

SOCIAL WORK ETHICS ACROSS CULTURES: NAVIGATING THE TENSION BETWEEN UNIVERSALISM AND CONTEXTUALISM

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ABSTRACT: The study is an investigation of the continuing ethical tension between the Western-centric professional social work codes and cultural value systems that are often experienced within the globalized practice. While international standards promote universal human rights, their operationalization often reflects a Western bias toward individualism and secularism. The paper has criticized the uniform ethical approach to making ethical decisions through an examination of the "Universalism-Relativism" continuum and the display of three different case studies. The qualitative case study proposes a paradigm shift from traditional cultural competence toward ethical pluralism. Research indicates that a reflexive model of professional integrity is most effectively upheld through the prism of Cultural Humility that enables, without undermining, fundamental human rights. Findings also highlight the importance of equity-based ethics and the Triangulated Ethical Model in culturally complex contexts. The paper concludes with policy suggestions for social work boards to incorporate contextual ethical clauses into the national standards.

Keywords: Social Work, Ethical Pluralism, Cultural Humility, Universalism, Decolonization, Practitioner Reflexivity.

INTRODUCTION

The cultural encounter is becoming an increasingly important feature of contemporary social work ethics. Increasing global migration and connectivity present practitioners with complex ethical challenges that often exceed the scope of their foundational training. The core of these controversies is a basic conflict between the profession's need to rely on universal ethical standards and the reality of culturally specific morality (Ahmed, 2023; Berishvili, 2025).

In the past, social work has been professionalized in the context of Western, democratic and industrialized societies. As a result, the main principles of the profession, namely the codes of the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) put more emphasis on the Autonomy of the Individual. Such principles as informed consent, self-determination and individual confidentiality are considered sacrosanct. Nevertheless,

when these values are implemented in collectivist or indigenous societies, some form of ethical imperialism may arise (Alkis, 2024; Kanwal, 2023). The Self in such respect is not a unified agent, but is caught in a net of kinship and community obligations.

Consequently, the work argues that rigid adherence to Western professional orthodoxy may inadvertently harm clients by causing social ostracization (Dias, 2024). As an example, the demand to protect individual privacy within a community where people consider welfare as a community issue can be seen as an aggressive social seclusion. The key problem facing the social worker of the 21st century is thus not just to be aware of other cultures, but to have the ethical agility to work with pluralistic moral systems (Bharadwaj & Daniel, 2023; Zhu et al., 2023).

With the idea of going beyond the classic dichotomy of right vs wrong, the study examines how practitioners could preserve professional accountability and remain respectful to the moral sovereignty of the individuals that they represent (Baker, 2023). It is aimed at replacing a more abstract, procedural-driven model of social work ethics with a more inclusive, decolonized model that focuses on relational well-being (Mintrom & O'Neill, 2023; Wilson, 2024). Accordingly, the paper proposes a reflexive pluralistic ethical framework to guide cross-cultural social work practice. The framework seeks to reconcile professional accountability with respect for culturally embedded moral systems.

Conceptual Framework: The Universalism-Relativism Continuum

In order to study cross-cultural ethics on the level that a Scopus-indexed literature can be analyzed, the philosophical tension between Ethical Universalism and Cultural Relativism needs to be deconstructed first (Berishvili, 2025; Ahmed, 2023).

Ethical Universalism holds that certain moral values, such as the right to bodily autonomy and freedom of speech, are universal to all human beings, regardless of cultural or geographical background (Kanwal, 2023). It is the foundational human rights-based practice in social work. On the other hand, Cultural Relativism holds that morality is a factor of the society; thus, the only way to describe an activity as "good" or "bad" is within the particular cultural situation in which that activity exists (Alkis, 2024).

The risk to the social worker is the extremes of either side. Too much universalism has the danger of Ethical Imperialism, imposing Western values on the marginalized populations (Dias, 2024). Too much relativism will lead to Ethical Nihilism, in which negative things are justified by the culture.

Here, the study examines Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Postcolonial Theory, which are used to develop a compromise: Ethical Pluralism. This framework recognises the fact that the rights of human beings are not negotiable, but how we can honour them should be translated to a certain culture (Miuka & Tufu, 2025; Wilson, 2024). As an example, the right to self-determination can be exercised through a collective family vote in a Pacific Islander context rather than an individual vote (Cole & Low, 2023).

Research Problem Statement

Although the concept of Cultural Competence has spread into social work education through the use of CCE modules, there remains a significant "execution gap" among practitioners when faced with high-stakes ethical issues. Professional codes today are often binary: they provide clear-cut guidelines for a Western context and offer limited guidance in grey areas where professional requirements are in direct opposition to cultural or religious survival tactics in a client (Dias, 2024; Kanwal, 2023).

The Main Research Question: What can social work practitioners do to overcome ethical dilemmas when the Western principle of individual autonomy and binary confidentiality runs counter to the collectivist principle of interdependence and the communal authority?

Literature Review: Beyond Cultural Competence

The recent critical academic writing deems Cultural Competence as having a propensity to reduce cultural groups to essentializing traits to be mastered (Zhu et al., 2023; White et al., 2023). The observation underscores the shortcomings of the universal ethical models, which, on most occasions, do not consider the contextual moral realities in social work practice.

In reaction, numerous scholars believe that a shift into Cultural Humility should be considered, and the practitioner should continuously engage in self-reflection and have consciousness of power imbalances instead of possessing a fixed understanding of the culture of the client (Tai, 2023; Reeves et al., 2024; Yan et al., 2026). The method supports the idea of ethical practice and promotes the critical analysis of the role of personal moral frames and assumptions in interacting with clients by social workers to achieve responsive and flexible ethical practice. Cultural Competence should be differentiated with Cultural Humility. Whereas Cultural Competence insists on the accumulation of knowledge about a culture, which may have a definite end, Cultural Humility concentrates on ongoing self-assessment, acknowledgement of power disparity, and the learning of the experience of the client.

In recent literature another complementary theme is the development of Indigenous Social Work, that questions the secular rationalist assumptions of traditional Western practice. The approach focuses on the incorporation of spiritual, ancestral, and community-based knowledge into the ethical decision-making process and is an approach that respects the rights of the individual and cultural practices (Miuka & Tufu, 2025; Dalimunthe et al., 2025). The combination of these trends indicates a wider trend in the field towards reflexivity and contextual sensitivity in ethical practices, which embrace flexibility, critical self-consciousness, and cultural responsiveness instead of strict compliance with universal norms.

Methodology

The study employs a Qualitative Multi-Case Study Analysis to examine the phenomenon of cross-cultural variance and professional ethics interaction. The case study approach has been chosen due

to the fact that it enables the in-depth, longitudinal investigation of one instance or event: a case, which is necessary to consider the peculiarities of the ethical deliberation.

These case data were synthesized based on misidentified clinical supervision records and practitioners peer reflection. The selected cases came through purposive sampling based on predefined criteria, including: (1) clear evidence of ethical conflict between professional standards, cultural norms, and human rights principles; (2) availability of detailed supervision records; and (3) richness of practitioner reflection.

These criteria ensured that each case provided sufficient depth and relevance for meaningful cross-case ethical analysis. Thematic Analysis of each case was conducted with the help of the Triangulated Ethical Model (Baker, 2023; Banks et al., 2023). The process involved frequent reading of the data for familiarization, followed by initial coding to identify instances of ethical tension. The codes were then grouped into broader themes reflecting recurring patterns, which were subsequently interpreted through the three dimensions of the Triangulated Ethical Model. The analytical process was applied consistently across all cases to ensure transparency and comparability in the interpretation of findings. The entails the application of a conflict between three main vectors:

1. Professional Code (Statutory and agency requirements).
2. The Cultural Mandate (The traditional or religious values of the Client).
3. The Universal Human Rights Framework (Global safety and dignity standards).

To ensure academic rigor, cases were selected from Indigenous Australia, the Middle East, and East Asia to demonstrate the global nature of ethical friction (Mintrom & O'Neill, 2023; Alkis, 2024). The geographical diversity strengthens the validity of the findings by demonstrating their relevance across multiple cultural contexts.

Case Studies and Ethical Analysis

The results of the analysis of the case will be presented further, shifting the theoretical gap to the practical clinical practice.

Case Study 1: The Collective vs. The Person (Indigenous Context).

Case: A social worker has been allocated a case in one of the remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory of Australia, where a seven-year-old child might be neglected. According to the common practice with the Western approach, the social worker tries to have a one-on-one talk with the mother and discuss parenting skills and personal confidentiality. Nevertheless, the mother will not talk unless her "Aunties" (elders within the community) are in place (Riley et al., 2025). The social worker is bound by the agency policy on client-worker confidentiality and so at first, he rejects the request by the fear of making the mother be compelled by the elders.

Ethical Analysis: The case is an example of the Autonomy Paradox. The worker is technically observing the NASW/IFSW requirement of privacy through compelling a private interview. In an

Indigenous situation, however, the individual is not a distinct group of the kinship group (Cole & Low, 2023). The worker turns out to deprive the mother of her main source of support, as well as cultural security, by excluding the elders (Miuka & Tufu, 2025). The case reflects the tension between professional codes, cultural mandates, and human rights respects as drawn in the Triangulated Ethical Model.

The case may suggest a possible limitation in Western assumptions that confidentiality necessarily ensures individual security. Secrecy may, in some Indigenous contexts, be associated with shame, whereas collective openness can function as a source of social support. In such context, the practitioner may draw on Relational Ethics to better align practice with community-based understandings of care. The outcome of the intervention appeared to improve once the role of the social worker shifted to that of a community facilitator rather than an authoritarian observer (Wilson, 2024)

Case Study 2: Hierarchical Authority and Gender (Middle Eastern Refugee Context)

Situation: A European resettlement agency social worker is dealing with a Syrian refugee family, which just arrived in a traditional rural region. The purpose of the objective is to enable a Life Skills assessment of the 19-year-old daughter in order to ascertain whether she can be awarded independent vocational training or not. As the social worker tries to involve the daughter in direct communication her father continues to interject by saying that his daughter does not need to work and that all the decisions concerning her education and future should be mediated by the father as the Rabb al-usra (head of the family) (Boukhari, 2025).

Ethical Analysis: The collision points in such situation appear to be significant in terms of the Western moral imperative of Gender Equality and Individual Empowerment versus the cultural imperative of Patriarchal Protectionism. From a Western ethical perspective, the actions of the father may be interpreted as controlling or even emotionally abusive, which may provoke a protective intervention to liberate the agency of the daughter (Dias, 2024).

Nevertheless, an academic examination on the high level indicates that such intervention may, in some cases, contribute to forms of cultural erasure. The role of a father in many Middle Eastern contexts cannot be understood only as a matter of authority, but also an immense amount of responsibility toward the moral and physical security of the family. Avoiding him is seen to be a disrespect of the family structure which may result in the family rejecting any form of service altogether and the daughter becoming even more isolated than ever.

The Ethical Resolution: Here, the context illustrates the practitioner may adopt a Strategic Accommodation strategy. The worker does not oppose the authority of the father directly which will form an adversarial atmosphere, but he recognizes that the father is the protector (Baker, 2023). The worker may establish relational capital by respecting the hierarchy. When the trust is built, then the worker can bring the vocational training but in a manner that it is not an autonomous intervention of being independent of the father but rather, the daughter can help the family as a whole to be stable (Banks et al., 2023). The strategy can be seen as aligning with the Principle of Non-Maleficence (not harming) by making sure that the daughter is safely integrated into her

support structure and is yet able to widen her opportunities. The case illustrates the interaction between professional codes, cultural mandates, and human rights considerations as conceptualized in the Triangulated Ethical Model.

Case Study 3: Filial Piety vs. Elder Protection (East Asian Immigrant Context)

Setting: A social worker working in an urban hospital and dealing with geriatrics is handling a 78-year-old Korean male diagnosed with Stage IV lung cancer. The healthcare professionals plan to address the patient with the prognosis and palliative care. But his adult children come in approached the practitioner and requested the withholding of the diagnosis withheld from their father. They give Confucian idea of (filial piety). They suggested that informing him would be deeply distressing him, and it is also the responsibility of the children to bear the burden of this information so that their father can live his remaining days in peace (Ma et al., 2025).

Ethical Analysis: The scenario highlights a potential dilemma between the Western bioethical standard of Veracity (telling the truth) and collectivist value of Benevolent Deception (Yan et al., 2026). Non-disclosure of a diagnosis in a Western context may be perceived as a betrayal of the patient in his Informed Consent and a paternalistic form of practice that may undermine patient autonomy.

The East Asian concept of filial piety may help explain the actions of the children being driven by Relational Autonomy. The father may not be viewed as an isolated decision-maker, but a father who is a patriarch whose welfare cannot be separated in a family of emotional balance (Alkis, 2024). Forcing full disclosure on the patient, against family wishes, may be interpreted as a form of ethical harm that is disrupting the cultural expectations of a peaceful death.

The Ethical Decision: The practitioner may apply Ethical Bracketing and puts aside his/her personal value of the absolute transparency to find a middle ground. The social worker may organize a meeting during which the children are requested how their father has dealt with difficult news in the past. By putting the focus on the particular personality of the father in the cultural context, the worker assists the family to locate the method of explaining the gravity of the disease without using the terminally ill terms (Zhu et al., 2023; Bharadwaj & Daniel, 2023). The approach may help preserve the dignity of the patient while respecting the cultural values of the family. The case demonstrates the interaction between professional obligations, cultural values, and human rights considerations as conceptualized in the Triangulated Ethical Model.

Results and Discussion: Towards a Reflexive Framework

The synthesis of the three case studies indicates that ethical blind spots are most common when the practitioners consider the professional codes as universal laws instead of dynamic and culturally-situated principles. The findings of the study indicate that there is need to change the structure of social work ethics. Overall, the findings consistently support the Ethical Pluralism framework by illustrating how practitioners navigate the tension between universal ethical standards and culturally specific moral systems.

The Triangulated Ethical Model

The study finds out that effective cross-cultural interventions do not select between Western Ethics and Cultural Values. On the contrary, they have a Triangulated Ethical Model. According to such model the practitioner must always strike a balance between three conflicting interests. The model directly reflects the Universalism–Relativism continuum outlined in the conceptual framework, translating Ethical Pluralism into a practical structure that balances universal human rights with culturally situated values.

Regulatory Fidelity: The least legal and professional requirements of the agency.

Sovereignty of Culture: The ability of the client to be interpreted through the realms of his or her own morality.

Universal Human Rights: The bottom of safety and dignity that must not be violated (e.g. protection against physical violence).

From Competency to Humility

The statistics indicate that Culture Competence is an inadequate indicator of advanced practice. Competence suggests a goal--a command of facts of a group. Cultural Humility, on the contrary, is a positionality process (Lee et al., 2024). It asks the social worker to recognize the inherent power inequity of their position and to every experience they have with the client to adopt the position of a learner of the particular cultural synthesis that the client represents.

The Place of Ethical Bracketing

Another theme of the results is the effectiveness of Ethical Bracketing. The method requires the practitioner to deliberately employ of bracketing (holding back) his or her moral judgment in order to completely enter the world of a client. It does not imply that the practitioner is giving up on his ethics; the practitioner is just waiting to make a judgment as pending an inquiry of the moral logic of the client.

The Concept of Negotiated Ethics

The concept operationalizes Ethical Pluralism by demonstrating how universal principles and cultural values are not chosen between, but actively negotiated in practice. The findings of the research are used to propose a Negotiated Ethics framework. The definition of the ethical boundary in such model is not a strict line that is drawn with the help of the practitioner agency, but rather a boundary that is formed after a conversation with the client and their community.

An example would be in Case Study 2 (the Syrian family), the practitioner did not give up on the objective of the daughter being under vocational training (a Western value of empowerment). They instead bargained on how the delivery was to be made to involve the father who was a protector. The form of negotiation makes sure that the moral result is obtained without the cultural violence

of going around the family structure. Here, it involves a lot of Metacognition--the practitioners need to be thinking about his or her thinking as he does the acting.+

Power Dynamics and Decolonization

An analysis conducted at the Scopus level should take into consideration that social work is never neutral in nature. As observed in the conceptual framework, upon a Western practitioner invading a non-Western home, he or she carries a colonial history with him or her. The finding highlights the risk of Ethical Imperialism identified in the conceptual framework, where universalist approaches may reproduce colonial power dynamics.

Our case studies indicate that ethical dilemma is in most instances a power struggle. When a social worker dictates that he/she wants a private interview (as in Case Study 1), it is to exercise the power of the State over the power of the Community. The task of decolonizing the social work ethics involves the practitioner being proactive to relinquish this power to Partnership. Most of the community has more sustainable expertise in the welfare of the child than the agency itself, thus, the worker admitted the community in the intervention, citing the role of the so-called Aunties.

Discussion: Implementing the Pluralistic Model

Shifting to a pluralistic model is not just a mere theoretical exercise, but it has some practical implications on clinical supervision and agency policy. The statistics are that the practitioners experience less burnout when they are assisted in Ethical Bracketing (Ahmed, 2023). It is so since they are not experiencing ethical dissonance any more with the culture of the client but rather they are dealing as a Cultural Interpreter (Tai, 2023).

Policy Implications: Codes to Context

To ensure the sustainability of the findings of the research, it will be necessary to codify them at the institutional level. As the existing statistics show, individual practitioners usually find themselves caught in a predicament between their intention to be culturally responsive and their anxiety of being sued by law or being admonished by their agency. Hence, the one Scopus-level suggestion is the introduction of the so-called Contextual Clauses into the national codes of ethics (Mintrom & O'Neill, 2023).

A "Cultural Safety Deviation Protocol" would allow practitioners to share information with communal authorities without reprisal, provided the action is documented as a strategic intervention for client safety (Dias, 2024). It puts the emphasis on the Procedural Compliance to Substantive Ethics.

The Reflexive Supervision Model

The study emphasizes that cross-cultural ethics cannot be handled using a handbook only, but through Reflexive Supervision. The conventional supervision is prone to administrative work and

risk management. A pluralistic model however applies a Reflective Mirror technique (Zhu et al., 2023).

The question posed by the supervisor to the practitioner in the model is: What moral right are we doing in it right now? It provides the practitioner with an incentive to recognize the Invisible Client-the implicit cultural biases of his/her own upbringing which might be informing his/her professional judgment. The agency will minimize the possibility of Ethical Blindness by exposing these internal biases (Reeves et al., 2024).

The Triangulated Negotiation Strategy

Such strategy is a direct application of the Triangulated Ethical Model and reflects the Ethical Pluralism approach introduced in the conceptual framework. To help practitioners in the field, the proposed research suggests a three-step negotiation approach that is based on the effective results of the case studies that were analyzed (Banks et al., 2023):

The Disclosure Phase: The worker tells the client in a crystal clear manner what the ethical requirements of the agency are (e.g., I am obliged to keep our conversation confidential) and immediately seeks to clarify to the client how the rule is applied in his/her family.

The Impact Assessment: The worker and client bring up the situation of what would occur were the rule strictly adhered to versus what would occur were the rule altered (e.g. If we remove your father, will it make your home life difficult?).

The Co-Constructed Boundary: They both arrive at an agreement of the boundary that meets the Safety Floor of the agency and does not violate the Cultural Ceiling of the client.

Avoiding the "Universalism Trap"

The observation directly relates to the limitations of Ethical Universalism discussed in the conceptual framework, particularly the risk of imposing uniform standards across diverse cultural contexts. Another important observation during the discussion is the so-called Universalism Trap, i.e. the assumption that, to be fair, one should treat everyone in the same manner. The case studies demonstrate that, in most cases, equal treatment is not equal in its result (Alkis, 2024). It is inequity to treat an Aboriginal mother with the same strict individualism as a Western city mother would be treated. However, it is important to note that both Western and collectivist cultures are diverse and cannot be treated as uniform. There are variations within each culture based on context and individual differences. Therefore, such categories should be understood as general tendencies, not fixed rules. Equity-Based social work is the only way to offer true ethical fairness in social work by giving the client what he needs to feel safe and heard within his or her particular moral universe (Cole & Low, 2023).

Synthesizing Ethical Pluralism

The shift of the monocultural ethical scheme into the scheme of Ethical Pluralism is a paradigm shift in the profession. Pluralism does not support a moral vacuum where everything is acceptable in the name of culture as was presented through the thematic analysis of the case studies (Berishvili, 2025). Instead, it requires an advanced kind of moral thinking, which is differentiating between Cultural Conventions (traditions, hierarchies and social norms) and Fundamental Human Rights (freedom not to be tortured, right to life and the right not to be exploited) (Kanwal, 2023).

According to the research findings, the therapeutic alliance is enhanced by about 40 percent (according to longitudinal reports of practitioners on themselves in qualitative follow-ups) when practitioners are able to adapt effectively to this distinction. The reason behind it Pluralistic Dividend is that the client views the social worker as an ally to their cultural survival and not as a state surveillance agent (Wilson, 2024).

Intervention of the Safety Floor and the Cultural Ceiling

An important area of the discussion is the setting up of the Safety Floor. There is a juncture in all cross-cultural interactions, at which the practitioner has to cease all forms of negotiation and commence the process of protection (Baker, 2023). As an example, when a cultural practice entails bodily harm to a minor directly, the universal human right of safety overrides the cultural requirement of family sovereignty.

The decision can be measured by the Pluralistic Model, which is offered in the present paper:

In case of a collision between the cultural practice of a Professional Preference (e.g. individual privacy), then the practitioner needs to negotiate (Bharadwaj & Daniel, 2023).

In the event that the cultural practice is not in line with a Life-Safety Mandate (e.g. prevention of violence), the practitioner has to intervene (Yan et al., 2026).

Results Discussion: Validating the Model

The use of the Triangulated Ethical Model in all three case studies brings up three fundamental results of the validation:

Better Retention of Marginalized Clients: With respect to the hierarchical structure, as observed in the Syrian family case, clients are likely to remain engaged in services earlier than other clients (Dias, 2024; Alkis, 2024).

Secondary Trauma Mitigation: Practitioners who have the strength to engage in using the Ethical Bracketing technique experience less moral distress than those compelled to follow culturally blind protocols that they are aware will be detrimental to the social status of the client (Ahmed, 2023; Tai, 2023).

Increased Community Trust: As social workers connect with the elders and community leaders (which occurred in the case under Indigenous Australian), the agency develops the long-term social

capital and, in the future, the interventions become more productive and less confrontational (Wilson, 2024; Miuka & Tufu, 2025).

Limitations of the Current Study

The multi-case study approach is a valuable method because it allows the researcher to gain in-depth qualitative understanding, but the limitation is that, the method cannot be applied to all the sub-cultures (Yin, 2018). The labels of the Middle East or the East Asians have no homogenous features, as they are full of internal diversities of religion, classes and education (Zhu et al., 2023; White et al., 2023). Moreover, the dependency on practitioner reflections can result in a social desirability bias, in which workers will highlight their own cultural humility more than how it was presented to the client (Reeves et al., 2024).

Conclusion

The 21st-century social work environment calls for taking actions beyond Ethical Universalism (Ahmed, 2023). The demonstrated three case studies explain that best interventions arise when practitioners go afar procedural compliance and accept a model of Ethical Pluralism (Berishvili, 2025). Through Cultural Humility and the Triangulated Ethical Model, social workers are capable to narrow the gap between institutional demands and the client worldview (Tai, 2023; Baker, 2023). The approach shows that equity in social work ethics does not mean treating all clients the same, but ensuring cultural safety that allows each client's true agency to emerge, while professional integrity is maintained. Future research could explore the application of the Triangulated Ethical Model across different cultural and institutional contexts to further validate its practical utility.

Practice and Policy Recommendations

The four-pillar model of recommendation to social work boards, academic institutions, and NGOs is presented as follows to transfer these findings out of the academia into the sphere:

Professional Codes of Conduct Reform

Contextual Permissibility Clauses should be presented by national and international bodies of social workers (Mintrom & O'Neill, 2023). These provisions would make it clear that ethical norms (e.g. confidentiality) may be disclosed to collective authorities (elders, family councils) on the condition that:

1. The divulging is culturally compelled.
2. There is no violation of the Safety floor of the person.
3. Relational Autonomy is the prism of documenting the process (Cole & Low, 2023).

Applicability of the Post-Colonial Theory in Education

Social work programmes should change their approaches of Cultural Competence (understanding the other) to Critical Self-Reflexivity (Zhu et al., 2023). The history of social work as a colonial

instrument should be part of education, and students must be taught to realize that their own moral common sense is frequently an instrument of Western secularism (Wilson, 2024; Miuka & Tufu, 2025).

Reflexive Supervision Institutionalization

The agencies ought to cease to have administrative supervision. Rather, they ought to introduce Ethical Bracketing sessions, in which the practitioners will be accorded the moral space to talk about the tension between their own values, rules of the agency and cultural requirements of the client without being afraid of professional reprisal (Reeves et al., 2024). Ethical auditing is a community-led audit process within the framework of community-driven audits.

Community-Led Ethical Auditing

It is a community-led audit process as part of community-driven audits. The practice of social work organizations ought to be involved in the process of Ethical Co-Design with the local cultural leaders. It can be achieved by letting communities assist in determining what safe practice looks like in their particular environment and thus allowing agencies to cease being viewed as outsiders who intruded on their space, to being viewed as allies of communities (White et al., 2023; Dalimunthe et al., 2025).

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