



**Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute**  
Engelberg Center for Children and Youth



**Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services**  
Research, Planning, and Training Division

# **Work with Families by Social Services: Outcomes, Intervention Strategies, and the Role of Professional Social Workers**

A Review of the Literature

Hester Fass ♦ Miriam Cohen-Navot

The review of the literature was written at the initiative of the Research, Planning, and Training Division, as part of the “Outcome Initiative”, and the Personal Social Services Division of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services

The report was written with the funding of the Research, Planning, and Training Division



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## Executive Summary

In Israel, social services are delivered at the local municipal level by social service departments that are funded by the national Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services. These departments provide a range of services to the most vulnerable populations in Israeli society, including people living in poverty and social exclusion, children and youth at risk, families in crisis and socioeconomic difficulties, women suffering from family violence, lone elders, people with disabilities and so forth.

In 2010, the Ministry initiated a major reform program to address growing concerns about the delivery of local services. Recent studies had found that local social service departments narrowly focused their services on individuals rather than on larger family units (Lavie, 2008). As well, previous research highlighted an overall lack of outcome-based planning at departmental and worker levels (Ofek, 2009).

The Ministry's reform program proposed adopting a family-centered approach to service delivery through the creation of a new position of “family social worker” within local social service departments to assess family needs and to develop and manage coordinated care plans across local social services.

To support the development of a family-centered approach and as part of the Ministry's Outcome Initiative, the Research, Planning and Training Division, along with the Personal Social Services Division asked the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute to prepare a literature review of family-centered approaches in other countries. The review examined three areas of knowledge and practice:

- ◆ Outcome Measurement (OM) tools for families
- ◆ Intervention strategies with families in social services
- ◆ The roles of social workers in their work with families

***Outcome measurement tools.*** The review of the OM tools revealed the importance of evaluating a range of outcomes including: access to basic necessities, improved parental functioning and practices, improved child functioning (behavior, development, health), and patterns of social relationships. The review found that the particular outcomes being measured are often influenced by the type of service in which the intervention occurs. Thus, for example, in Child Welfare Services in the U.S., the outcome areas of child welfare and parenting skills were prominent.

The review classified OM tools according to a set of criteria (such as the level of comprehensiveness or the method of data collection), and identified two tools that met most criteria.

***Intervention strategies with families in social services.*** The examination of intervention strategies in other countries revealed that, like the proposed reform in Israel, several other

countries have initiated policy changes towards a more family-centered approach. In the United States family-centered practices have developed particularly in relation to child welfare services rather than other specific services. In contrast, the Think Family reform in the UK calls for adopting family-centered practice across all social services, including those addressing families caring for elderly or disabled relatives.

***The roles of social workers in their work with families.*** Information from the National Association of Social Workers in the United States revealed two areas of specialized knowledge, skills and practice that are relevant to working with families.

The first area is children, youth and family work, which is found mainly in child welfare services and which combines direct treatment with advocacy.

The second area is case management, which focuses on assessing needs, planning interventions, coordinating services, and actively assisting the clients in accessing the services and advocating for them when necessary.

***Relevance of findings to Israeli policy.*** The information emerging from the review reveals a number of significant issues to be considered in developing the role of family social workers in Israel. These include:

- ◆ How to best apply a family-centered approach throughout the social service system
- ◆ How to find the right integrated balance between direct treatment and case management
- ◆ How to raise the professional status of the family social worker, and reduce worker burnout and staff turnover
- ◆ How to promote multi-system cooperation across government agencies to maximize service delivery to families

The findings of the review were presented to senior staff at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services and will serve the continued formulation and implementation of the reform, and the construction of OM tools in the work with families.

## **References**

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