

Identifying Ethical Aspects in the Assessment of Social Services- A Framework

Lars Sandman
Swedish National Centre for
Priorities in Health, Linköping
University, University of Borås
Västra Götaland region
SBU, Council Brage

Gunilla Fahlström, Ragnar Levi, Sofia
Tranaeus, Pernilla Östlund
SBU
Christian Munthe
Gothenburg University

Swedish Agency for Health Technology Assessment and the Assessment of Social Services (SBU)

Assesses healthcare and social service interventions from a broad perspective. This include medical, economic, ethical and social aspects.

- Which treatment or intervention is best?
- What type of treatment, care or support is the safest and most effective?
- Which methods/interventions are the most cost-effective?
- Are there any gaps in scientific evidence?

Background

- **2014 SBU published a framework for identifying ethical aspects in HTA-projects**
- Successfully implemented at the agency, and used by other public actors in Sweden.
- Since **2015** SBU is also tasked with assessing **interventions in the** social services

- **The HTA ethics framework does not fit the social services sector**, due to more complex and detailed regulation, and less clear ethical norms, re. the latter sector
- Framework needs to be grounded in ethical values and norms in Swedish social services regulation and practice
- Development of this new ethics framework now in the final stages

Project process

- Project group: SBU officers together with two ethicists
 - SBU: Ragnar Levi, Laura Lintamo, Gunilla Fahlström, Sofia Tranaeus, Pernilla Östlund,
 - Ethicists: Lars Sandman, Christian Munthe
- Drafts sent for review in two consecutive rounds (with revision in between):
 - Experts on ethics within the social services
 - Broad review panel:
 - » Authorities/ Universities/ Professional organizations/ Interest organizations for different user groups

Outline of the framework

- Framework to be used to formulate and address both open and more specific ethical questions regarding interventions, or an area of interventions, when assessing these
- To be used primarily by non-ethicist – but used to identify the need for an ethicist
- Framework covers both general values and norms of social services, and specific values and norms for specially addressed user groups (children, elderly, addiction)
- Special framework for interventions for users with disabilities to be developed later (due to more complex legislation)
- Four sections:
 - The intervention in relation to **the goals of the social services**
 - The intervention in relation to the **ethical norms of the social services**
 - **Structural factors** that may impact ethically relevant consequences of the intervention
 - **Long term ethical consequences** due to use of the intervention

Goals of the social services

- Question 1: How does the intervention relate to the goals of the social services for different user groups?
 - General goals:
 - » economic and social security
 - » equal living conditions
 - » active participation in society
 - » liberation and development of individual and group resources
 - Subsections for children / adolescents; persons with addiction problems, elderly persons
 - More complex than for the health framework – where there is a single goal (health)

Goals of the social services

- Question 3: Are there ethical problems in the scientific studies or in conducting future research to improve the evidential support?
- Question 2: Which need/right does the intervention correspond to and what degree of claim does this give rise to?
 - In distinction to the health framework which is needs-based – the social services is both needs- and rights-based
- Question 4: How does the intervention affect significant others and other persons/ groups?
 - More complex than the health framework with subsections for children/adolescents; persons with addiction problems; elderly persons
- Summary: Which are the pros and cons of the intervention (based on questions 1-4)

Ethical values

- Question 5: Does the intervention support equal treatment? Is there a risk for discrimination or stigma associated with the intervention?
 - In distinction to the health framework – there are no specific values for distributive justice for the social services
- Question 6: Do users have the opportunity and ability to affect decisions about the intervention?
 - A bit more complex than the health framework with two different legislations for compulsory care: children/adolescents and persons with addiction problems
- Question 7: Is the intervention acceptable given respect for privacy?

Ethical values

- Question 8: Is the intervention acceptable given personal responsibility for people's own social situation?
 - Explicit support for personal responsibility and that social services should support and strengthen this – in stark contrast to the health framework where there is little explicit room for considering personal responsibility
- Summary: Is the intervention acceptable given the ethical values in questions 5-8?

Structural factors

- Question 9: Are there resources and/or organizational limitation that can affect equal access to the intervention (or to other interventions affected by the assessed intervention)?
 - More complex than the health framework with 290 self-governing municipalities with different socio-economic, geographical and political conditions
 - Social services more directly politically governed
- Question 10: Can professional values affect equal access to the intervention?
- Question 11: Can stakeholder interests affect equal access to the intervention?
 - More private entrepreneurial interests than within the health sector
- Summary: Can equal access to the intervention (or other interventions) be affected given the answers to questions 9-11?

Long term ethical effects and overall summary

- Question 12: Are there any long term ethical effects in using the intervention?

Summary

- How can the ethical assessment be summarized?
 - Pros and cons
 - Changing the intervention to handle the cons?

General take home message

- The contextually adapted framework for the health sector seems to have provided an important support and improved the quality of the ethics sections of HTA-reports at SBU
- It is hypothesized that this contextual adaptation to the ethical values and norms of the social services in Sweden will be equally supportive for SBU-reports
- Generally, the social services are, in many jurisdictions, likely to have somewhat different ethical values and norms and/or a different balancing of them that needs to be adapted to in distinction to the health sector
- The guideline is not an ethical analysis!



PRIORITIES 2018

International Society on Priorities in Health

**13-15 September 2018 Linköping,
Sweden**

Priorities in Health: Ideas in Practice

www.priorities2018.se

www.liu.se