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Social welfare reform in Israel: Social workers' views on change, participation and professional values

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Abstract

In recent years, many western welfare states have undergone reforms in their social services. These reforms are intended to influence the work of social workers in the public sector, and depend largely upon workers' ability and willingness to implement them. The research presented in this article addresses the reform in Israeli Departments of Social Services through the perspective of the social workers tasked with its implementation. Drawing on recent developments of the Knowledge-Power-Politics Triad model, the relationship between aspects of social workers' support for the reform and their perceived and actual involvement in reform policy making, general attitude towards change, and professional inclinations was examined. Our sample consisted of 180 social workers employed in departments currently implementing the reform. The study's results emphasise the vital role employee participation plays in forming support for reforms' goals, and at the same time expose the complex interplay between developing a 'sense' of participation and participation's actual realisation. They offer several insights into the way social workers' support for reform is constructed, and not less so, regarding aspects of examining such support.

KEYWORDS

attitudes, empirical research, israel, participation and empowerment, reforms, social policy

1 | INTRODUCTION

Public Departments of Social Services (DSS) of local authorities are among the primary sources of welfare services provided in Israel, and work with the most vulnerable populations in Israeli society (Katan, 2012). In recent years, the Israeli Ministry of Social Affairs has been introducing a national reform that is expected to broadly affect the work in DSS. The goals of this reform, that is primarily described as an organisational change, include strengthening community services; constructing and reinforcing the role of case managers; instilling collaborative approaches; updating and redefining the functions of DSS; promoting outcome-based interventions; adapting services to the needs of different local authorities; and transitioning services to a more technologically advanced environment. Since its inception, the reform has been presented as consolidated and formed with the involvement of social workers, who are depicted as valuable and instructive partners in making decisions regarding the reform, on the local and national levels (Israeli Ministry of Social Affairs, 2011). Official documents describing the reform state that 'social workers' active involvement in its formation and implementation are key to its success' (Israeli Ministry of Social Affairs, 2015, p. 23). Consequently, several mechanisms have been installed to enable workers' involvement in the reform process (including online feedback platforms, advisory boards, joint think tanks and multiparty conventions; Israeli Ministry of Social Affairs, 2014). Today, the large majority of DSS in Israel are in the midst of effecting the reform. Through the enactment of this reform, Israel is acting in concordance with other western welfare states promoting reforms in their public social services based on similar principles, among them the Social Services Performance and Reform Program of the Australian Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, and the social work and social care reforms being sponsored by the UK Government and Department of Health.

The current study dealt with the reform in Israel from the perspective of the social workers tasked with its implementation. Specifically, it was intended to examine which factors, in themselves or while interacting with others, could predict social workers' support for the reform. The study's theoretical assumptions were derived from a development of the Knowledge-Power-Politics Triad model (Levin, 2012), commonly used to investigate the authenticity and actualisation of collaborative approaches between professionals and service-users (Levin, 2015), and recently employed also for the appraisal of public involvement initiatives (Levin, in progress). Using the Knowledge-Power-Politics Triad, collaborative professional processes can be critically assessed through addressing mutual sharing of knowledge and mutual sharing of power, within a defined political context. The current study's point of departure was the supposition that political structures work towards shaping relationships, be they between service-users and social workers, citizens and government, or employees and their organisations. As such, we found it relevant to examine attitudes formed among social workers towards the reform in Israeli DSS using the framework offered by this theory.

The Knowledge-Power-Politics Triad model suggests four possible types of collaboration. The first, called 'deceptive collaboration', occurs when knowledge is shared by both parties (in the current study, reform decision-makers and social workers) active in a political structure (the arena of Israeli public social services), but power of decision remains at the disposal of only one of them. The second, that occurs when power of decision is shared, but decision-making depends on lacking or no shared knowledge relevant to making the decision, also leads to 'deceptive collaboration'. When both knowledge and power are shared, 'actual collaboration' is achieved. And, when neither of them is shared, a counter-collaborative relationship is formed (for an extensive description of this, see Levin, 2012).

For the present study, two dependent variables were selected. Together, these variables dealt with social workers' attitudes towards the reform, as a function of their reaction to the information they had been exposed to regarding the reform and its expected implementation. Thus, these variables represented the 'Knowledge' aspect of the theoretical framework. Namely, these variables examined social workers' attitudes towards the content and nature of the current reform, and their general support for the need for carrying out reform in Israeli public social services.

In addition, four independent variables were assigned to our hypothesised model. The first variable was workers' general resistance to change. In this vein, Oreg (2003) examined whether, beyond being a situational response, resistance to change of any sort is a personality trait, and found that some individuals indeed tend to resist, avoid and undervalue change in general. His studies show this trait remains constant over time and in response to a variety of different types of change. Not surprisingly, employees displaying this inherent resistance to change have been found to also report greater difficulty adjusting to vast changes in their employing organisations (Oreg et al., 2008).

The second and third independent variables chosen for the current study tapped social workers' sense of participation in reform policy making processes, and their actual partaking in attempts to

What is known about this topic

- Employees' general resistance to change can negatively affect their support for major changes in the workplace.
- Employee participation positively affects support for major changes in the workplace.
- Social workers' professional attitudes affect their support for broad professional processes.

What this paper adds

- Aspects of social workers' participation in decision-making processes regarding reforms in social services play a crucial role in their support for such reforms.
- It is important to examine social workers' 'sense' of participation in decision-making processes separately from their actual involvement in such processes.
- Theory of service-user participation and public involvement can lend valuable insights to the study of social workers' participation in policy making.

influence such processes. These variables represented the 'Power' element of the Knowledge-Power-Politics framework, and reflected workers' actualised and perceived capacity to become partners in the effort to consolidate adequate and implementable reform policies. Traditionally, employee participation in policy making processes has been described as possibly achieving two main goals: a political goal of rebalancing power in organisations to prevent employee alienation; and a motivational goal of increasing employees' willingness to invest in the organisation, take initiative and gain a sense of belonging to it (Sagie & Aycan, 2003). Sometimes, however, employee participation can be misused to coopt employees or pacify criticism. For this reason, it is considered high only when employees are genuinely able to influence organisational decisions (Scott-Ladd & Chan, 2004). Allowing for the participation of employees in reforms and their actual involvement in decision-making processes are two distinct processes that nurture each other. Institutions that enable more participation encourage greater involvement in decision-making; in turn, employees who are more involved demand broader and more authentic opportunities to be included (Lines, 2004).

The forth independent variable chosen for this study, representing the 'Politics' element of the theoretical framework, examined social workers' views regarding the extent to which social work should at all influence policy making processes. Codes of ethics for the social work profession (e.g. NASW, 2017; Israeli Association of Social Workers (IASW) 2017), as well as its definition by the International Association of Schools of Social Work (2014), describe it as a profession aimed both at promoting wide-ranging social change and empowering individuals. Perhaps because of this broad range of activity and goals, along with the difficulty of achieving all of them simultaneously, there is profound disagreement over whether the primary aim of social workers should

be to bring about wide social change or to help individuals to adapt better to the existing social environment. This tension is yet considered one of the social work profession's most defining and dividing issues (Healy, 2014). As a result, social workers' professional orientations towards goals of their profession are often (e.g. Weiss-Gal, 2008), as well as in the current study, examined as ranging on a continuum between focusing on macro, social issues or on individuals' personal well-being.

Based on recent developments of the Knowledge-Power-Politics Triad framework (Levin, Gewirtz, & Cribb, 2017; Levin, in progress), our hypothesised model thus included variables that dealt with the knowledge, power and politics elements suggested in the original model, as well as with various levels of social workers' interfaces with the reform, including interactions between social workers and their employing organisations (represented in their attitudes towards change); interactions between workers and reform policy makers (represented in their perceived and actual involvement in the policy making process); and interactions between workers and their profession (represented in their professional attitudes).

In accordance, the hypotheses examined were as follows:

1. Negative correlations will be found between social workers' general resistance to change and their general support for reform at present, as well as between social workers' general resistance to change and their support for the specific content of the current reform.
2. Positive correlations will be found between social workers' perceived participation in developing and implementing the reform and their general support for reform at present, as well as between their perceived participation and support for the specific content of the current reform.
3. Positive correlations will be found between social workers' actual involvement in reform policy making processes and their general support for reform at present, as well as between their actual involvement and support for the specific content of the current reform.
4. Positive correlations will be found between social workers' support in the macro-oriented goals of the social work profession and their support for specific content of the current reform, as well as their general support for reform at present.

Our underlying research question was: what is the unique and combined contribution of the independent variables to social workers' support for the national reform in Israeli DSS?

2 | METHODS

2.1 | Sample and sampling

The sample consisted of 180 social workers in DSS undergoing reform. All social workers from a randomly selected list of DSS where the reform is being implemented were invited to participate in the study. DSS were selected by means of a computer program instructed to select

a third of all relevant DSS, assuming this would generate a sample of about 150–200 participants (considered satisfactory when examining research models similar to the one hypothesised in the current study, taking into account population size and allowing for a confidence level of 95% and a 5% margin of error; calculated using Raosoft® Inc. software). The final list of 102 DSS included proportionally suitable numbers of those serving Jewish and Arab populations, Jewish secular and religious populations, and populations in the centre of the country and the periphery. In all, 19 DSS refused to participate in the study due to a heavy workload or insufficient experience in implementing the reform. Among the final sample of participants (reflecting a response rate of 64%), most (80%) were women. Their age ranged between 26 and 70 years ($\mathrm{m} = 43$, $SD = 10.8$). The majority of respondents were Jewish (85%) and a minority Arab (12.8%). Participants held a variety of positions, the most common of which (67%) was case worker. They worked with different populations, including people with disabilities, elderly people and children at risk. Employment experience in DSS ranged from 6 months to 42 years ($\mathrm{m} = 11.28$, $SD = 9.16$). It would appear that except for age (which was slightly older), the demographic distribution in the current sample is similar to that of social workers in Israeli DSS documented in previous studies (Levin, in progress; Schwartz-Tayri, 2015). Participants rated their knowledge of the reform as an averaged 3.53 on a scale of 5 ($SD = 1.16$).

2.2 | Procedure

Data collection took place between August and October 2016. At this time, the reform had been underway for over 5 years, all social workers in DSS were aware of it and the vast majority of DSS were in advanced stages of its implementation. Social workers were invited to participate in the study via an e-mail from the research team, forwarded to them by their DSS manager. While this method of approaching them has its shortcomings, our experience with research on social workers in DSS had shown that this was the most effective way of reaching all social workers employed within a certain DSS. E-mails included a link leading to an online questionnaire, constructed by means of Goggle Docs®, thereby enabling completing the questionnaire anonymously. Prior to data collection, the study was approved by Tel Aviv University's IRB, as well as by the Research Division of the Israeli Ministry of Social Affairs. All participants had to indicate their informed consent to participate in the study on the first page of the questionnaire. Rules of ethics were strictly upheld throughout the study, and the rights of participants, including, but not limited to, anonymity were rigorously protected.

2.3 | Instruments

General support for reform at present was measured using a questionnaire based on Priester and Petty's (1996) Attitude to Change Questionnaire, translated into Hebrew by Goldratt (2000) and adapted for the current study to refer to the reform in DSS. The

questionnaire contains 15 statements to which each participant responded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Some items relate to positive attitudes (ɱ = 3.22; *SD* = 1.04; α = 0.93; e.g. 'The change generated by the reform will be of personal benefit to me'), and others to negative attitudes (ɱ = 2.14; *SD* = 0.9; α = 0.81; e.g. 'I don't understand at all why the reform is necessary'). Still others relate to ambivalent attitudes (ɱ = 2.48; *SD* = 0.81; α = 0.73; e.g. 'I see both positive and negative sides to the reform'). Factor analysis using Varimax rotation validated these three factors (Eigen Values = 1.270–5.905). A score for each factor was therefore calculated for each participant by averaging their responses.

Support for the specific content of the current reform (ɱ = 4.15; *SD* = 0.78; α = 0.78) was assessed by a 9-item questionnaire constructed specially for the current study. Each item relates to a particular principle of the reform (e.g. 'Basing interventions on a systematic and organised screening and evaluation process'). Principles were taken from a document obtained from the government administration responsible for the reform. Participants were asked to indicate the degree to which they support each of the elements on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*do not support at all*) to 5 (*strongly support*). Exploratory factor analysis showed that one dominant factor explained 55.08% of the variance in this variable. Consequently, a single score for this variable was calculated for each participant by averaging their responses. Higher scores indicate greater support for the specific content of the current reform.

General resistance to change (ɱ = 2.40; *SD* = 0.67; α = 0.86) was assessed by the Resistance to Change Scale (Oreg, 2003), translated into Hebrew and validated by Eizenberg (2004). This 17-item instrument relates to four dimensions of resistance to change: routine seeking; emotional reaction; short term focus; and cognitive rigidity. Each of the items contains a statement (e.g. 'Changing plans seems like a real hassle to me'), to which respondents indicated their agreement on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). In contrast to previous studies, here exploratory factor analysis revealed three factors, the first of which explained 41.03% of the variance. It was therefore decided to assign each participant a single score for this variable by averaging their responses, higher scores indicating greater resistance to change.

Perceived participation in reform policy making processes (ɱ = 2.71; *SD* = 1.13; α = 0.93) was assessed by means of a specially constructed questionnaire. This questionnaire employed concepts underlying existing instruments: Participation in Decision-Making (El-al Englert, 2009) and the classic scale for measuring participation in decision-making based on Likert's (1961, 1967) management systems. It consists of eight items relating to participants' sense that they were considered partners in reform policy making (e.g. 'I can influence the way in which decisions regarding the reform are made in my department'). Participants were asked to indicate the degree to which they agree with each item, marking their responses on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Exploratory factor analysis performed to examine the validity of this instrument showed that one dominant factor explained 68.13% of

the variance. A score for this variable was therefore computed for each participant by averaging their responses. A higher score indicates a greater extent of perceived participation in the process of reform policy making.

Actual involvement in reform policy making processes (ɱ = 2.78; *SD* = 1; α = 0.85) was assessed using a questionnaire that consists of nine items, representing nine actions possibly taken by social workers who were actively involved in reform policy making processes (e.g. 'I responded to the content of the reform in my online professional community'). This instrument was constructed in consultation with the reform administration, which supplied the research team with a list of the nine primary mechanisms by which social workers can influence the nature and implementation of the reform. Participants responded to each item on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*to a great degree*). Exploratory factor analysis showed that one dominant factor explained 46.42% of the variance in responses to this variable. Thus, a single score for this variable was calculated for each participant by averaging their responses, higher scores indicating greater actual involvement in the process of reform policy making.

Professional attitudes were assessed by means of a scale developed by Weiss (2003). The instrument consists of 15 items describing individual-oriented goals (ɱ = 4.18; *SD* = 0.69; α = 0.86; e.g. 'Enhancing people's ability to solve their problems') and society-oriented goals (ɱ = 4.16; *SD* = 0.57; α = 0.78; e.g. 'Increasing the exercise of people's civil rights') of the social work profession. Participants were asked to indicate the degree to which they believe the goal in each item is important, marking their responses on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not important at all*) to 5 (*very important*). Factor analysis with Varimax rotation validated the division into two factors (Eigen values = 1.682–5.882). Each participant was therefore assigned two scores by averaging their responses to the items in each dimension, higher scores indicating the attitude that each type of goal is important.

2.4 | Statistical analysis

To examine the research hypotheses, Pearson correlation tests were conducted. Next, to respond to our main research question, structural equation modelling (*SEM*) was performed using IBM® SPSS® Amos software, v. 24. *SEM* is a method that can be applied using a large number of statistical techniques, all aimed at assessing the extent to which observed data validate a suggested theoretical model (Lei & Wu, 2007). Ordinarily, *SEM* combines factor analysis and multiple regression analyses, and enables the examination of structural aspects of the relationship between obtained measurements and a latent construct (Bowen & Guo, 2011). In the present study, *SEM* was used to carry out paths analysis, based on the understanding that paths analysis enables the employment of diverse and alternative models to illustrate connections between observed variables (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004). This analysis does not prescribe any latent variables, but rather reflects the

relationships among variables that serve as predictors in an examined theoretical model (Kline, 2015). In this type of analysis, the quality of the correlation is reflected in five fit indices. The first three are the comparative indices NFI, TLI and CFI. NFI measures the discrepancy between the hypothesised model (default) and two extreme models: saturated (in a saturated model, everything correlates with everything, there are 0 degrees of freedom, and Chi-square = 0) and independence (in an independence model, nothing affects anything, everything is random, there are maximum degrees of freedom, and Chi-square is of maximum value). CFI and TLI also take into account degrees of freedom. On all three indices, a good enough fit is considered higher than 0.90, or more strictly, 0.95. The other two indices of quality of fit are RMSEA and Chi-square, which are both absolute, rather than comparative. RMSEA relates to the simplicity of the model, with a good enough fit considered less than 0.08, or even 0.04. Chi-square represents the discrepancy between the matrices*n, with goodness-of-fit reflected in a non-significant value that indicates a good replication of the matrix of correlations. The variables examined in the current analysis were subjected to a one-sample Kolmogorov–Smirnov test as to establish the nature of their distribution. This test rendered statistics between 0.057 and 0.179 for these variables, and most cases were found insignificant ($p > .05$), implying it is possible to assume that the data collected is normally distributed, and justifying the use of psychometric tests associated with *SEM*. As responding to all questions was a prerequisite for the online submission of a completed questionnaire, there were no missing data to account for.

3 | RESULTS

The results of Pearson correlation tests examining the current study's hypotheses appear in Table 1. To eliminate the possibility that age and knowledge of the reform might affect associations, these background variables were controlled for.

In view of the correlations found between the study variables, a structural model was constructed in which the exogenic variables were general resistance to change, perceived and actual participation in reform policy making processes, and individual-oriented and society-oriented professional attitudes. Initial analysis yielded satisfactory goodness-of-fit for this model (Chi-square = 34.73, *df* = 19, *p* = .15, NFI = 0.929, TLI = 0.934, CFI = 0.965, RMSEA = 0.68). However, as several of the associations were not significant, the model did not necessarily appear to provide an optimal description of the data. Alternative models were therefore constructed on the basis of data provided by the program's Modification Indices. Figure 1 presents the model that yielded the best goodness-of-fit (Chi-square = 7.77, *df* = 10, *p* = .651, NFI = 0.983, TLI = 1.01, CFI = 1, RMSEA = 0.000). Here again, experience in a DSS and knowledge of the reform were held constant to exclude the possibility that they would explain any associations found. Goodness-of-fit measures AIC and ECVI, which allow for a comparison between models, also

showed that the alternative model better explained the associations between the variables. AIC and ECVI values for the first model were 86.733 and 0.485, respectively, and for the alternative model 59.771 and 0.334, respectively.

The predictors in the model explained 37% and 26% of the variance in participants' general support for reform at present and support for the content of the current reform, respectively. In addition, positive associations were found between perceived participation in reform policy making processes and general support for reform at present (β = 0.71, *p* = .001), perceived participation and support for the specific content of the current reform (β = 0.44, *p* = .001), and society-oriented professional attitudes and support for the specific content of the current reform (β = 0.34, *p* = .003). Furthermore, a negative association emerged between actual involvement in reform policy making processes and general support for reform at present (β = −0.22, *p* = .018).

4 | DISCUSSION

The results of the current study provide a number of understandings regarding factors associated with social workers' consolidation of attitudes towards large-scale reforms that impact their work. No less importantly, they provide some generalisable insights into the way in which this process can be investigated. As predicted, the more social workers felt that they could share in reform policy making, the more they appreciated the need for reform at present and the greater their support for its content was. These findings are consistent with those of previous studies showing the benefits of employees' sense of participation in large organisational change processes, including increased commitment to the change, reduced resistance and even an improved ability to implement change in a beneficial and effective manner faithful to reformers' intentions (Greenberg & Baron, 2011). More so, research has shown that the most significant effect of employees' participation in policy making processes is a decrease in their resistance to change, whether they participate on a high level or are simply given the role of passive advisors (Cummings & Worley, 2015; Witt, Andrews, & Kacmar, 2000). Noteworthily, the association between perceived participation in reform policy making and support for the reform was not bidirectional. In other words, it was not that social workers who supported the reform expressed, a priori, a more positive attitude towards their participation. This, too, highlights the importance of affording social workers the sense that they are partners also in broad efforts of organisational change, such as national reforms.

Having said that, these findings beg some further reflection, as rather surprisingly, our study also found that the more social workers were *actually* involved in reform policy making processes, the less support they reported for carrying out a reform at present. Based on theoretical and empirical literature in the field of employee participation in policy making (e.g. Lines, 2004; Witt et al., 2000; Levin, et al., 2017), we predicted that not only perceived

TABLE 1 Pearson correlation matrix between the study variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 Positive general attitude to reform at present	1								
2 Negative general attitude to reform at present	−0.594**	1							
3 Ambivalent general attitude to reform at present	0.124	0.309**	1						
4 Support for the specific content of the current reform	0.473**	−0.258**	0.31	1					
5 Perceived participation in reform policy making processes	0.537**	−0.282**	−0.012**	0.265**	1				
6 Actual involvement in reform policy making processes	0.149*	−0.028	−0.006	0.100	0.450**	1			
7 Society-oriented professional attitudes	0.052	0.152*	0.110	0.312**	−0.066	0.184*	1		
8 Individual-oriented professional attitudes	0.026	0.013	0.081	0.246**	−0.078	0.047	0.613**	1	
9 General resistance to change	−0.015	0.292**	0.206**	0.045	0.059	−0.053	0.018	−0.043	1

*$p < .05$;

**$p < .01$ + Controlling for age and knowledge about the reform.
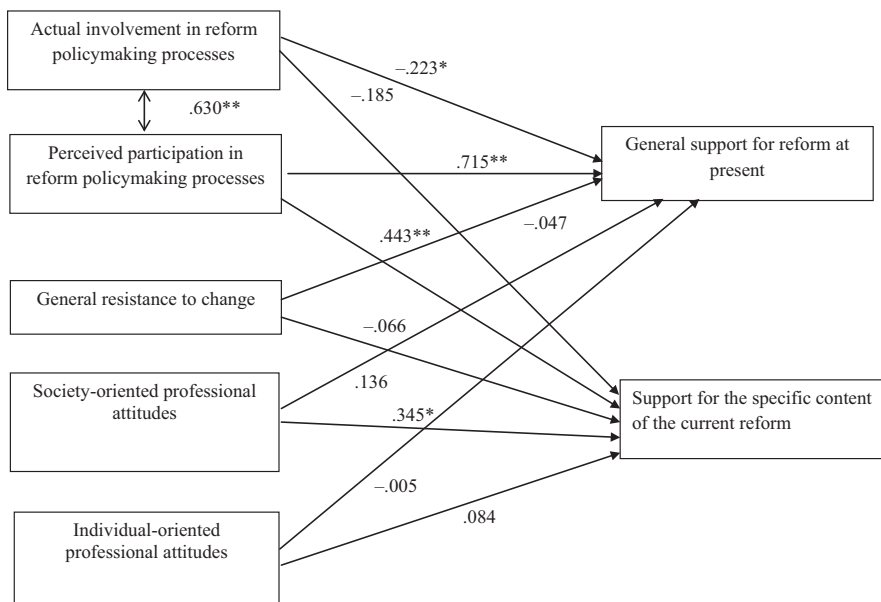
FIGURE 1 Ultimate observed model explaining support for social services reform. *$p < .01$ **$p = .001$

participation but also actual involvement would be associated with greater support for reform. One intuitive explanation for the contrary finding is that the more social workers were actually involved, the closer the encounters they experienced with the administrators, principles and details of the reform, and consequently, the more critical their attitudes towards it became. If so, employees who feel that their participation in policy making processes is enabled, but do not actually materialise their involvement, may regard the change as more satisfying and positive than those who have more detailed knowledge of it. It could be beneficial to examine deeper aspects of these processes, and gather additional possible explanations for this finding, through qualitative interviews with social workers.

Another finding that should be considered in this vein is that while the association between actual involvement in reform policy making and general support for reform at present was positive (albeit weak) in the initial correlative analysis, this changed in the multivariate analysis. In theoretical terms, this suggests that when other factors are disregarded, actual involvement might mistakenly be thought to correlate directly and positively with support for broad organisational changes; when in fact, it might hardly ever be advisable to examine actual involvement without reference to other

variables relevant to employee participation, such as perceived participation, and vice versa. At the very least, the model derived from our data indicates that actual involvement and perceived participation are highly distinguishable variables, and warrant independent examination.

What is more, in the current study, the association between actual involvement in reform policy making processes and general support for reform at present was moderated by perceived participation. At the same time, perceived participation mediated the association between actual involvement and support for the content of the current reform (for an explanation regarding the differences between moderating and mediating variables, see Baron & Kenny, 1986). This constitutes further evidence that a 'sense' of participation is more likely to result in employees' positive attitude to reform than actual involvement in policy making processes. Such findings hint towards the potential misuse of perceived participation by managers to garner employees' support for reforms. In the interest of more seamless transitions, they might employ strategies aimed at increasing the sense of participation rather than actually enabling employees to influence decisions. The inclusion of both perceived participation and actual involvement in policy making processes in future studies of employees' attitudes towards reform and other forms of organisational changes may help to uncover such instances.

As mentioned, sharing in reform policy making had a negative effect on social workers' support for reform in general, independent of their level of support for its specific content. This could suggest that while actual involvement influenced social workers' overall attitude to reform, their attitude to its content was influenced more by their professional principles than by their familiarity with the reform. The findings of the current study with relation to social workers' society-oriented professional attitudes somewhat confirm this proposition. This issue warrants further investigation in future studies.

Contrary to our hypothesis, general resistance to change was not associated with resistance to the reform, either the project itself or its content. Here, too, whereas resistance to change was positively associated with resistances to reform in initial correlative analyses, the association proved to be insignificant in the final observed model. Thus, although the findings support the notion that dispositional resistance to change can explain some of the response to organisational change, as reported in previous studies (Oreg et al., 2008), they also show that this explanation is not sufficient on its own and should be examined alongside alternative explanations, to expose more complex aspects of social workers' attitudes towards broad organisational changes.

Returning to the Knowledge-Power-Politics Triad framework, the findings of the current study suggest that in the case of the Israeli reform in DSS, an interesting sub-type of 'deceptive collaboration' can be identified. While the results of the present inquiry do not point to necessarily counter-collaborative processes, or to fully actualised collaboration, they do shed light on the unique organisational consequences of the encounter between receiving and imparting knowledge concerning reforms, perceived and actual sharing of power between policy makers and social workers, and the politics of broad changes in public social services. Mainly, the findings emphasise the fact that when examining collaborations in decision-making on a national, professional, organisational level, the complexities that characterise collaborative processes on more limited scales are enhanced, and the relationship between potential parties in the collaborative process is exposed as combining several factors that interplay towards achieving organisational goals. In such a complicated context, the intricacies that distinguish actual collaborations from deceptive or counter collaborations, include a range of explicit and implicit processes, which can only be addressed using research models that simultaneously deal with various interfaces between parties, as well as with diverse aspects of the meeting point of knowledge, power and politics.

The results of this study can help to expand the understanding concerning ways to institute reforms with the cooperation and support of the employees charged with their integration and implementation. A more holistic and multifaceted perception of the interface between workers who deal directly with the users of services and the decisions governing their work may lead to more effective reforms that are better suited to the characteristics and needs of personnel, without whom nothing can change. Also, the study offers insights into the way in which employees' attitudes to broad organisational changes can be examined, measured and conceptualised. These understandings represent an open invitation for future studies to explore the role of social workers in national public service reforms, employee participation and involvement in organisational change, and a range of aspects relating to the connections between attitudes to change, features of the change and features of employees. It would be of special interest to test the model proposed here in other contexts and other countries.

The contribution of the current study notwithstanding, some of its limitations should be considered when reviewing its conclusions. First, it is based solely on self-reports. Thus, the findings reflect only the attitudes of participants and cannot be said to represent objective data (e.g. regarding the actual extent of employee participation in policy making). Second, by its very nature, the study presents only the Israeli case. Third, some of the social workers who refrained from participating in the study cited the fear of arousing a negative response if they expressed criticism of professional processes. It is possible that those who chose not to take part are characterised by features or attitudes that relevantly distinguish them from the respondents in the eventual sample. Finally, the study is based mainly on hypotheses drawn from the existing academic literature. A study designed in cooperation with social workers in the public sector may lead to conclusions even more relevant to their work.

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