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**Poverty-Aware Social Work**

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## **Summaries of the Main Articles**



## **Poverty-aware social work: Application of the paradigm in social service departments during 2014-2018**

*Michal Krumer-Nevo<sup>1</sup>, Ayala Meir<sup>2</sup> and Nurit Weisberg-Nakash<sup>3</sup>*

In 2016 the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Social Services decided to adopt the poverty-aware social work paradigm as a leading model in case worker practice for social services departments. Prior to this decision, the paradigm was included in a pilot program – ‘Families Meet Opportunity’ (MAPA) – in a small number of social service departments as of 2014. Since then, the paradigm has been operating in five programs in more than a hundred social services departments. In order to facilitate this, an organizational model for the five programs was developed. This introductory article surveys the process of the paradigm adoption from 2014-2018. The article delineates the theoretical principles of the paradigm and their relevance to practice, and describes the five programs and their organizational model. In addition, it details the challenges facing the implementation of the organizational model and the paradigm’s principles.

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2 Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Social Services

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## Poverty and agency: From getting by to getting organized

*Ruth Lister*<sup>1</sup>

This is a translated chapter from Ruth Lister's classic book *Poverty*. The chapter deals with the agency of people in poverty, i.e. their capacity to act and to be influential, to be the authors of their own biographies. Until recently, there has been only limited recognition of the agency of people living in poverty. To the extent that agency has been acknowledged it has tended to be in terms of attribution of responsibility for the individual's poverty rather than recognition of the complex subjectivity of fellow human beings trying to negotiate their lives in adverse circumstances. Based on a thorough review of studies, the chapter offers a general discussion of the notion of agency and how it figures in different explanations of poverty. This discussion is followed by an exploration of four types of agency: 'getting by' or everyday coping; 'getting (back) at' through everyday resistance; 'getting out' of poverty; and 'getting organized' to effect change.

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## Is direct practice for social change possible? A critical examination and suggestions for practice

Yuval Saar-Heiman<sup>1</sup> and Sivan Ruso-Carmel<sup>2</sup>

Critical social work theory and practice has long been concerned with the manifestation of social issues in the lives of individuals. Yet there is a dearth of writing on the contribution of critical social work to direct practice and on its potential to promote social change. This article addresses the void by focusing on two questions: 1. What if at all, is the social change that direct practice can evoke? 2. How does direct practice for social change manifest? The article is based on three critical reflections written by social work students in a special poverty-aware social work program – *Case Work for Social Change*. Analyzing the students' reflections on their practice reveals and conceptualizes the expression of social and political issues in direct social work interventions. Based on the analysis, 'social justice' is proposed as a concept that can bridge between the social and the personal and three phases of direct practice for social change are outlined: Identification of social injustice, recognition of social injustice and actions against social injustice.

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## **What is active in active realization of rights? Active realization of rights in MAPA (Families Meet Opportunities) program**

*Sivan Russo-Carmel<sup>1</sup>, Iris Socolover-Yacobi<sup>2</sup> and Michal Krumer-Nevo<sup>3</sup>*

Writing on the practice of realizing rights in social work, usually differentiates between case advocacy, focused on changing the situation of the individual, and cause advocacy, meaning structural change. This article proposes a critical version of case realization of rights that gives this practice a political character, and is called “active realization of rights”. The article is based on the experiences accumulated in the MAPA (Families Meet Opportunities) program, where the concept of active realization of rights was developed for the first time, as well as its implementation in both the roles of realization-of-rights social workers and case workers.

The definition of poverty in poverty-aware social work as a violation of human rights, turns realization of rights into a significant centerpiece both in theoretical understanding and in practice. Moreover, the understanding that poverty is constituted not only by material shortage but also by a shortage in symbolic capital, changes realization of rights from top to bottom and emphasizes therapeutic aspects. The article presents active realization of rights as a pro-active practice, which includes three components: defining problems in terms of rights; standing by the client’s side; linking the individual and structural. In addition, the article presents the roles of realization-of-rights social workers and case workers in relation to rights realization, and discusses the need for developing the field.

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## **The grassroots of women in need of public housing in Israel: The choice to struggle**

*Tamar Shwartz-Ziv<sup>1</sup>, Edith Blit-Cohen<sup>2</sup> and Mimi Ajzenstadt<sup>1</sup>*

In recent years, following the erosion of public housing services in Israel, we are witnessing a group of female grassroots activists in need of public housing, who refuse to accept the current policy and aim to create social change. This research gives voice to these activists and aims to understand their mobilization process, namely, the process in which they decide to join a collective agency and participate in the protest. The study uses qualitative-phenomenological research with a feminist perspective, and is based on 15 in-depth semi-structured interviews with women in need of public housing, who were active in the public-housing grassroots. The findings reveal that the women's mobilization process develops according to multiple experiences of homelessness and their relationships with the welfare state and its agents, as much as their exposure to social protest as a legitimate democratic resistance strategy. The research shows that the interaction between women in poverty and welfare state agents, constitutes a significant arena for the mobilization process. Moreover, it sheds light on the way in which intersectionality constructs meanings of homelessness and leads to the formation of collective action.

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## **Service users' perspectives of social treatment in social service departments: Differences between routine and poverty-aware treatments**

*Aila Brand-Levi<sup>1</sup> and Miki Malul<sup>1</sup>*

The paper focuses on service users who live in poverty, exploring their experiences and satisfaction with their treatment by family social workers in social services departments. Specifically, the study uses quantitative and qualitative tools to compare the perceptions of service users who are treated by unique programs of poverty-aware social work, and those who get the routine social service treatment. The sample included 235 service users, divided into four different groups: Two groups included service users who were treated by unique poverty-aware social work programs: 'Noshmim Lirvacha' and MAPA. The two other groups included service users in routine treatment – one group was treated by family social workers who were trained in poverty-aware social work, while the other was treated by social workers who did not have this kind of training. The participants were interviewed via phone, using a questionnaire with open- and closed-ended questions. Quantitative findings reveal an association between the frequency of encounters and satisfaction level with the relationship with social worker; they also reveal higher satisfaction levels among participants in the unique programs compared to those receiving routine treatment. Past relations with social services departments were not found to be associated with the level of satisfaction. Routine treatment by poverty-aware family social workers also yielded higher levels of satisfaction compared to routine treatment, being similar to that found in the unique programs. The qualitative analysis shed light on the experiences that affect satisfaction level. It was found that higher levels of satisfaction were associated with experiences where the social worker offered support, acknowledged needs, treated service users with respect, was active and initiating, and offered holistic treatment. The findings are analyzed in the discussion section in

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light of approaches highlighting the importance of relationships in social work, pointing out the research limitations and offering recommendation for future studies.

## **Between conservatism, managerialism and criticism: A struggle over professionalization in Israeli social work**

*Shachar Timor-Shlevin<sup>1</sup>*

The literature on professionalism in the public service indicates the dominance of two main discourses: conservatism, characterized by acceptance of the capitalist social structure as normative and appropriate, and the formulation of professional operation on adapting people into this order. The second is managerialism, promoting economic logic of cost-benefit calculations, cost reduction and efficiency. Opposing these common discourses, a critical standpoint has been gaining strength in the last few years, promoting social justice values and practical solidarity with marginalized people. Nonetheless, the literature hardly elaborates the ways these opposing professional standpoints act in a direct encounter in the field. Using the recent integration process of the critical paradigm "Poverty-Aware Social Work" by the Israeli welfare ministry, this study examines the ways this discursive encounter is operating. The research focused on daily experiences of street-level state caseworkers asked to implement Poverty-Aware Social Work, and has two main findings: A discursive coalition, combining conservative standpoints with managerialist conclusions, and the ways this discursive coalition connects to experiences of denial of recognition. Based on these findings, I elaborate how the encounter between the common discursive standpoints in the field and the critical practice of Poverty-Aware Social Work indicates a struggle over professionalization, and the specific impediments for critical practice at the discursive, inter-personal and institutional levels. The research contribution to practice will elaborate the steps and conditions that can sustain critical practice assimilation in the institutional system.

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