Chapter 16
Potential Threats of Social Engineering Practices to Social Work:
Concepts, Challenges, and Solutions

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ABSTRACT

Social work aims to promote social change, development, cohesion, and the empowerment of people and communities. Its professionals work with institutions and families and help to provide and advance various aspects of human equity such as civil rights, unemployment insurance, worker's compensation, disability pay, medicaid and medicare, and child abuse and neglect prevention. In recent years, social engineering practices started to threaten not only just a single or group of individuals but also the entire society. Considering the potential threats of social engineering practices on the practices of social work, strategies and good practices should be developed to achieve the sustainable goals of social work. Since the social engineering practices target our fundamental biases, our ignorance, and our lack of cognition, the key to counteracting them is awareness. This chapter covers the potential threats of social engineering practices, challenges related to counteracting them, methodologies used to uncover them, and future research directions in this domain.

INTRODUCTION

Although social work is also an academic discipline, it is more a practice-based profession that promotes the empowerment and liberation of people, social change and development, and social cohesion (IFSW, 2014). It focuses on principles of human rights, respect for diversities, social justice, and collective responsibility (Moriarty, Baginsky, & Manthorpe, 2015). Helping people obtain tangible services, helping communities or groups, counselling and psychotherapy with individuals and groups, improving social and health services, and taking part in legislative processes lie at the core of social work (Dominelli, 2009; Hare, 2004; Moriarty, Baginsky, & Manthorpe, 2015; Payne, 2005). Social work professionals work closely with families and institutions to provide and advance civil rights, unemployment insurance, worker's compensation, disability pay, medicaid and medicare, child abuse and neglect prevention, and reduced mental health stigma (Dominelli, 2009; Hare, 2004; Moriarty, Baginsky, & Manthorpe, 2015; Payne, 2005). Social work professionals aim to help in meeting basic and complex needs of people and communities and enhancing their overall well-being. They particularly focus on people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty (Twikirize *et al.*, 2013). They try to address barriers and social injustices to their clients, to eliminate or mitigate poverty, discrimination and unemployment, and to provide housing (Lombard & Twikirize, 2014). They also support their clients and communities who live with disabilities, have substance abuse problems, or experience domestic conflicts; therefore, sometimes their participation in legislative processes might be also required (Hare, 2004; Payne, 2005). A number of problems caused by COVID-19 pandemic has shown the critical role of social work and its foreseeable future as a profession (Golightley & Holloway, 2020).

As well as maintaining a collection of handwritten notes, social work professionals rely on technology; however, this brings challenges as well as its advantages (Gillingham, 2015; Özsungur, 2020). Although electronic systems help them manage their projects, their time and their clients, have access to electronic medical records and electronic health records, track and retain data, and share data across social service agencies, their use introduces challenges in terms of accessibility, technology reliability and information security (Harman, Flite, & Bond, 2012; Ozair, Jamshed, Sharma, & Aggarwal, 2015). For instance, the security of data storage leaves sensitive information of their clients vulnerable to hackers (Erickson, 2008; Hubbard & Seiersen, 2016). Because, not all servers are secure and reliable and a security breach could result in releasing sensitive information to an unauthorised person or untrusted environment (Cappelli, Moore, & Trzeciak, 2012). Social service agencies might not be aware that many resources on their network may attract attackers. Therefore, their networks must be designed to involve firewall, IDS/IPS, virtual private network, e-mail server with spam filtering capabilities and anti-virus/anti-malware solutions. In addition, social service agencies need to consider some basic principles when building out proper cyber security strategies (Parrott & Madoc-Jones, 2008). First, all types of sensitive data need to be identified. Because, protecting all data is their responsibility. Second, they need to determine how to store all the data, which can be held in documents, spreadsheets and databases (Perron, Taylor, Glass, & Margerum-Leys, 2010). Third, training their employees about cyber security practices and creating awareness plays a key role since a working environment consists of computers and mobile devices in addition to servers and cyber security is not just an information technology issue (Hubbard & Seiersen, 2016). If their employees do not know how to protect and use sensitive data and interact securely, sensitive information could be at risk. Creating awareness about cyber security could lead to the early detection and reporting of suspicious cyber behaviours.

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