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Social Workers and Governance in the Israeli Welfare State

Idit Weiss Gal

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Introduction

The changing nature of social care, its governance and modes of provision, has implications for service-users, professionals and policy-makers. One consequence of the changing social care landscape in welfare states is the participation of additional actors in the social policy formulation process (Bode 2006).

The interventions of these actors take different forms and can occur at various points in this process. While traditionally the participants in this process have been politicians, bureaucrats or representatives of interest groups, the contemporary social policy formulation process is seen to include actors situated in the various institutions of the state. These actors can be located in the administrative structure or the political system, and can be involved in varying decision-making and implementation levels of activity, either on the transnational, the national or the local levels. Interest groups, advocacy organisations and non-profit providers, think tanks, citizen and community groups as well as professionals and academics all seek to influence this process in welfare states (Hill Hupe 2006, Bifulco Centemeri, 2008).

Professionals have often been identified as playing a unique role in decision-making in welfare states due to their role as the providers of services offered by the state or funded or regulated by it (Noordegraff 2007). Due the changing nature of governance in the welfare state, the role of professionals has been transformed and it appears that the members of at least one profession - social work - are playing a growing, and more diversified, role in this process. No longer primarily state employees charged with providing social care, in many

welfare states social workers are playing more varied roles in the social services (Farrell Morris 2003). They are undertaking increasingly administrative roles in state services on local and national levels, and are also employers and employees in non-profit agencies, leaders of advocacy organisations, and members of citizen groups (Harris 2003, Healy 2004, Freund 2005).

This article seeks to shed light on welfare governance, an issue that is enjoying growing attention in the social policy discourse in recent years. More specifically, it studies the role of professionals in the social policy formulation process by exploring the involvement of social workers in parliamentary committees in Israel. This focus on social workers reflects an increasing discussion on the importance of the role of members of this profession within the policy process in different countries.

Governance, Social Policy and Professionals

Governance is an umbrella notion that has been adopted in the social sciences in recent years in order to describe and explain the conditions under which collective action is undertaken by institutions and actors drawn from, and beyond, government in order to reduce and manage complexity (Stoker 1998). Theoretical developments in the study of governance underscore major changes in the policy formulation process. In particular, this discourse emphasizes the growing role of non-government actors in the policy formulation process (Pierre & Guy Peters 2000), the blurring of boundaries, and the mixing of responsibilities in dealing with social and economic issues (Ahonen, Hyyryläinrn & Salminen, 2006). Observers have noted that deliberations over policy have moved beyond the “core executive” that traditionally dominated

decision-making to include additional levels of government and an array of actors and institutions (Richards & Smith 2002, Keeiman 2003).

In recent years, the notion of governance has been applied in social policy research (Daly 2003). Transformations in social care provision in various countries have led researchers to describe the existing situation as a “disorganized welfare mix” in which more heterogeneous public-private partnerships have emerged and there is more creative civic action (Bode 2006, Milbourne 2009). This research has generally focused on the role of local and regional authorities and of non-profits in welfare provision, and has offered evidence of the increasingly diverse role of non-state providers of social care and the growing involvement of service users in decisions pertaining to social care (Hill & Hupe 2006, Bifulco & Centemeri 2008, Newman, Glendinning & Hughes 2008). A focus on the policy-formulation aspect of governance in social policy has enjoyed much less empirical examination.

Closely linked to governance in social policy discourse is the growing theoretical interest in the implications of changes in the structuring of welfare states, and the policy process within them, upon professionals. In the past, professionals in most welfare states were perceived as key figures with vast autonomy with regard to decisions over the provision of medical, educational and social services to citizens (Wilding 1982). In addition, they were seen as members of powerful interest groups that strived, often quite successfully, to maintain their unique domains (Immergut 1992).

Contemporary welfare state transformations have had a marked effect upon the roles and stature of professionals (Hugman 1998, Malin 2000, Farrell & Morris 2003, Noordegraaf 2007). In particular New Public Management has led to professionals, such as doctors, teachers

and social workers, fulfilling administrative roles. They are torn between demands to provide for the articulated needs of service users while adhering to the budgetary organisational concerns of the services in which they are employed (Martin, Phelps & Katbamna 2004).

Not surprisingly, social workers have been the subject of much of the literature concerning the impact of welfare state change upon professionals (Lymbery 2000, May & Buck 2000, Webb 2006). This is a consequence of the identification of social work with the functions of the welfare state and the fact that these changes, especially in the UK case (due to radical changes introduced in community care in that country), have had a particularly strong impact upon members of this profession. Yet these developments and others may conceivably also offer new opportunities for professionals, and particularly social workers, to be better able to engage in policy formulation rather than only policy implementation (Alavikko 2008, Campanini & Fortunato 2008).

A growing body of literature research has discussed the growing opportunities that social workers in different positions have in order to influence the policy formulation process on organizational (within their own services), local and national levels (Wyers, 1991; Figuera-McDonough, 1993, 2007; Ellis, 2008). Acutely aware of social problems and the limitations of policy, social workers can work through the media or directly with legislators in order to place issues on the public agenda. They can also engage in the analysis of problems, the assessment of policies, and the preparation of policy alternatives as a means of influencing policy-makers (Janssen, 2003). As administrators in social services, social workers may play a role in the process by which the nature of services is discussed, access conditions are decided upon, priorities identified, and the forms of provision and funding are determined. Finally, when they

serve as high- or intermediate- level bureaucrats, social workers are clearly directly involved in setting social policies.

At the same time, out-sourcing of services and the establishment of quasi-markets has led to a growing role for non-state organisations in social care provision (Grimshaw, Vincent & Willmott 2002, Forder *et al.* 2004). A widening of access to the policy process has provided these organisations with new opportunities to influence social policy formulation (Bode 2006, Schmid, Bar & Nirel 2008). As these are potential employers of social workers, it can be assumed that they may facilitate enhanced social worker involvement in the social policy formulation process. Similarly, the growing impact of advocacy organisations in the social policy process in different countries (Mendes 2006, Potting 2009), offers opportunities for the involvement of social workers in policy formulation. Social workers' unique knowledge and qualifications should provide them with the credentials that enable them to play a major role in this process (Hoefer 2005, Jansson 2008). For example, social policy courses are an integral part of the social work education curriculum in various countries, among them the United States, Australia and Israel (Sauliner 2000, Weiss, Gal & Katan 2006, Zubtzycki & McArthur, 2004).

An additional motivation for policy engagement are the values that, at least formally, guide the professional activities of social workers. Social work adheres to an ethos of social justice (Craig 2002, Hare 2004, Banks 2006) and members of the profession are expected to seek to influence the social policy process in order to further the rights of excluded groups (International Federation of Social Workers 2004). This call to engage in social policy change is reflected in social work codes of ethics (British Association of Social Workers 2008, National

Association of Social Workers 2008), in the professional literature (Ezell 2001, Haynes & Mickelson 2003, Ellis 2008), and in the professional socialization process (Gibbons & Gray 2005). Indeed, research from Australia, South Africa, New Zealand (Gray et al. 2002), Canada (Dudziak & Coates 2004) and the United States (Ezell 1994, Figueira McDonough 2007) indicates that social workers are involved in the policy process at various policy levels (national, state, local and organizational). However these studies are based on self-reporting and not upon a concrete analysis of the actual involvement of social workers in the social policy formulation process. Moreover, this literature does not enable us to distinguish between the involvement in policy practice of front-line and administrative level social workers, between social workers employed at the local or national levels, and between state employees and those engaged in non-governmental advocacy roles.

Israel is an interesting case for the study of social worker involvement in the social policy formulation process. First introduced in the early 20th century, social work has since undergone a constant process of professionalization. It currently enjoys a more solid professional status than that in many other countries (Weiss *et al.* 2004). The occupation has received public recognition as a unique profession and “social work” has become a protected trade mark. Social work’s exclusive domains have expanded over time and the level of professional autonomy increased, with most social workers employed in services headed by social workers. The 1996 Social Workers Law formalized these achievements and provided elements of the code of ethics with a mechanism of enforcement. It also strengthened social work’s monopoly in various fields of activity in the social services. Many positions in local welfare bureaus, hospitals, and probation services are the exclusive domain of registered social

workers. Social workers also head local social services departments in Israel (Spiro, *et al.* 1997). As in other welfare states, welfare governance in Israel has growingly taken the form of a “disorganized welfare mix”. While in the past, most social workers were employed by the state, privatization and a rapid growth of civil society has led to a marked increase in social workers employed by non-state employers or by advocacy organisations (Bar Zuri 2004). Moreover, there has been a marked process of devolution of responsibility for the provision and regulation of services to the local level (Bar-Nir & Gal, In Press). Finally, while traditionally engagement in policy formulation was the exclusive domain of social workers serving as high-level civil servants in the relevant state ministries (Doron, 2004), there is some initial evidence of the growing involvement of local social workers or those employed in civil society organizations in the policy process (Kadman, 1992; Kaufman, 2005).

Parliamentary Committees

Parliamentary committees are the venue chosen in this study for examining social worker involvement in social policy formulation. In democracies parliamentary committees are perceived as crucial components in the policy process (Jann & Weigrich 2007). They play a central role in the legislative and policy-formulation process (McAllister & Stirbu 2007, Wehner 2006). Researchers claim that the tasks common to committees in different national settings can be grouped into two comprehensive categories (Hazan 2001b). The first focuses on legislative functions, while the second emphasizes oversight functions of the committees (Longley & Davidson 1998). These oversight functions relate to ongoing activities aimed at the

examination, review and scrutiny of the policies of the government and of the parliament and the challenging of these actions (Mattson & Strøm 1995).

Parliamentary activity in the Knesset, the Israeli parliament, takes place both in plenary sessions and in its committees (Sager 1985). Four types of parliamentary committees exist: permanent committees (12 in all); temporary committees established to deal with specific issues; two "housekeeping" committees; and parliamentary committees of inquiry that are formed occasionally. In addition, the permanent committees can, and frequently do, delegate authority to sub-committees (Hazan 2001a).

An examination of the roles of parliamentary committees in the Knesset reveal that they undertake both of the types of functions described in the literature. The parliamentary committees scrutinize proposed bills and motions referred to them by the plenary. In order to become law, bills must be discussed by the committee and returned to the plenary. The committees can amend bills prior to returning them to the plenary for the final (second and third) readings, and they have statutory powers to make changes in existing laws. Moreover, some ministerial regulations and orders must have committee approval to be adopted. Knesset committees also engage in overseeing the executive through discussion of motions for the agenda referred to the committees by the plenary and by way of initiated discussion of issues linked to policies, to emerging social problems and to the shortcomings of state services.

According to Knesset by-laws, committees invite ministers and state officials to testify before them in deliberations touching upon their fields of activity and jurisdiction. While not required specifically by law, the participation of experts and other interested parties in the

deliberations of Knesset committees is also the norm. These include professionals, representatives of diverse organizations, interest groups, and citizens.

An examination of the influence of parliamentary committees in the Knesset indicates that there is a gap between the two types of tasks undertaken by these bodies (Hazan 2001a). A lack of statutory powers to summon witnesses and of investigative tools limits the oversight role of parliamentary committees in Israel. Though the executive branch heavily dominates the legislative process due to the fact that a majority of bills discussed by parliament and its committees originate in this branch, parliamentary committees have a major impact upon the legislative process, due to their formal role and statutory powers. This influence is apparently particularly the case for social issues, which have generally had little salience in the political debate. Thus Knesset members believe that their greatest influence over social policy is through their participation in the workings of the Knesset committees (Ben-Arieh 1999).

The Current Study

This study seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the role of professionals in the social policy formulation process by studying social workers' involvement in parliamentary committees in Israel's parliament during the 15th and 16th Knessets, a period of seven years between 1999 - 2006. Its uniqueness is that it moves beyond existing research on the policy involvement of social workers, which tends to be based upon retrospective self-reported data, by examining the actual involvement of social workers in the parliamentary arena.

The study focuses upon the following research questions: What is the level of participation of social workers in the deliberations of parliamentary committees in the period

studied? In the meetings of which parliamentary committees did social workers tend to participate? In which types of discussions did the social workers participate and were they related to the oversight (e.g., initiated discussions, discussions of motions for the agenda) or to the legislative (e.g., preparation of bills for legislation) functions of the committees? What were the topics of these discussions? What were the socio-demographic characteristics and the affiliation of the social workers who participated in parliamentary committee meetings? How frequent was the participation of social workers in these meetings?

Methodology

The study employs a quantitative content analysis of the minutes of all the parliamentary committees in which at least one social worker participated, either actively or passively, in the studied period. This was possible due to the fact that all the minutes are public knowledge and can be freely accessed on the Knesset website. The process of identification of committee meetings in which social workers participated consisted of two stages. Initially the Knesset website was searched. Each of the minutes contains a list of all the participants in the meetings, be they Knesset members or guests. In most cases, the guest's profession or affiliation is noted. In order to identify meetings in which social workers participated, two search engines (Google and the Knesset site search engine) were employed to search the minutes. Keywords included terms such as "social worker", "social", "welfare", "probation officer", and "community worker".

All the names of the participants in parliamentary meetings are public knowledge and readily accessible through the web. As not all social worker participants were identified as such,

a second stage in the identification process comprised of a manual search of the minutes of those ten Knesset committees, in which social workers were most likely to participate. The lists of participants in all the minutes of these committees were searched. At this stage, potential social workers (generally on the basis of their affiliation, say the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services, a non-profit or a local authority) were identified. Access to the membership list of the Israeli Association of Social Workers was granted to the research team on the basis of a strict commitment to ensure the anonymity of the members of this list. This data enabled the team to determine whether the participants identified as potential social workers were indeed social workers. However, as not all social workers are affiliated with this association, the names of the potential social workers were also distributed to various experts who were asked if they were familiar with any of them. As participation of social workers in the committee discussions was an integral part of the social worker's professional activity and thus undertaken with the consent of their employers, organisations and institutions were also approached in order to determine whether the participants identified as being employed by them were indeed social workers. On the basis of these two stages, any committee meeting in which at least one social worker participated was included in the list of minutes to be analyzed. As the study employed data accessible to the general public and did not include interviews or data collected directly from the research population, no review by a research ethics committee was required.

A quantitative content analysis (Holsti 1969, Miles & Huberman 1994) was then undertaken. This entails a systematic and objective analysis of the content of relevant documents through the employment of a coding schedule that depicts the variables and a coding manual that contains the possible values of each of the variables (Bryman 2001). The

unit of analysis in the study was the committee meeting minutes, each of which was coded according to the following coding schedule and manual: 1. Knesset (15th or 16th); 2. The committee title and type (permanent, temporary, sub-committee; inquiry); 3. The type of discussion (a private member's bill; preparation of a bill for the second and third readings in the plenum; a discussion initiated by the committee; a discussion of motions for the agenda; a discussion of regulations; field tours); 4. The topic of discussion (e.g. social and civil rights, violence; education; immigration); 5. The affiliation of the social worker; 6. Gender; 7. Nationality (Jew/Arab/Other). If more than one social worker participated in the meeting, each of them was coded on an individual basis. SPSS Release 15.0 (Chicago, IL., USA) was used for data analysis. The findings are based on the presentation of frequency distribution.

Findings

Level of Social Worker Participation in Parliamentary Committee Meetings

Table 1 shows the proportion of meetings in which social workers participated in all the meetings of parliamentary committees in each of the studied Knessets.

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Social workers participated in a total of 1,013 meetings. The number of meetings was similar in each of the Knessets. The slightly higher number of meetings in the 15th Knesset may be a result of the fact that this Knesset lasted six months longer than the subsequent Knesset. The proportion of meetings in which social workers participated out of all the meeting of all the committees was similar (9%). If five committees which deal with issues unrelated to social work (House Committee; Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee; Internal Affairs Committee;

Science and Technology Committee) are ignored, it emerges that social workers participated in 13% of the relevant parliamentary committee meetings in the 15th Knesset, and 14% of the meetings in the 16th Knesset. Of the 1,013 meetings in which social workers attended, at least one of the social worker participants took an active part in the discussion in 87% of the committee meetings.

Participation by Committee Title and Type

A breakdown of the level of participation of social workers by committee title and type can be found in Table 2.

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Social workers took part in the deliberations of diverse Knesset committees. Most of the participation was in five of the committees, four permanent and one temporary. The permanent committees were the Committee on the Status of Women (deals with gender equality, labor market and economic disparities linked to gender, violence against women), the Immigration Absorption and Diaspora Affairs Committee (immigration and initial settlement policies); the Labour, Welfare and Health Committee (labour rights, social security, health issues, social care, juvenile offenders); and the Education, Culture and Sport Committee (the educational system, cultural institutions, mass media). The temporary committee with a particularly high level of social worker participation was the Committee for the Rights of the Child (child protection, children's constitutional rights, developmental rights). Social workers participated in over 30% of all the committee meetings in three of these committees, ranging from 33% of the meetings in the Immigration Absorption and Diaspora Affairs Committee to

47% in the Committee for the Rights of the Child. In addition, in three other committees (the Committee on Drug Abuse; the Committee of Inquiry on the Trafficking of Women and the Committee on School Dropout) social workers were present in over half of all the meetings.

Participation by Discussion Type

Table 3 offers an insight into the types of discussions to which social workers were a party.

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Social workers participated in all the types of discussions held in parliamentary committees. Most of these were linked to the oversight function of the committees. 73% of the discussions were initiated either by the committee, by organisations or by individuals. In another 7% of the cases social workers took part in discussions on motions for the agenda referred to the committee. A second type of discussion in which social workers frequently took part was discussions linked directly to the legislative roles, either the preparation of a private member's bill for its first reading or the discussion of details of a bill prior to second and third readings in the plenum. This distribution of types of committee discussions reflects the general distribution of discussions in the five committees in which social workers tended to participate.

Participation in Parliamentary Committees by Topics

The topics of discussions in which social workers participated are presented in Table 4.

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The major topic of discussion in committee meetings in which social workers participated was social and civil rights. Here the emphasis was on the rights of foreign migrant workers and their families. Interestingly, issues relating to violence and crime also topped the list of topic of meetings in which social workers participated. This reflects the statutory involvement of social

workers in dealing with cases of domestic and sexual violence and the fact that correction services in Israel are an exclusive social work domain (Weiss & Wozner 2002). Issues related to education, media and culture were the topics of a similarly high number of committee meetings in which social workers took part in. Issues such as the protection of children against harmful television or internet contents, or school payments were prominent in these discussions. In addition to these topics, the more traditional fields of social work involvement also figured prominently in their participation in parliamentary committees. A third of the committee discussions in which social workers took part concerned social welfare services, immigration and addiction issues.

Demographic Characteristics and the Affiliation of Social Worker Participants

In the 1013 committee meetings in which at least one social worker participated, a total of 667 social workers took part. Of these, 74% were women, which reflect the fact that social work in Israel, as in other countries, is predominantly a female profession. This proportion is lower than that of women in the profession as a whole (89%), indicating that a higher proportion of male social workers participated in parliamentary committee meetings than their actual representation in the overall social work population (Bar-Zuri 2004). The vast majority of the social workers participating in the committee meetings were Jews (90%). Though only 4.3% of Israeli social workers are Arabs, a tenth of the social work participants in the committee meetings were Arabs.

Data on the affiliation of the social worker participants in the parliamentary committee meetings (see table 5) reflect the diversity of professional employment in Israel. While many social workers are still employed in state and local government sectors, a growing number also

find work in non-profit (service provision, advocacy, and community and citizen organisations) and for-profit organisations.

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Social workers employed by the state were those most likely to participate in the committee discussions. Most were high- or intermediate- level civil servants in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services. Generally, these were social workers who held diverse positions within the ministry. They included heads of departments, regional directors, and inspectors. In addition, a large proportion of the social workers taking part in parliamentary committee discussions were employed by local social service departments. Significantly a quarter of the social workers participating in the committee meetings were non-profit employees.

The Frequency of Social Worker Participation in Parliamentary Committees

Table 6 presents the frequency of the participation of individual social workers in parliamentary committee meetings.

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Just over a half of all the social worker participants took part in a single meeting. For the remainder, participation in the committee meetings was not a one-off event. More specifically, 16% participated in two meetings, 7% in three meetings, and another 4% in four meetings. 2% of the social workers participated in five meetings. A tenth of the social workers participated in over eight meetings of the parliamentary committees. Half of these took part in between 9 and 13 meetings, while the rest participated in 14 or more committee meetings. Four social workers participated in 45 - 55 meetings. Noticeably, a single social worker participated in 153 meetings and a second social worker took part in 69 of the parliamentary committee meetings.

A more refined portrayal of the identify of social workers participating in parliamentary committee meeting is afforded by a closer analysis of the characteristics of the 27 social workers who took part in over 20 committee meetings. While most of these were civil servants (74%), a relatively large proportion (22%) was representatives of advocacy organisations. An analysis of the demographic characteristics of these social workers revealed that 70% were women and only one was an Arab (4%).

Discussion and Conclusion

This article's findings on the involvement of social workers in parliamentary committees in the Knesset, the Israeli parliament, provide ample support for the claim that emerges from the governance literature, that social policy is no longer the domain of a small group of decision-makers in the upper echelons of the government and its bureaucracy. It also appears to reinforce the sense that the changing nature of the role of professionals in the welfare state may offer avenues for greater participation in policy formulation. The fact that social workers participated in over a tenth of all relevant parliamentary committee meetings over the period studied indicates that members of this professional group play a role in the policy formulation process. While the actual number of times in which individual social workers were party to these meetings fluctuates greatly, 667 social workers participated in at least one committee meeting. The participation of social workers in between a third and a half of the meetings of six different parliamentary committees indicates that this participation was neither marginal nor inconsequential.

The organisational affiliation of the social workers that participated in the parliamentary committee meetings offers additional support for the governance thesis. While a significant proportion (30%) of the social workers were civil servants, a large proportion was affiliated with organisations and agencies outside the traditional social policy formulation realm. 28% of these were employed by local authorities and 31% represented diverse non-profit organisations. These findings are indicative of the active involvement of non-governmental actors in the social policy formulation process.

An examination of the meetings in which social workers were involved shows that these generally sought to further the oversight function of the parliamentary committees. As can be seen in the findings, 80% of these meetings were either initiated discussions or dealt with motions for the agenda. By contrast, only 20% of the committee meetings were devoted to legislative functions. These findings show that social workers are not engaged only in the legitimization or justification of existing policies but also in more critical roles, such as agenda-setting or identifying shortcomings in existing policies or in their implementation. However, given the limited impact of the oversight role of these committees in the Israeli parliament, they also indicate that the influence of social workers may be more limited than the incidence of their participation suggests. Further research is required in order to better understand why this is the case. This may be simply a result of the fact that the committees, in which social workers participated, devoted more of their discussion to oversight than to legislation. It may also be a result of the very nature of the legislative process, which tends to include primarily legislators and high-level civil servants. However, the greater involvement of social workers in oversight may also be linked to the way in which social workers view their role in the policy

formulation process and be indicative of the perception, that is also predominant in the literature on legislative advocacy in social work, that their primary contribution to this process is in agenda-setting and the provision of informed opinions on policies and social problems (Richan 2006, Jansson 2008).

The findings of the study offer evidence not only of change in welfare governance and the diversification of the social policy process, but also of the changing nature of the social work profession. In various welfare states, there is a growing emphasis on social aspects of the profession and a clear-cut call for the involvement of social workers in the social policy process. While there is some initial evidence of the involvement of social workers in the social policy formulation process as lobbyists, campaigners, advocates and direct participants in the legislative process, this data is generally self-reported or based on case studies (e.g. Gray et al. 2002; Jansson, 2003). The findings of the Israeli study presented here strengthen this claim by focusing on the actual involvement of social workers in the policy process. In the past, only a very limited number of Israeli social workers, primarily high-level official in the Ministry of Welfare and academics, were actively involved in the social policy process (Deutsch 1970, Doron 2004). This study offers a very different portrayal of social work in the Israeli welfare state. Members of the relatively large group of social workers involved in the policy process are employed across a wide range of organisations, ranging from the top echelons of the civil service to much lower levels of the state bureaucracy as well as local authorities, advocacy organisations and non-profit service providers. While involvement in the social policy process and participation in the deliberation of parliamentary committees discussing existing or proposed state policy is clearly an integral part of the professional role of social workers in high-

or intermediate-level positions within the civil service, this is not the case for social workers employed at the local level or by non-profit organizations. Judging by the topics of the discussions in which they participated, the social workers are engaged in a wide range of fields of activity and deal with very diverse population groups and social problems.

The data pertains specifically to social workers in the Israeli case study. Giving the lack of comparable studies employing similar methodological tools on social worker participation in parliamentary committees in other welfare states, it is unclear whether there is a similar degree of involvement in parliamentary committees in other national contexts. While in the existing literature on the participation of social workers in the policy process in different countries (Ezell 1994, Gray et al. 2002, Dudziak & Coates 2004, Figueira McDonough 2007) does indeed report on testifying before public hearings and state commissions, these studies draw upon either the retrospective self-reported data of social workers or on specific case studies of the involvement of social workers in the legislative stages of policy process.

The analysis presented here does not offer conclusive evidence of the actual impact of social workers in the social policy process. It did not follow the trail of particular policy decisions, nor did it attempt to assess the impact of the social workers upon the discussions in which they participated. This requires detailed case study analyses of specific policy formulation processes and is beyond the scope of this study. Thus the findings offer evidence of social workers involvement in the policy process but not direct evidence of the influence of social workers on policy formulation. However the diffusion of power within the policy formulation process, the changing contours of social work employment and the profession's expressed commitment to an agenda of social change have the potential to lead to greater involvement of

social workers in the social policy process. Israeli social workers appear to be willing to play an active role in this process. Additional research in other nations can offer more evidence of if, and how, this is the case elsewhere.

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TABLE 1. Parliamentary committee meetings in which social workers participated.

Knesset	Total number of committee meetings	Meetings in which at least one social worker participated N (%)	Meetings of “relevant committees” ¹	Proportion of meetings of the relevant committees in which social workers participated
15	5,710	520 (9%)	4,050	13%
16	5,459	493 (9%)	3,498	14%
Total	11,169	1,013 (9%)	7,548	14%

¹ Excluded are the House Committee, which deals with Knesset procedures, the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, the Internal Affairs Committee, and the Science and Technology Committee.

TABLE 2. Distribution of meetings in which social workers participated, by committee title and type

(N = 1013)

Title of Committee	Type of Committee	Number of meetings in which social workers participated	Proportion of all the committee meetings
Committee on the Status of Women	Permanent	206	43%
Immigrant Absorption and Diaspora Affairs	Permanent	167	33%
Rights of the Child	Temporary	155	47%
Labour, Welfare and Health	Permanent	130	12%
Education, Culture and Sport	Permanent	123	11%
Drug Abuse	Temporary	88	52%
Foreign Workers	Temporary	41	25%
Trafficking of Women	Committee of Inquiry	41	53%
Law and Judiciary	Permanent	15	0.4%
Social Disparities	Committee of Inquiry	13	45%
School Dropout	Temporary	8	89%
Public Petitions	Temporary	7	0.4%
Finance	Permanent	5	
Women in the Arab Sector	Sub-committee	4	
Women in the Labour Market	Sub-committee	2	
Economic Affairs	Permanent	2	
Women's Health	Sub-committee	2	
Learning Difficulties	Sub-committee	2	

State Comptroller	Permanent	1
Research and Scientific Development	Permanent	1

TABLE 3. Distribution of meetings in which social workers participated by type of discussion
(N=1026²)

Type of discussion	N(%)
Initiated discussion (by the committee, one of its members, citizens or organizations)	750 (73%)
Discussion of a private member's bill	125 (12%)
Preparation of bills for the second and third readings	56 (5.5%)
Discussion of motions for the agenda	73 (7%)
Discussion of regulations	18 (2%)
Tours	4 (0.5%)
Total	1026 (100%)

² The number is greater than the total number of meetings in which social workers participated (1013) because some of the meetings were devoted to more than one topic.

TABLE 4. Distribution of meetings in which social workers participated, by topics (N=1061³)

Topic	N(%)
Social and civil rights	157 (15%)
Violence and crime	154 (15%)
Education, media and culture	148 (14%)
Immigration	109 (10%)
Social services and social welfare institutions	97 (9%)
Addictions	95 (9%)
Health	61 (6%)
Social security	60 (6%)
Trafficking of women	47 (4%)
Labour rights and unemployment	42 (4%)
Macroeconomic and social issues	29 (2.5%)
Adoption	12 (1%)
Terror and security	12 (1%)
Poverty	12 (1%)
Others	26 (2.5%)
Total	1061 (100%)

³ The number is greater than the total number of meetings in which social workers participated (1013) because some of the meetings were devoted to more than one topic.

TABLE 5. Distribution of social worker participants in committee meetings, by affiliation

(N = 667)

Affiliation	N (%)
Government	198 (30%)
Local authorities	188 (28%)
Non-governmental service providers	69 (10%)
Advocacy organizations	51 (8%)
Hospitals and health funds	32 (5%)
Women's organizations	25 (4%)
Social workers association	27 (4%)
State authorities	18 (3%)
Quasi non-governmental agencies	13 (2%)
Academia	12 (0.7%)
National Insurance Institute	5 (0.7%)
For-profit organizations	9 (1%)
Think tanks	4 (0.5%)
Unknown	7 (1%)
Others	4 (0.5%)

TABLE 6. Distribution of the number of meetings in which the social workers participated
(N = 667)

Number of meetings	Social workers N (%)	Cumulative proportions
1	367 (55%)	55%
2	104 (16%)	71%
3	47 (7%)	78%
4	26 (4%)	82%
5	15 (2%)	84%
6	11 (2%)	86%
7	13 (2%)	88%
8	12 (2%)	90%
9 – 13	35 (5%)	94.5%
14-19	10 (1.5%)	96%
20-30	13 (2%)	98%
31-39	8 (1%)	99%
45-55	4 (0.5%)	99.5%
69	1 (0.25%)	99.75%
153	1 (0.25%)	100%
Total	667	100%