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Social Work Education in Israel

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The article starts with a brief description of the evolution of the social work profession in Israel. Israel's cultural diversity, its unique composition and history, and the enduring hostilities between Israel and its neighbours have, and still are, influencing social work practice in the nation and differentiate it from other Western countries. While the pedagogical framework of instruction is derived from the American literature, Israel is increasingly developing courses that are unique to the region. Though a multicultural approach to instruction is stressed upon, studies indicate that social work students need special training on culturally sensitive social work to address issues of racism, multiculturalism and psychosocial intervention in conflict-ridden zones when working with clients from different upbringings both in clinical and non-clinical settings.

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INTRODUCTION

Israel is a small country in the Middle East that was established as a democratic homeland for the Jewish people in 1948 (Weiss and Gal, 2003). Today, Israel has a growing population of just over eight million people, and Israeli society is composed of a wide range of cultural and religious backgrounds (Weiss and Gal, 2003). Israel is the world's only Jewish-majority nation. Over 75 percent of the current population comprises Jews, including the Ashkenazi Jews (who originate from Europe and the Americas) and Sephardic Jews (who originate from Spain, Portugal, North Africa and the Middle East) (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 2013). As a result of Israel's Law of Return, which allows every Jew to immigrate and become a citizen, the country has become a land of Jewish immigrants (Tsuda, 2010). Approximately a fourth (27 percent) of Israeli

Jews are Israeli-born, while the others are immigrants from Europe and the Americas (18.4 percent) and from Asia and Africa (8.6 percent) (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 2010).

Within the population that defines themselves as Jews, some consider themselves to be traditional, some secular, some religious Zionists, and some ultra-Orthodox or *Haredim* (Elazar, 1996). The ultra-Orthodox Jewish population is rather small at present, representing just around 10–15 percent of Israel's population (Dehan, 2013). Furthermore, roughly 20 percent of the country's total population is comprised of Arab citizens of Israel (Baum, 2010; Zeira and Auslander, 2010). Arab Muslims currently make up about 16 percent of the population and are considered Israel's largest religious minority (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 2010). Finally, about 2 percent of the population is Arab Christian and about 1.5 percent is Druze (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 2010). However, due to the high fertility rates of both the ultra-Orthodox and the Arab population, the proportion of these groups combined have been projected to reach about 40 percent of the total population by 2028 (Hurvitz and Brodet, 2008).

Since its establishment in 1948, Israel has been involved in seven wars, two Palestinian uprisings (*intifada)*, and numerous military conflicts, which are a part and parcel of the ongoing Israeli-Arab conflict (Ramon, Campbell, Lindsay, McCrystal, and Baidoun, 2006). Israel's cultural diversity, its unique composition and history, and the enduring hostilities between Israel and its neighbours have, and still are, influencing social work practice in the nation and differentiating it from other Western countries.

In this article we review and describe social work in Israel. We begin by addressing the origins of social work education in Israel, notable events in the history of social work education, and the social work curriculum offered at various levels of training. We then briefly describe social services in Israel, where many Israeli social workers are employed. In the remaining parts of the paper we focus on two salient issues to social work education and practice in Israel: social work in a multicultural society and social work in a political conflict zone.

SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION IN ISRAEL: PAST AND PRESENT

In 1931, the National Council, an executive body of the Jewish community under the rule of the British Mandate (1920–1948), established a department of social work (Weiss-Gal and Gal, 2011). Henrietta Szold, president of the Hadassah women's Zionist organisation of America, headed the new

department (Weiss-Gal and Gal, 2011). In 1934, the department opened the first (non-academic) formal training course for social workers (Spiro, Sherer, Korin-Langer, and Weiss, 1998; Weiss and Gal, 2003; Weiss, Spiro, Sherer, and Korin-Langer, 2004). In 1937, the Israeli Association of Social Workers (ISASW) was established to perform three main functions: 1) To act as a professional association, negotiating salaries and working conditions for social workers and helping workers find employment; 2) To set a code of ethics for the profession; and 3) To influence and advocate for social policy (Weiss and others, 2004; Nefesh B'Nefesh, 2014). Since its creation, graduates of a recognised social work training programme are granted eligibility to join (Weiss and others, 2004).

By the time the State of Israel was established in 1948, the two existing schools of social work had trained approximately 150 social workers, which at the time exceeded the needs of the country (Spiro, 2001). In 1958, the first university-based school of social work was established at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem (Spiro, 2001). The Paul Baerwald School of Social Work and Social Welfare offered a three-year programme leading to a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) degree. Today, having a BSW or Bachelor's in social work (BA) continues to provide students with state authorisation to engage in professional social work (Dehan, 2013). The decision to integrate social work studies into Israeli universities in the 1950s had significant implications for the development of the profession. First, it indicated that social work in Israel had achieved a professional status. Second, it reflected the awareness among social workers that university training was invaluable to their careers and to the profession (Cohen and Guttman, 1998).

In the 1950s, various trends in Israeli society, including the damage caused by the War of Independence of 1948, the mass immigration to Israel from neighbouring Middle Eastern countries, and the mass immigration of holocaust survivors from Europe, led to an increasing need for professional social workers (Spiro, 2001). Over the next two decades, academic schools of social work were established at four Israeli universities, with a fifth opening in 1982 (Weiss and Gal, 2003). Several master's level programmes opened in the 1970s, and later, Ph.D. programmes were added (Spiro, 2001; Cohen and Guttman, 1998; Weiss and others, 2004). Today, Israel has five university-based schools of social work—Ariel University, Bar Ilan University, Ben Gurion University, Hebrew University, Tel Aviv University, University of Haifa—and five colleges that offer social work degrees (Makaros and Weiss-Gal, 2012).

Several schools of social work have also opened specialised programmes for specific groups of students. One was a two-year intensive social work training programme targeted for members of *kibbutzim* (collective communities in Israel traditionally based on agriculture) (Silver, 1977). The programme was affiliated with the Social Work Training Institute of the Ministry of Social Welfare, and was intended to serve *kibbutz* communities. Unfortunately, the programme did not survive over time. Additionally, in 1997, the Hebrew University School of Social Work and Social Welfare initiated a two-year BSW programme for ultra-Orthodox women (*Haredi*) with a prior BA degree (Dehan, 2013; Garr and Marans, 2001). The programme was developed as part of the Council for Higher Education of Israel's (CHE) initiative to promote the accessibility of higher education for the *Haredi* population (Dehan, 2013). While the programme adhered to the school curriculum, classes were conducted on the campus of an ultra-orthodox women's seminary known as *Neve Yerushalyim* and the programme was designated as an official academic programme specifically for *Haredi* women (Garr and Marans, 2001; Dehan, 2013). The shortage of *Haredi* professionals at that time made it important for targeted professional social work training programmes for the *Haredi* population (Dehan, 2013). The programme's success contributed to the attention placed on social work education and higher education for the *Haredi* population, and led to an abundance of university-based social work programmes offered on *Haredi* campuses (Dehan, 2013). For instance, in 2006 the University of Haifa opened a three-year BSW programme for ultra-Orthodox (*Haredi*) women and men (who study separately), with a prior bachelor's degree from a recognised university (University of Haifa, 2014).

Social Work Faculty

At present, about 150 social work faculty members (including professors, associate professors, senior lecturers, and lecturers) are employed among the five universities alone. All full-time faculty members in the various social work schools and departments hold a doctorate degree (the majority of whom have a Ph.D., and some of whom have a Doctor of Social Work [DSW]). Adjunct professors and field instructors typically have a master's or a doctorate degree. Faculty members in social work programmes in Israel come from varied academic backgrounds, such as psychology, political science, law, and sociology.

Significant teaching and administration demands on faculty members, the need to create and translate measuring instruments to a different culture

and in a different language, and the political atmosphere, among other factors, make it difficult for social work faculty in Israel to invest their time and energy in research (Zeira and Auslander, 2010).

Nevertheless, social work research in Israel is conducted on a wide range of issues and in a variety of settings, including universities, research institutes, and government offices (Zeira and Auslander, 2010). A particularly positive development has been the growth of research groups and research centres at several Israeli universities (Spiro and others, 1998). Israeli academics have been contributing to social work research for a number of years and are among the most prolific contributors to the literature. Indeed, apart from the United States and Canada, Israeli academics in the field of social work were found to be the most widely published researchers in primary social work journals (Zeira and Auslander, 2010). Israel also publishes more on social work in Arab populations than any other nation and produces significant new knowledge that advances the field in Israel and abroad (Zeira and Auslander, 2010). The academic requirements for Israeli researchers emphasise publication in foreign, English-language journals, and so, their contribution to the advancement of teaching and practice within Israel is more modest than could be expected.

PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The pedagogical framework for social work instruction in Israel today is derived from the American literature (Gal and Weiss, 2000). Indeed, the majority of the first generation of social workers in Israel were either trained in the United States or taught the social work model used in the United States (Cohen and Guttmann, 1998; Gal and Weiss, 2000). As a result, North America has long been the main influence on the social work training curriculum and structure in Israel (Gal and Weiss, 2000; Spiro, 2001). Over time, and with the establishment of Ph.D. programmes in Israel, there has been an increase in the proportion of faculty members who completed their studies in Israel, but they too usually have a strong North American orientation. This relationship to North America has contributed to the international standing of Israeli academics, as reflected in their publications, participation in conferences, and faculty exchanges. However, it has been argued that a "distinctively Israeli organising framework for social work education is lacking" (Prager, 1985: 129). This orientation has led to a certain degree of provinciality, and a tendency to ignore developments in social work and social work education in other parts of the world (Spiro, 2001).

Research conducted in Israel reveals a dominant inclination among students to work with individuals, families, or small groups rather than with society at large (Weiss and Gal, 2003). Student preference for micro practice rather than macro practice appears to be connected to the recent increase in the numbers of social workers in private practice (Weiss and Gal, 2003). One possible explanation for this is the gap between social work's macro-level ideology and the actual training, which primarily focuses on individual-centered practice (Buchbinder, Eisikovits, and Karnieli-Miller, 2004; Kaufman, Segal-Engelchin, and Huss, 2012; Gal and Weiss, 2000; Spiro, 2001; Weiss-Gal and Gal, 2008;). Although social work training programmes in Israel emphasise "the person in the environment" approach (Makaros and Weiss-Gal, 2012), it is seldom implemented in their practice (Kaufman and others, 2012; Weiss-Gal, 2008). As such, programmes that include multi-method practical and academic courses are needed to prepare students to engage in both micro and macro practice (Kaufman and others, 2012).

Apart from the tendency toward micro practice, a number of studies show that social work students in Israel are not inclined to work with marginalised and excluded clients (for example, individuals who are poor, elderly, or have disabilities) (Kaufman and others, 2012; Krumer-Nevo and Weiss, 2006). These findings are troubling since social work has been traditionally committed to these clients (Krumer-Nevo and Weiss, 2006). Notably, academic programmes for social work in Israel increasingly understand the need to deepen social work students' commitment to social change (Weiss and Gal, 2003). Indeed, there have been proposals of new training models that would increase awareness, knowledge and skills in these areas (Weiss and Gal, 2003). Nevertheless, social work practice has not truly changed at its core. A committee from the Council for Higher Education of Israel (CEH) addressed this matter, noting too many outdated approaches to social work practice and not enough implementation of new findings (Council for Higher Education, 2007). The committee also noted insufficient differentiation between undergraduate and graduate training, and an ongoing shortage of funding due to a lack of recognition of the uniqueness of social work as an applied profession (Council for Higher Education, 2007).

Curriculum

The curricula in the *undergraduate level* programmes combine academic instruction with supervised fieldwork, enabling students to integrate

theoretical and practical knowledge (Gilbar, Ben-Zur, and Gil, 2003). The primary aim of social work training at the undergraduate level is to provide students with a solid knowledge base in various fields of social work, experience with social science research methods, as well as hands-on training in the field (Gilbar and others, 2003). The curriculum at the University of Haifa, for instance, includes introductory courses in the social sciences, theoretical social work courses, courses in social work intervention skills, and methodology courses, such as research methods and statistics (Gilbar and others, 2003). Each of the five existing university-based programmes also require fieldwork training during the undergraduate degree programme (Cohen and Guttmann, 1998), which is an integral part of the three-year social work curriculum. Most commonly, agency practitioners who receive an official status as 'field teachers', as well as faculty members, oversee field training that is based on a university-developed curriculum (Gal and Weiss, 2000; Weiss and Gal, 2003). Many of these practitioners, especially those in senior positions in their agencies, now have advanced degrees and are often formally acknowledged as experts in their field. It would be beneficial to consider transferring much of the practical training from the agencies in the field, to the university. Such a model, if implemented carefully and with consideration to the curriculum required, could strengthen the links between academic instruction and those with experience in the field, but has yet to be employed by any of the Israeli schools.

A BA in social work (BSW) is a prerequisite for admission to a master's of social work (MSW) programme in Israel, in addition to two years of employment as a social worker (Buchbinder and others, 2004). Most Ph.D. programmes in social work require a master's degree as a prerequisite to enrollment. However, the Hebrew University, for instance, has recently implemented a direct Ph.D. track that admits a handful of students immediately after their Bachelor's degree (Hebrew University, 2014). The *graduate level* programmes strive to cultivate leadership and advanced practice roles in the profession (Gilbar and others, 2003). Graduate training in social work at the master's level involves two years of coursework. Many programmes offer specialisations that provide focused knowledge in particular populations and areas of social work (for example, health, trauma, administration and social policy, social work and corrections, children and families, and clinical social work). At the doctoral level, students are engaged in individualised programmes of study and research to prepare them for a future of leadership, teaching, and publication.

At both the undergraduate and graduate levels, Israeli social work programmes encourage interdisciplinary collaboration within the university and, to a larger extent, collaboration with the community (Bronstein, Mizrahi, Korazim-Korösy and McPhee, 2010). In addition, research is an important part of social work education in Israel. Social work students learn skills in research designs and methodologies and many conduct their own research projects. All Ph.D. students and many MSW students are engaged in original research projects for their theses and dissertations (Spiro and others, 1998).

Practicing Social Work in Israel

The Ministry of Welfare and Social Services in Israel creates policy, initiates legislation, enacts regulations for the operation of social services, and supervises the services offered by public and private organisations (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013). The *Social Welfare Law of 1958* mandates that all municipalities and local authorities in Israel maintain a department of social services. Over the years, the ISASW successfully lobbied to establish the principle that only academically trained social workers would be able to fill social work positions (Weiss and others, 2004). This principle was given legal backing with the passage of the *Social Workers Act of 1996*, which represented a substantial change in the professional status of social work in Israel (Doron, Rosner, and Karpel, 2008). The Act has also led to the anchoring of the rules of ethics in a set of regulations [*The Social Workers Regulations (Rules of Professional Ethics), 5759 – 1999 (3)*]. These regulations which apply to all social workers in Israel, unlike the ISASW's code of ethics of 1994 (a revised and enlarged version of the first ISASW code of ethics published in 1978) (Weiss-Gal and Gal, 2011), which applies only to its members.

As a welfare state, the government of Israel ensures that every citizen receives acceptable standards of health, education, housing, employment, and income. Implementation of these political rights through intervention and allowances is deemed a collective responsibility of the Israeli government (Cohen, Mizrahi, and Yuval, 2011). From the 1940s to the mid 1970s, the Israeli welfare state mostly corresponded to the social-democratic orientation. However, since the mid-1970s, the nation has followed the neo-liberal orientation, which proposes that the government should limit its intervention. This was due to structural changes, globalisation, an economic crisis, and the rise of individualistic values in Israeli society (Cohen and others, 2011). As part of these ideas, Israel's public sector has

been undergoing a process of privatisation in recent decades, which has also affected the social welfare system (Doron and Karger, 1993). More and more services are now provided by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or for-profit businesses. As a result, wealthier individuals now have increased access to improved, high-quality services. However, low socio-economic status individuals are left with few options from which to choose (Doron and Karger, 1993).

Furthermore, data on social workers in Israel is scant. According to the Israeli Association of Social Workers (ISASW), in 2011, there were approximately 15,000 social workers in Israel, 89 percent of whom were women (ISASW, 2011). Data from a convenience sample of 411 social workers from 27 social service agencies in Israel suggested that a majority of social workers in Israel were married (77.6 percent), Jewish (85.1 percent), and secular (64.7 percent) (Weiss-Gal and Gal, 2008). Weiss-Gal and Gal (2008) also found that 73.3 percent of Israeli social workers had a bachelor's degree and the remaining 27 percent had an MSW or a Ph.D.

In addition, most social workers are employed in services headed by other social workers and report experiencing a high degree of professional autonomy (Krumer-Nevo, Weiss-Gal and Levin, 2011). Social workers in Israel work with a variety of populations such as persons with mental illnesses and their families; at-risk children and youth; hospital patients and their families; the elderly; individuals who are addicted to drugs, alcohol or gambling; immigrants; trauma and abuse victims; and victims of terror (Krumer-Nevo and others, 2011). In 2011, the ISASW reported that 9,000 social workers were employed in the public sector, while the remaining 6,000 social workers were employed in not-for profit organisations and private entities (ISASW, 2011).

Like other countries, the average salary of social workers in all three sectors is typically low, especially in the beginning of an individual's career (Shetreet and Woolf, 2013). In addition, in many social work jobs, few benefits, high turnover, and lack of ongoing training are the norm (Preminger, 2013). According to a self-administered survey of social workers employed at 15 Arab and Jewish Human Services Departments, work satisfaction of Israeli social workers is largely determined by their relationships with their supervisors and colleagues, opportunities for promotion, comfortable work environment, and their ethnicity (in this case Jewish) (Abu-Bader, 2000). Moreover, according to a subsequent report of the same study, though female social workers reported fewer opportunities for promotion, lower quality of supervision, and higher workload than their

male counterparts, the results did not indicate significant job satisfaction differences based on gender (Abu-Bader, 2005).

SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION AND PRACTICE IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

Social work education and practice in Israel is taking place in an increasingly multicultural, multi-religious, and multiracial milieu. As a welfare state, Israel recognises the significance of promoting the quality of life of all its citizens. Thus, social workers are encouraged to express cultural sensitivity and acceptance, and to maintain a non-judgmental attitude when serving clients (Band-Winterstein and Freund, 2013). Students and practitioners are expected to familiarise themselves with their clients' cultures and to take cultural norms and values into account (Baum, 2010).

One way for social work educators to teach their students how to embrace diversity in their careers is by teaching culturally sensitive social work (Nadan and Ben-Ari, 2013). Research from Israel suggests that cultural-competence training enhances cultural self-awareness, gives them insight into the centrality of immigration in the lives of Israeli immigrants, and makes them more empathic to their clients' experiences, challenges, and cultural diversity (Mirsky, 2012). However, while social work schools in Israel are likely to discuss culturally sensitive social work practice (Mirsky, 2013), it is not yet a dominant training approach (Roer-Strier and Haj-Yahia, 1998). Indeed, qualitative research suggests that Israel is far from implementing a multicultural approach to instruction (Schiff and Katz, 2007). Baum (2007; 2010) specifically found that social work students expected to have difficulty empathising with individuals with different political beliefs. This finding further indicates that special training for social work students is necessary to ensure they are well suited to work with clients from different upbringings both in a clinical and non-clinical setting (Baum, 2007; 2010).

Nonetheless, if social work students are not placed with clients from their own cultural background, they may return to their communities of origin without the specialised knowledge necessary to help their clients (Schiff and Katz, 2007; Zoabi and Savaya, 2012). Schiff and Katz (2007) for example, found the majority of Arab social work students complete their fieldwork requirements in predominantly Jewish populations, leading them to alter their attitudes, values, and expectations to mainstream Jewish culture.

Apart from teaching culturally sensitive social work, the literature suggests a need to ensure sufficient representation of the various groups among the faculty and student body. Many of the cultural groups of Israel are represented among the social work student body, and over the years, the number of Arab students in particular has grown (Schiff and Katz, 2007). In addition, several services have been created for Arab students at the schools of social work, such as an outreach programme for Bedouins, special advisors for Arab students, and support groups. However, these services do not address issues of racism and multiculturalism among the general population of social work students (Roer-Strier and Haj-Yahia, 1998).

Moreover, as previously mentioned, two groups (members of *kibbutzim* and *Haredim*) have been the focus of specific training programmes (Roer-Strier and Haj-Yahia, 1998). A sustained effort to recruit students who were immigrants from the former USSR and Ethiopia has also been made. For the latter group, this has sometimes required a degree of affirmative action, and special programmes to ensure their success. An effort has similarly been made to increase the numbers of students from economically disadvantaged communities and to help them with their academic requirements (Ivri, 2007)

Israeli social work practice—like Israeli social work education— emphasises a multicultural worldview (Band-Winterstein and Freund, 2013). Since culture fundamentally affects the ways in which individuals understand the world, as well as how they behave in different situations, social workers in Israel need to employ culture-specific intervention strategies when working with clients (Haj-Yahia, 1995; Al-Krenawi and Graham, 2000; Zoabi and Savaya, 2012).

Semi-structured interviews with Palestinian social workers living and educated in Israel, for example, revealed that these professionals work to 1) create a client-therapist discourse based on mutual understanding; 2) help clients avoid punishment by their family and community; and 3) help clients cope with their problems in a way that is familiar and relevant to them (Zoabi and Savaya, 2012).

For example, given the importance of faith in Palestinian culture, social workers may help their clients cope with problems by emphasising G-d as a source of strength, and by attributing tragedies to fate (Zoabi and Savaya, 2012). Importantly, Palestinian social workers who have served in their communities, have in their toolkit both the cultural strategies they

have gained on the job, as well as Western intervention strategies they learned during their training (Zoabi and Savaya, 2012). This means they can employ a variety of intervention strategies depending on the individual and his or her situation and experiences.

Notably, as various cultural groups have become more exposed to secular society, many individuals are more open to working with social workers outside of their communities. With an increased need for social workers in particular communities within Israel (Band-Winterstein and Freund, 2013), this makes it possible for social workers from outside a given community to provide much-needed assistance.

Still, it is clear that social workers from inside a community (for example, a *Haredi* social worker serving in a *Haredi* community), and those from outside a community (for example, a non-*Haredi* social worker serving in a *Haredi* community) come to the therapeutic encounter from different starting points (Band-Winterstein and Freund, 2013). For instance, data based on in-depth interviews with social workers intervening with *Haredi* clients revealed that *Haredi* social workers are already familiar with the cultural codes of their community, while non-*Haredi* social workers have to learn the specific 'language' of *Haredi* culture and use that language during their encounters with their *Haredi* clients (Band-Winterstein and Freund, 2013).

Social Work in a Political Conflict Zone

In addition to being a land of diversity, Israel, as aforementioned, is a land with a history of both political uncertainty and political conflict. This reality has an effect on social work professionals and the clients they serve, and in turn, on social work practice (Ramon, 2004; Baum, 2006; Nadan and Ben-Ari, 2014).

In the aftermath of a national emergency, social workers in Israel are tasked with providing psychosocial care for victims and their families, crisis intervention, and case management (Baum and Ramon, 2010). Generally, Israeli Jewish and Arab social workers work side-by-side in mixed Arab- Jewish cities, but not in exclusively Jewish or Arab residences (Baum and Ramon, 2010).

Israeli social workers often live in the same community as their clients and experience the same traumatic events as those they serve (Nuttman-Shwartz and Dekel, 2009; Dekel and Baum, 2010; Nadan and Ben-Ari, 2014). They are tasked with helping others cope with an event even when

the same event was personally threatening or harmful (Nadan and Ben-Ari, 2014). Thus, these social workers find themselves in what has been termed a 'shared traumatic reality' with their clients (Nuttman-Shwartz and Dekel, 2009). Social workers in this situation report greater work-related stress, emotional pressure, and conflict between work and professional roles (Nadan and Ben-Ari, 2014). Of note is that, given their relative inexperience and vulnerability, social work students may experience significantly higher levels of anxiety and exhaustion than professionals (Nadan and Ben-Ari, 2014).

Baum (2004), for example, found that in response to the Second *Intifada*, which erupted in October 2000, students mentioned doubt about their professional competence, a need to carve out personal space to cope, and worry about their ability to do fieldwork under terror. However, research has also shown that violent political conflict may offer an opportunity for growth. Social workers who have served during a traumatic political conflict expressed increased skills and knowledge, greater solidarity, greater team cohesion, and increased emergency and crisis intervention knowledge (Baum and Ramon, 2010). Still, Israeli social work students undoubtedly need preparation to work in conflict-ridden areas.

Unfortunately, though, despite its relevance to social work research in general, and Israeli social work research in particular, political conflict research as it relates to social work education and practice is limited. Perhaps because of this, conflict-related issues are seldom addressed in students' coursework and few attempts to train students to work in political conflict zones have been documented (Nadan and Ben-Ari, 2014).

Indeed, researchers Nadan and Ben-Ari (2014) conducted 25 in-depth interviews with social work educators, finding that social work educators did not deliberately address political conflict and its implications with students. Rather, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict organically came up in class discussions when discussing current events or through the interactions of Arab and Jewish students. The researchers noted that although bringing up the political conflict may overwhelm or distress educators and students, this discomfort can give students new perspectives, new abilities to reflect on challenging situations, self-awareness, and skills to work in areas of conflict (Nadan and Ben-Ari, 2014).

Educators should allow traumatic events to be part of class discussions and individual experiences to add to students' professional socialisation (Baum, 2004). They should also make a concerted effort to enable minority

students to feel comfortable in the classroom and fieldwork environments (Baum, 2004).

CONCLUSION

Social work in Israel has a relatively short history. Nonetheless, since 1931 the profession has grown and developed considerably, and in contrast to many other countries, Israeli social work has achieved a level of professionalism that resembles that of the more traditional professions (Doron and others, 2008).

Alongside the successes, professionals recognise future challenges that Israeli social work still needs to face. Social work education and training needs to equally emphasise both micro and macro practice. As an integral component of this challenge, social workers in Israel need to re-embrace their roles as advocates for justice, equality and human rights and, first and foremost, their commitment to those who are disadvantaged, marginalised, and excluded.

Two decades ago, an attempt was made to forecast some of the characteristics and challenges of social work in Israel in the early 21st century (Weiss-Gal and Levin, 2011). One such projection was the possible increase in resources following a successful peace process between Israel and its neighbours, an expectation that unfortunately has not come to fruition. Instead, social workers now more than ever, must train to handle emergencies and traumas. Nonetheless, as above-mentioned, the topic of social work in conflict-ridden zones has not received sufficient attention in social work training and education today.

Other developments that were forecast include dealing with immigration waves and training students in culturally sensitive practice. Unfortunately, today this still remains a challenge for social work education and practice in Israel.

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