

THE CODE OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS OF THE SLOVENE PSYCHOLOGISTS

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INTRODUCTORY PROVISIONS

In our attempt to define the extend and substance of our work responsibility in detail, and to help shape the image of a psychologist as a responsible expert, we, the Slovene psychologists, bind ourselves to obey the rules of the Code of Psychological Ethics at our work.

The ethics of psychological work is based on the ethical and moral principles of a democratic, legal and social society. The Code of Psychological Ethics takes into consideration all the rights that are guaranteed by the constitution and laws of the Republic of Slovenia, as well as all the international documents from the domain of human right that have been ratified and accepted by the Republic of Slovenia. It is done in accordance with the codes of professional

ethics of the professional psychological associations in EFPPA (European Federation of Professional Psychological Associations).

The principles of psychological ethics represent guidance for psychologists contributing with their theoretical and practical work to the self-realization of a person, so that that person would be able to independently control all spheres of life as much as possible.

1. The Code of Psychological Ethics is a record of most important principles which psychologists have to obey at their work.

2. The Code of Psychological Ethics is defined by four principles. The sequence of importance is as follows: respect for human rights and dignity, the principle of competence, the principle of a psychologist's responsibility, and the principle of the integrity of the profession.

3. At their scientific and professional work, psychologists establish professional relationships with the individuals and groups in the domains of psychological help, research and instruction. In the psychological procedure they treat individuals or groups which are looking for and/or need help due to personal, family, educational, organizational, economic problems and/or aims (in the text of the Code: patients). They also treat people involved in research, students, employees, employers, colleagues, orderers, and the public.

1. RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND DIGNITY

A psychologist respects people and their basic human rights, dignity and equality.

The principle of respect for rights and dignity is an essential principle of the psychological ethics. Psychologists always obey it as their leading principle, except in the circumstances when the known or unknown individual is in evident and immediate danger.

This principle defines respect for human dignity, general human rights, equal rights, privacy and confidentiality, use and protection of psychodiagnostic instruments, informed consent with free decision of the patient, and psychological research on animals.

Respect for human dignity

4. Psychologists respect all people which they establish professional relations with. At their expert work they respect the dignity, personality, knowledge, cognizance, experience, and the profession of all persons which he comes into contact with.

Due to the nature of work, the focus of psychologist's responsibility is respect for the persons directly involved into the expert procedure, since they are more exposed as those who are indirectly involved (third party, employer, team, the public). Patients directly involved in the psychological procedure are more vulnerable (for example clients, students, tested persons). Psychologist's responsibility for these people is usually greater than for those who are indirectly involved in the procedure (for example, employers, third party, the public).

5. Psychologists respect human rights at their work. Especially important for them are the rights for privacy, self-determination and autonomy. They respect and protect them at their expert work.

Psychologists may only perform the procedures and activities for which they can obtain an informed consent and trust of the patient, an important part of those rights.

6. A psychologist doesn't engage in any kind of harassment of patients (sexual harassment, extortion, offense).

General human rights

7. Psychologists refuse every cooperation in procedures which violate the legal or moral rights of other people.

8. Psychologists refuse to advise, use or convey information to a person if they make a soundly-based assumption that that person would use that knowledge, skills or information in a way which can mean a violation of human rights.

9. Psychologists promise that they will not, either intentionally or unintentionally, misuse their psychological knowledge and skills at their expert work and therefore violate human rights.

10. Psychologists respect human rights of the people who receive their psychological help, and that of participants of research and pedagogical processes.

Equal rights – equality

11. Psychologists treat all people equally, regardless of the race, nationality, gender, religion, and political or sexual orientation. They neither allow, justify, facilitate, nor cooperate using any kind of discrimination.

12. They refuse and prevent the procedures which unfairly discriminate people.

Privacy and confidentiality

13. In their professional work with an individual, a group or an institution, psychologists establish a confidential relationship. They strictly respect the principle of professional security in that relationship, and are personally responsible for obtaining from and conveying to the patient only such information which is connected to the aim of the treatment.

14. Psychologists know and respect the rights, principles and measures for preventing illegal and unjustified interference with the integrity of persons' personality and of their private or family life, due to collecting, processing, storing, conveying and using personal information.

15. Psychologists keep a permanent, well-organized systematic, and with regard to the contents and time, complete professional record (a dossier) of a treatment. By doing so, they ensure the quality and continuity of a professional relationship.

Psychologists keep their additional personal records of a treatment separately. They are not a part of the described expert documentation and may not be shown to anybody.

Psychologists are personally responsible for possible mistakes and misuses of psychological information and psychodiagnostic instruments if they are to be guilty of those mistakes or misuses.

16. Before psychologists use the collected information, they are obliged to inform patients about the purpose of using the information. On the demand of patients, psychologists enable them an insight into their dossier. Psychologists refuse to give patients an insight in their dossier only in the case in which it would cause serious harm. Patients can choose another expert outside the relationship to give them an insight into their dossier.

Information from a dossier is the property of the patient.

17. On the demand of a patient, psychologists change or eliminate inaccurate or incomplete information from a dossier, or one that is not in accordance with the purpose of treatment. They can also make an incomplete information complete.

18. If patients are unable to get an independent estimation, their guardian has the right to get an insight into the patients' dossier and to make possible changes in it.

19. A psychologist is personally responsible for a safe and confidential storing and use of all the information about the patient regardless of the form of that information.

20. When reporting, informing, explaining or publishing anything that refers to their patients, psychologists do what is necessary to reasonably restrict the information and preserve their anonymity.

If, when publishing expert writings, psychologists intend to use examples from their practice, they must ensure total anonymity of patients. For publication of information for which there is a possibility that it might in any way reveal the patient, they must get the patient's written informed consent beforehand. When publishing their work for wide readership outside the psychological profession, they must ensure the patient's consent even if they have ensured the anonymity. Regardless of the consent obtained, psychologists may not publish information which could harm the patient in any way.

21. In the case of legal demand or justified need for disclosure of certain information, psychologists reasonably limit the access to or report on the information. They only disclose the contents that are directly connected to the existing need or demand.

Only in exceptional cases may psychologists withdraw from the obligation of complete protection of information (when the lives of patients or other people are endangered, or in the case of child abuse). Psychologists are obliged to inform patients about these exceptions at the beginning of a professional relationship.

Informed consent and freedom of consent

22. In their professional relationship, psychologists ensure patients the greatest possible level of self-determination, including the decision of starting and finishing a professional relationship. The decision of patients is based on informed consent.

23. Before a psychological treatment psychologists obtain informed consent. During the treatment, they maintain that consent. They inform the patient about the necessary expert activities and ethical dilemmas, as well as with the possible consequences, and make sure that the patient understood the explanation.

This consent also includes the patient's familiarity with the duties of a psychologist with regard to the way of protecting personal information and reporting. A patient can withdraw from the consent or demand its renewal any time during the procedure.

24. When the aim and the outcome of a professional relationship refer to more patients, a psychologist must obtain the consent from all the patients who are either directly or indirectly involved.

A psychologist suitably defines the content of the informed consent for each patient in advance.

25. Psychologists are personally responsible for the wellbeing of the patients from whom they cannot obtain an informed consent, or when the informed consent is obtained with limitations due to a patient's chronological or mental age and mental health, or due to limitations set by the legal process.

26. If psychologists want to include in their research the participants from whom they cannot get an informed consent, they are personally responsible for them. They conduct research with such participants only when it serves an important development of mankind, or when it is advantageous for the participants themselves. If possible, the inclusion of such participants should be avoided. If conducting research, psychologists are responsible for ensuring that all colleagues cooperating in it work in accordance with the code of ethics. They protect the participants from physical and mental discomfort, harm or danger which can be caused during the research or any time later on. If it is impossible to avoid discomfort, harm or danger in research, psychologists decline their participation in it.

2. THE COMPETENCE OF A PSYCHOLOGIST

Psychologists try to reach and maintain the highest level of competence at their work. While doing so, they are aware of the boundaries of their competence and experience.

They perform only such psychological activity and use only such psychological methods and techniques for which they have been educated by studying and for which they are qualified and have the necessary experience.

This principle defines the awareness of ethics, boundaries of a psychologist's competence, boundaries of psychological procedures, the need for permanent professional development, and the psychologist's ability for professional work.

Awareness of ethics

27. Psychologists are familiar with the Code of Professional Ethics. They relate ethical aims to their professional work and respect them.

Boundaries of competence

28. Psychologists do their expert work within the boundaries of their education, qualifications and experience, and within the provisions of the Code of Psychological Ethics. The expert demand of individual specific fields of psychological work obliges psychologists to have a detailed mastery of a certain field, and to take over only those tasks for which they are qualified.

Boundaries of procedures

29. Psychologists choose their work methods independently. Therefore they are obliged to critically evaluate especially those methods which have been obtained in different environments, or which have not been sufficiently verified.

Psychologists use methods, techniques and procedures which have been assessed and accepted by the profession.

30. While treating a patient, a psychologist performs those psychological procedures which are necessary for the development of treatment, for professional findings and for the aim of psychological help.

Permanent professional development

31. Psychologists have an obligation for permanent education and training for their professional work.

Ability for professional work

32. Psychologists take on and perform expert work only if their physical and mental health allow and enable them for professional ability and judgment.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES OF A PSYCHOLOGIST

Psychologists are aware of their professional responsibilities to their patients, institutions, communities and the society in which they live and work.

They avoid causing harm. They are fully responsible for their actions. At the same time they also prevent, to the greatest possible degree, misuse of their expert work.

That principle defines the general responsibilities, ensuring a high standard of expert and scientific work, avoiding harm, extended care for the integrity of treatment, a widened responsibility for mentorship and supervision, and resolving ethical dilemmas.

General responsibilities

33. Psychologists are responsible for professionalism, quality and consequences of their professional work.

Ensuring a high standard of expert and scientific work

34. Psychologists develop and maintain a high scientific and expert standard of their professional work, and act in accordance with the principles of the code of professional ethics.

Psychologists are responsible for the integrity of expert treatment.

The use and protection of psychodiagnostic instruments

35. The psychological dossier is a part of the protected psychological archives.

The protected psychological archives also contain psychodiagnostic instruments and other psychological standardized instruments, the spread of which would considerably harm the profession, individuals or society. A psychologist is obliged to use and store these instruments in such a way that they are only accessible to certified psychologists.

A psychologist is obliged to assure that psychodiagnostic instruments are dealt with in the same way as confidential materials. A psychologist has to carefully deposit the psychodiagnostic and other instruments that are used for work into the psychological archives.

36. A psychologist has a full and exclusive responsibility for every harm caused, or for any violation of responsibilities which happen, due to incorrect and negligent use of psychodiagnostic instruments, or information obtained by using these instruments.

37. At their expert work, psychologists use quality psychodiagnostic instruments, the characteristics of which correspond to standards of production, use and assessment of psychological tests, as well as other psychological measuring instruments. The instruments also have to correspond to standards for translation and adjustment of psychological tests from one cultural environment into another.

38. A psychologist always tries to choose those psychodiagnostic instruments which most appropriately reach the goal which they are intended for, and which are suitable for the target group or the individual on which a psychologist wants to use these instruments. A psychologist always first precisely defines the purpose of using certain psychodiagnostic instruments.

39. Psychologists maintain high personal standards regarding their professional competence, and use only those psychodiagnostic instruments, for use of which they are qualified. When doing so, they pay regard to the accepted categorization of psychodiagnostic instruments according to the difficulty of their use, which for every experiment defines the necessary basic expertise and additional qualification of a psychologist. Even in case when they are only allowed to use a definite appropriately categorized psychodiagnostic instrument, psychologists are obliged to estimate by themselves whether their theoretical and practical knowledge, understanding, experience and qualification allow them to competently use the specified psychodiagnostic instruments.

Psychologists are aware that by incorrect use of psychodiagnostic instruments (at administering, valuation and interpretation of results) they can cause irreparable damage to an individual, the profession or society.

40. A psychologist respects copyright, legislation and agreements on the use of psychodiagnostic instruments.

Avoiding harm

41. Psychologists do not cause harm to patients by their expert knowledge.

Psychologists do their best to minimize the consequences of unpredicted or predicted harm.

Extended care

42. Psychologists are responsible for the execution of a treatment even when they themselves cannot conclude it. They ensure an expert execution of a treatment in cooperation with their colleagues or institution.

43. Psychologists also remain responsible for helping a patient after the conclusion of the treatment, if a patient turns to him again with a problem, connected to the primary treatment.

Widened responsibility

44. Psychologists who run a project, or who study or perform either mentorship or supervision are responsible for correct scientific and expert work of all the cooperating persons, including their obedience of the ethical principles.

Resolving ethical dilemmas

45. Psychologists pay attention to ethical dilemmas. They recognize and try to resolve them in accordance with the provisions of the code of ethics. When resolving dilemmas, psychologists consult their colleagues on their field or/and ask for help of a Commission for Professional Ethics of the Slovene Psychologists.

4. THE INTEGRITY OF THE PROFESSION

Psychologists seek to promote integrity of the psychological science, theory development and practical experience.

In their expert activities, psychologists are honest, fair and respectful.

Psychologists describe their professional role to their patients at the beginning of the expert procedure. They act as much as possible according to that role.

This principle defines the responsibility of recognizing boundaries, psychologist's honesty and credibility, sincerity and openness, conflict of interests, exploitation, and unethical work of psychologist's colleagues.

Recognizing boundaries

46. Psychologists must be aware of their personal and professional boundaries at their work. In demanding situations, psychologists seek advice and help of their colleagues and institutions.

47. Psychologists do not include their ideological, political and religious beliefs in their professional work.

Credibility

48. Psychologists present their professional qualification, experience and competence in an objective and honest way.

49. Psychologists set an appropriate price for their professional service and consistently hold on to that price agreement.

50. Psychologists state objective conclusions, opinions and findings, and are aware of the boundaries of their profession.

Sincerity and openness

51. Psychologists make a creative contribution to the development and applicability of the profession. They present the findings and cognizance to the professional and general public.

52. Psychologists have an active relationship to the public, and strive to help the public be objectively informed about the contributions of psychological cognizance to the development of an individual and society. While doing so, they avoid sensationalism.

53. Psychologists are obliged to openly inform a patient about possible alternative procedures. They correct patient's wrong perceptions of the psychological treatment and re-establish trust.

Conflict of interests and exploitation

54. Psychologists are aware of the problems caused by a double relationship. They are obliged to prevent any relationship which reduces the necessary professional distance and leads to conflict of interests, or to the exploitation of a patient.

55. Psychologists do not exploit their professional relationship for personal, political, religious or other ideological interests and purposes.

56. Psychologists do not exploit inequality of power, emerging from the roles of a professional relationship either during or after the formal end of treatment.

Violations of the Code of Professional Ethics

57. If recognizing a violation of the Code of Professional Ethics of Psychologists, psychologists are obliged to act accordingly. They must warn the violator and, if necessary, inform the Slovene Psychological Association and the Commission for Psychological Ethics.

SANCTIONS

They are defined by the Book of Regulations of the Court of Honour of the Slovene Psychologists