

Challenges from an aging population. Legality, Professionalism, and Practical Ethics in Care for Older People in Latvia, Lithuania and Norway

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Aims and objectivesThis is a comparative study of how values and norms may influence the delivery of care for older people in the public service sector of three countries in the Baltic Sea Region. The research focuses on the criteria for making decisions that prevail when professional social workers at the street level in bureaucracy are expected to make good and thorough assessments regarding the care for older people.**Methodology and design**The study has a multidimensional design that is supposed to include the dynamic relations between structural, discursive and practical level. Both qualitative and quantitative data is collected. The interviews are based on two vignettes that describe authentic cases that could have been "real" cases relevant to the care for older people in all three countries.**Results:**The results show that there are several policy differences between our countries with respect to the assessments procedures and care for older people. However, with regard to professionalism and practical ethics, this study shows that there are several interrelated and overarching norms at the heart of professional/practical ethics in the care for older people in the three countries.**Implications**Using vignettes as a research method combined with other qualitative methods, makes it possible to go "under the surface" discussing different social work practices and ethical dilemmas that social workers are confronted with in their everyday work. A question raised, but not yet answered, is how this knowledge could be used towards the political and administrative authorities at local and national levels, and how it could promote human rights perspectives for the aging population across the national borders.