step involves raising awareness about indirect practice standards and

the ethical dimensions of administrative and supervisory responsibilities. Other needed actions include further research into the nature of collegial complaints and the additional avenues of redress being pursued in personnel matters.

Research studies which directly examine the practices of supervisors and administrators would provide more useful information about the nature and frequency of ethical dilemmas. Similarly, research which examines the decision to file (or not file) a case, and the choice to do so through NASW or some other adjudicatory body, might shed light on the nature and intent of cases presented to NASW.

Linked with this is the question of whether the Code of Ethics is the proper basis for remedying personnel disputes. To what extent should the profession hold individual social workers accountable for carrying out organizational policies or implementing a potentially flawed human resource system? What other avenues of redress can/do aggrieved employees use for complaints about personnel matters? What types of disputes are successfully remedied on the organizational level? Are some situations best addressed through NASW adjudication procedures, or might mediation or other forms of dispute resolution yield the same outcomes at less cost for all involved? Clearly, further exploration of these issues would provide fruitful guidance for the profession and for individual practitioners.

Future research based on NASW's adjudication processes would benefit from a standardized and more comprehensive database and from more consistency in the collection of data by chapters. Similarly, while procedures are in place to guide the adjudication of complaints, the application of these can be uneven across chapters due to fluctuations in the availability of trained volunteers, different levels of interest in ethics adjudication, and in levels of case activity. More rigorous training and oversight for staff and volunteers, and more consistent opportunities to exercise these skills, would likely lead to greater consistency in adjudication processes and in the research that results from it.

CONCLUSION

Employees and colleagues may use the Code of Ethics and professional association processes to adjudicate complaints about the conduct of fellow social workers. While these complaints can encompass a range of issues, often they involve issues where the social worker feels personally harmed by his or her colleague's behavior. This study found that violations in this area are relatively infrequent, yet the incidence of collegial allegations calls attention to the impact complaints can have and suggests the strategies for improving indirect practice which can be employed. The literature on risk manage-

ment, ethics, supervision, and administration all provide useful adjuncts to the Code in guiding personnel and collegial actions, and further discussion and research should examine whether such complaints are best addressed through professional adjudication processes.

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