



January 2005

# Does Social Work Education Have an Impact on Social Policy Preferences? A Three-Cohort Study

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## Recommended Citation

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Reprinted from *Journal of Social Work Education*, Volume 41, Issue 1, 2005, pages 29-47.  
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# Does Social Work Education Have an Impact on Social Policy Preferences? A Three-Cohort Study

## **Abstract**

This article examines the impact of social work education on the social policy preferences of social work students through a panel study of three cohorts of students at three universities in two countries - the United States and Israel. The findings of the study indicate that though the initial policy preferences of the students at the beginning of their studies at the three universities differed, by the end of their studies, the students' preferences were similar and supportive of the welfare state model.

## **Comments**

Reprinted from *Journal of Social Work Education*, Volume 41, Issue 1, 2005, pages 29-47.

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# DOES SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION HAVE AN IMPACT ON SOCIAL POLICY PREFERENCES? A THREE-COHORT STUDY

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This article examines the impact of social work education on the social policy preferences of social work students through a panel study of 3 cohorts of students at universities in 2 countries—the United States and Israel. The findings of the study indicate that though the initial policy preferences of the students at the beginning of their studies at the 3 universities differed, by the end of their studies the students' preferences were similar and supportive of the welfare state model.

DESPITE A LONG LASTING and often vigorous debate over the goals of social work (Haynes, 1998), it would appear that there is now wide concurrence that the profession in different countries has a dual focus (Healy, 2001) and is concerned with both individuals and society (Lynn, 1999; Witkin, 1999). As such, it is generally agreed that one of the central and indeed unique characteristics of social work continues to be its commitment to the furthering of social justice, construed as ensuring more equal access to economic and social resources for all members of society (Figueira-McDonough, 1993; Haynes & White, 1999; Stuart, 1999; Wakefield, 1993). Retrenchment in contemporary welfare states and the impact of globalization have only served to underscore the relevance of this goal (Reisch & Jarman-Rohde, 2000).

In order to further a social justice objective, social workers and their representative organizations are generally expected to engage in

a variety of policy-related activities that seek to shape social welfare policy. These policies aim to achieve a greater degree of redistribution of social wealth and to enhance the role of the state in providing social protection to those in need and in offering an adequate economic, social, and psychological safety net of services (Jansson, 1990; Schneider & Netting, 1999; Wakefield, 1988). Indeed, social work's commitment to principles of social justice, such as redistribution and the upholding of social rights and to social and political advocacy, is unequivocally underscored in formal documents, such as the International Federation of Social Workers' recently adopted definition of the profession (International Federation of Social Workers, 2000) and the codes of ethics of social worker associations throughout the world (Banks, 2001). For example, the code of ethics of the National Association of Social Workers (1999) states that: "Social workers



should engage in social and political action that seeks to ensure that all people have equal access to the resources, employment, services, and opportunities they require to meet their basic human needs and to develop fully. Social workers should be aware of the impact of the political arena on practice and should advocate for change in policy and legislation to improve conditions... and promote social justice" (Sec. 6.04). In a similar vein, the Israel Association of Social Workers' (1994) code of ethics notes: "the social worker is committed to supporting policies and legislation that seek to improve social conditions and further social justice" (chapter 2, A-6).

If social work as a profession does indeed seek to advance goals of social justice and social reform, surely it is incumbent upon social workers to avoid adhering to ostensibly "neutral," nonideological positions vis-à-vis the state and its involvement in social issues. Clearly a profession devoted to social justice must be comprised of practitioners broadly supportive of state activities intended to curb the negative excesses of a market economy and to safeguard social rights, especially those of the weakest and least protected groups in society (Abramovitz, 1993, 1998; Figueira-McDonough, 1993). Policy practice, in particular, is seen as a form of social work intervention that must be firmly grounded in this type of value system (Iatridis, 1995).

Currently, many fear that the policy practice role of the profession has been undermined in the face of a growing lurch toward individual treatment and private practice. Over the last decades, numerous calls have been made to strengthen the commitment of social work practitioners to the goal of social

justice (Abramovitz, 1998) and to encourage the involvement of social workers in policy practice activities (Haynes & Mickelson, 1986; Schneider & Netting, 1999; Specht & Courtney, 1994). Much attention has been directed toward the role of the professional training system in this context (Keller, Whittaker & Burke, 2001; Rocha, 2000; Saulnier, 2000). Working from the assumption that a certain ideological infrastructure is required of individuals seeking to participate in efforts to further social work's policy goals, pressure has been brought upon social work education programs to adopt curricula that will ensure that graduates entering the field will be equipped with a value system consistent with the social justice objectives of the profession (Fisher, 1995; Witherspoon & Phillips, 1987). This study seeks to examine whether social work education can indeed bring its students to heightened support for the welfare state model.

### **Social Policy Preferences of Social Workers and Social Work Students**

The perceived "crisis of the welfare state" has led to a wide-ranging effort to identify public attitudes toward the welfare state and various aspects of social policy over the last two or three decades (Coughlin, 1980; Papadakis, 1992). Studies have focused upon issues such as the role of the state in welfare provision and redistribution and the preferred levels of social expenditure (Bean & Papadakis, 1998; Macleod, Montero, & Speer, 1999; Taylor-Gooby, 2001), support for the idea of social insurance (Gelissen, 2000), attitudes toward universal and selective services (Kangas, 1995), and views on the impact of welfare upon recipients, particularly upon dependency and motivation to



work (Garin, Molyneux, & Divall, 1994; Weaver, Shapiro, & Jacobs, 1995).

By contrast, much less is known about the social policy preferences of social workers. Though social workers are generally assumed to hold liberal attitudes toward the welfare state and to favor state involvement in furthering social justice, empirical support for this claim is scarce, often indirect, and not necessarily conclusive. While human service professions (among them social workers) have been found to hold more liberal attitudes on social spending and politics, they appear to be more conservative with regard to personal morality issues and the work ethic (Brint 1984, 1985; Hendrickson & Axelson, 1985). Reeser and Epstein (1987), in a study of change in the attitudes of social workers toward poverty and social action between the late 1960s and early 1980s, found that social workers adhered to a liberal conception of the causes of poverty but were less committed to an activist goal orientation for the profession than in the past. Littrell and Diwan (1998), however, found that social workers preferred work programs over those that offered only cash grants to welfare recipients.

Similarly, the data on the social policy preferences of social work students is limited. Though student views on poverty and its causes have been the subject of a number of studies (Crynes, 1977; Grimm & Orten, 1973; Macarov, 1981; Schwartz & Robinson, 1991; Sun, 2001), very little research has sought to identify the types of social policies that students actually prefer (Littrell & Diwan, 1998; Macarov, 1981). In a study of the attitudes of social work students in three countries at the beginning of their education process, Weiss et al. found that divergence in the degree of support for various aspects of

social policy emerged between different student groups. Support for a major role of the state in dealing with social problems was forthcoming but it varied between mediocre and enthusiastic (Weiss, Gal, Cnaan, & Majlaglic, 2002).

### **The Impact of Social Work Education**

An examination of the impact of social work education upon a wide range of variables has been the subject of a significant body of research. Among them are values or ethical judgments (Abbott, 1988; Bargal, 1978; Brown, 1970; Haynes & Varley, 1965; Judah, 1979; Korerin, 1977; Landau, 1999; Varley, 1963; Wodarski, Pippin & Daniels, 1988), attitudes toward social justice issues (Enoch, 1989; Moran, 1989), views on persons receiving public assistance (Merdinger, 1982; Sharwell, 1974), views on the urgency of social problems (Cnaan & Bergman, 1990; Ramachandran, 1972; Ramachandran & Barah, 1972) and their sources (Ryan, Fook, & Hawkins, 1995), approaches to social work practice (Neikrug, 1978), and professional preferences (Aviram & Katan, 1991; Bogo, Michalski, Raphael, & Roberts, 1995; Butler, 1990, 1992; Jack & Mosley, 1997; Perry, 2001; Rubin, Johnson, & DeWeaver, 1986). The results of these studies are inconsistent. While some studies have found very limited change in views of students between entry and graduation (for example, Landau, 1999; Varley, 1963; Wodarski et al., 1988), others have discovered change that ran counter to the direction expected or, more bluntly, deviated from the views that social work seeks to convey (Enoch, 1989; Neikrug, 1978). A few studies found significant change in the variables examined or uncovered differences between social work students and other students that took the form sought by social



work education (Merdinger, 1982; Sharwell, 1974). Some studies revealed changes in the expected direction while others did not (Cnaan & Bergman, 1990; Moran, 1989; Ryan et al., 1995). The mixed results from these studies are indicative of the difficulties inherent in efforts to receive clear-cut answers to investigations into the impact of work education on the values and perceptions of students.

Very little research has focused on the impact of social work education upon social policy preferences of students. A number of studies undertaken during the seventies and eighties dealt with the impact of social work education on support for social justice (Moran, 1989), attitudes toward public assistance and its recipients (Merdinger, 1982; Sharwell, 1974), and views on the preferred social system (Enoch, 1989). Yet these studies did not seek explicitly to look at the impact of social work education upon the social policy preferences of students.

In conclusion, it would appear that there is a wide degree of consensus within social work regarding both the importance of the involvement of members of the profession in social change and the furthering of social justice and the task of social work education in preparing students for undertaking this role. Yet our literature review indicates that despite calls to evaluate the degree to which social work education prepares graduates to promote social justice (Gambrill, 2001), very few studies have actually focused on the social policy preferences of social workers and social work students and on the impact of social work education on this population. This study seeks to contribute to our knowledge in this field by looking at the social policy preferences of three cohorts of students on the verge of their entrance into

the profession. In contrast to previous studies that focused on students in a single national setting, this study employs a cross-national perspective. The inclusion of social work schools in two different countries is intended to limit the impact of country-specific factors on the findings. More specifically the study relates to two questions. The first looks at change in the attitudes of social work students toward social policy over the period of their studies. In other words, it asks if social work education systems influence students' views on social welfare policy. A second question seeks to determine whether divergent types of education programs influence differently the attitudes of students toward welfare state issues.

## Method

### Research Sites

Three schools of social work, two in Israel and one in the United States served as the research sites for this study. The choice of the United States and Israel was influenced by a desire to compare social work students training in welfare states that are different yet share some common heritages and contemporary characteristics both with regard to welfare state institutions and to the social work profession. While the Israeli welfare state was originally structured along the lines of the more universal Beveridgean welfare state and was influenced by the social-democratic views of the dominant Labor Party, since the late 1970s it has undergone marked processes of retrenchment and privatization (Gal, 1998). Thus, it has moved closer to the liberal welfare state model in the Esping-Andersen (1999) typology, of which the United States is a prime example. Indeed during the 1980s and 1990s, governments in



both countries sought to introduce neo-liberal reforms to welfare (Karger & Monnickendam, 1991; Pierson, 1994; Weil & Feingold, 2002). There are also some significant similarities and cross-cultural influences between social work and social work education in the two countries. In particular, the US model of social work has been very influential in the development of the social work profession in Israel (Prager, 1988).

As the goal of this study was to examine the impact of social work training on prospective social workers, programs that offered qualifying degrees that are mandated by the relevant degree-confirming authorities in both countries were chosen. While in the United States, a 2-year MSW program fulfills this condition, in the Israeli case completion of a 3-year baccalaureate social work program is required. As such, the Israeli programs examined in this study offered BSW degrees while the US program is a master of social work program. The three schools included in the study were chosen because their training programs differ significantly with regard to the place of social justice issues in these programs.

The curriculum at ISR1 (Tel-Aviv University), a university-based publicly funded institution, offers a greater emphasis on direct intervention with individuals and small groups with courses on psychological aspects of human behavior central to the program. Policy practice is not taught nor are training placements of this type offered to students. While social policy is a subject taught in ISR1 it is accorded a very limited place in the curriculum (Spiro, Sherer, & Korin-Langer, 1992).

By contrast, ISR2 (the Hebrew University of Jerusalem) is also a university-based publicly funded institution that has traditionally tended

to place a much greater emphasis on social issues and policy. This school offers students courses and field training placements that prepare students for various aspects of policy practice. A recent quantitative study of course content of all Israeli social work education programs has provided clear-cut support for this distinction between the two schools (Gal & Weiss, 2000). While social policy is a major field of research and activity among faculty members at ISR2, there is more limited research interest in this field at ISR1.

The US school is housed in a private research university in the Northeast United States (University of Pennsylvania). It is an urban school with a strong social justice emphasis. This school has a requirement of 2 semesters of policy and 2 semesters of racism and social change. As such, half the courses in the 1st year are policy and social change oriented. Furthermore, on average, one third of the students in 2nd year elect macro practice and are exposed to management, community practice, and social administration. In comparison to the other research sites in this study, the US school is clearly that which most openly identifies with the social justice goals of social work and the training of social workers to engage in policy practice.

### **Sample and Procedure**

The participants in this study consisted of 223 students (BSW students in Israel and MSW students in the United States) who completed a questionnaire both during their first weeks of study (1998) and again just prior to graduation at the three universities (in 2000 in the United States and 2001 in Israel). At the American university 74 students participated in both

measurements (64% of the entire graduating class), at ISR1 70 participated in both measurements (50% of all graduates) and at ISR2 79 participated in both (58% of all graduates). In the first wave, there were 387 respondents of whom 130 respondents were in ISR1 (96% of the entire first year class), 112 in ISR2 (86%) and 145 students in the American university (98%). In the second wave, there were 278 respondents of whom 96 respondents in ISR1 (83% of the entire graduate class), 92 in ISR2 (68%) and 90 in the American university (76%). In the second wave 164 students who had participated in the first wave did not respond to the questionnaire in this wave and were therefore removed from the analysis. Fifty-five of the students who responded to the questionnaire in the second wave did not respond in the first wave. As a result, a total of 223 students responded to

the questionnaire in both waves and served as the respondents for this study. Chi-square tests with regard to demographic variables and MANOVA analyses with regard to attitudes on social policy did not reveal any significant differences between those 164 students that did not respond to the second wave and those that responded to both waves.

The demographic characteristics of all three student groups and the results of chi-square tests of association can be seen in Table 1.

The findings in Table 1 indicate that there were statistically significant differences between the three groups among all the variables apart from marital status. In all schools, a large proportion of the students were unmarried. Most of the participants in the study were women, but the proportion of men was higher in the American sample. For the variable age,

**TABLE 1. Demographic Characteristics of Students at Each University and the Results of Chi-Square Test of the Demographic Differences (N=223)**

Values	USA (N=74)		ISR1 (N=70)		ISR2 (N=79)		$\chi^2$
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Gender							
Female	60	81	64	93	72	91	5.67*
Male	14	19	5	7	7	9	
Age							
20–22	19	26	41	60	51	64	33.39***
23–25	29	39	21	30	21	27	
≥ 26	26	35	7	10	7	9	
Marital status							
Married	6	8	1	2	8	10	—
Unmarried	67	92	68	98	71	90	
Work							
Yes	28	38	45	66	49	62	13.18**
No	45	62	23	34	30	38	

Note. With regard some of the variables, the totals may not equal the specified N due to missing data. \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .



most participants were under 25 years old. The proportion of younger students (20–22) was highest in the Israeli groups. Most of the students in the two Israeli universities worked, while this was not the case for the American students. No significant differences between the demographic characteristics of students in the two Israeli groups were found.

The participants volunteered to respond to an in-class survey and were assured of confidentiality. The questionnaires were distributed at two points in time: First during the 1st week of studies (October 1998 in the Israel universities and in September in the United States), and then again during the last weeks of their graduating year (during the months of May and June 2001 in Israel and during April 2000 in the United States). In addition, students not present in class were surveyed by telephone or by mail. In order to facilitate an individual-level comparison, the respondents were asked to provide the last four digits of their social security number (US) or their student ID (Israel). It was stressed that this information was intended purely for statistical needs and not to identify the respondent.

### **Instrument**

The instrument employed in this study was a 22-item, 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very little) to 5 (very much) formulated by the authors to measure various aspects of social policy (Weiss et al., 2002). The issues included in the scale relate to major characteristics of the modern welfare state and, in particular, to central issues of debate regarding the nature of social provision in different types of welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1999; Huber & Stephens, 2001; Pierson, 1998).

These issues have been the focus of various surveys that have sought to identify public opinion toward the welfare state (Svallfors & Taylor-Gooby, 1999).

In a principle component factor analysis undertaken on the basis of the results of the questionnaires distributed upon graduation, seven factors with an Eigenvalue greater than 1 emerged, and the factors jointly explained 64% of the variance. One factor, which comprised of two questions relating to issues of the state role in housing, was removed from the analysis because the Cronbach alpha score was low ( $\alpha=.54$ ) and the content of the two questions was not related to any of the other factors. After removing these two questions another principle component factor analysis was undertaken in which five factors with an Eigenvalue greater than 1 emerged, that jointly explained 66% of the variance (in this analysis, two of the original factors are merged into one). The factors are:

1. "State responsibility for welfare," which included six questions, such as: Do you think that the state should guarantee at least a basic standard of living to all citizens? and Do you think that there should be legislation promising work to all citizens? The internal consistency for the six questions was  $\alpha=.71$ . The score for each of the respondents was calculated by averaging the responses to each of the six questions. Higher scores indicated greater support for the role of the state in the welfare arena.
2. "The negative implications of welfare services" consisted of four questions, among them: Do you think that benefits to poor families increase their dependence upon

society? and Do you think that unemployment benefits undermine the willingness of the unemployed to work? The internal consistency for the four questions was  $\alpha=.91$ . The score for each of the respondents was calculated by averaging the responses to each of the three questions. Higher scores indicated higher support for perceptions that see the negative implications of welfare.

3. "Support for selective services" consisted of three questions, an example being: Do you think that disability benefits should be paid to the low-income disabled only? The internal consistency for the three questions was  $\alpha=.81$ . The score for each of the respondents was calculated by averaging the responses to each of the three questions. Higher scores indicated greater support for selective services.
4. "Support for universal services" included three questions, such as: Do you think that disability benefits should be paid to all disabled regardless of their individual income? The internal consistency for the

three questions was  $\alpha=.80$ . The score for each of the respondents was calculated by averaging the responses to each of the three questions. Higher scores indicated greater support for universal services.

5. "Personal willingness to finance the welfare state" included four questions, for example: Would you be willing to pay additional taxes so that the state could increase its welfare spending? The internal consistency for those four questions was  $\alpha=.82$ . The score for each of the respondents was calculated by averaging the responses to each of the four questions. Higher scores indicated greater personal willingness to finance the welfare state.

### Findings

In order to determine if there were differences in the preferences of students at the various universities upon entry to the education process, a one-way MANOVA was undertaken. The MANOVA revealed a significant between-group differences,  $F(10, 432)=30.34, p<.001$ .

**TABLE 2. Mean and Standard Deviation Scores Measuring Student Attitudes About Social Policies at the Beginning of Study and Analysis of Variance**

	USA (N=74)		ISR1 (N=70)		ISR2 (N=79)		F (2, 220)
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
State responsibility for welfare	4.10	.74	4.27	.44	3.08	.46	98.70***
Willingness to finance the welfare state	3.79	.80	3.34	.59	3.46	.51	9.35***
Support for selective services	2.52	.83	3.04	.93	2.66	.59	8.36***
Support for universal services	3.03	.92	2.82	.78	3.29	.62	6.65**
Negative implications of welfare provision	2.47	.96	3.04	.77	3.43	.58	28.84***

Note. For the variable Negative implications of welfare provisions, the higher the score, the greater the support for the idea that the welfare has negative implication.

\* $p<.05$ , \*\* $p<.01$ , \*\*\* $p<.001$



Presented in Table 2 are the means and standard deviations of the students' social policy preferences at the three universities and the results of the univariate ANOVA regarding each of the measures.

As can be seen from Table 2, significant differences were found among the three cohorts at the beginning of studies for all five aspects of social policy examined in this study. The greatest between-group differences were found for the variable State Responsibility for Welfare and the lowest emerged for Support for Universal Services. In order to identify the source of the differences in each of the aspects of policy examined, Scheffe post-hoc comparisons were undertaken ( $p < .05$ ).

The mean scores of the USA and ISR1 groups for State Responsibility for Welfare were over 4, thereby indicating a high level of support for the idea that the state should be responsible for welfare services for its citizens. By contrast, the same scores for the students at ISR2 were lower and closer to 3, indicative of modest support for state responsibility for welfare. Not surprisingly, the Scheffe test indicated significant differences between the mean scores of the ISR2 students and the two other groups.

As for Personal Willingness to Finance the Welfare State, no significant differences were found between the two Israeli student groups. Both indicated only a modest willingness to finance welfare. By contrast the US students showed a significantly greater degree of willingness to pay for the welfare state than their Israeli counterparts, even though the level of support cannot be described as very high.

For Support for Selective and Universal Services, the findings show that the support

of the ISR1 students for selective services was moderate but nevertheless higher than that of the two other groups. The findings indicate that ISR2 students exhibited higher levels of support for universal services than their counterparts in ISR1. No statistically significant differences were found between the ISR2 students and the USA students for Support for Universal Services.

An examination of the views of the respondents on the negative impact of welfare services on the individual indicates that the American sample was the least negative with their mean well below 3. In other words at the onset of their social work training, welfare provision was perceived by these students as having less of a negative impact on recipients. By contrast the ISR2 students, who tended to be the least supportive of the welfare state idea, also tended to be the most conscious of the negative impact of welfare.

In order to determine whether the views of the students at the beginning of their studies derived from the differences in the personal characteristics of the respondents (see Table 1), a MANCOVA analysis was undertaken. Three variables (gender, age, and work) were included in the analysis as covariates. In this analysis, significant differences between the three student groups emerged,  $F(10, 418) = 27.25$ ;  $p < .001$ . These findings indicate that there were still between-group differences even after accounting for these covariates.

MANOVA (2x3: Universities x Time) with repeated measures on Time were undertaken in order to determine whether any change took place in the students' attitudes toward different aspects of social policy between the two points in time, and if the changes were due to the dif-



ferent study programs at the various schools. The MANOVA revealed significant differences in attitudes between the first and the second measurements,  $F(5, 215)=24.15; p<.001$ ; and a significant interaction of University  $\times$  Time,  $F(10, 438)=15.95; p<.001$ . The means and standard deviations of the attitudes of the students at the three universities toward the various aspects of social policy at both points in time are presented in Table 3 and the results of the univariate ANOVA are shown in Table 4.

The findings in Table 4 indicate that no significant change over time was found in the level of the students' support for selective and for universal services but that the interaction was significant. In order to examine the source of the interaction simple effects analyses were undertaken. These indicated that a significant change occurred over time among members of the ISR1 group only with support for selective services decreasing to a less than moderate level,  $F(1, 69)=8.83; p<.01$ ) and support for universal services growing to a more than moderate level,  $F(1, 69)=7.40; p<.01$ ).

Significant change over time and significant interaction were found in the students' attitudes toward the other aspects of social policy examined in the study. In simple effects tests of the source of the interaction in the case of a state responsibility for welfare change occurred only among members of the ISR2 group,  $F(1, 77)=158.05; p<.001$ . Support for state responsibility within this group, which reached the education program with the least support for social welfare provision, reached a high level. No significant changes over time were found in the other two groups, which began their studies with higher levels of support for state responsibility for welfare and maintained this level of support throughout.

For the variable Willingness to Finance the Welfare State a decrease over time was observed only among the two Israeli groups: ISR1:  $F(1, 69)=4.13; p<.05$ , and ISR2:  $F(1, 77)=11.00; p<.001$ . These groups began their course of studies with mediocre levels of willingness to finance the welfare state and completed their studies with even less willingness to

**TABLE 3. Mean and Standard Deviation Scores Measuring Student Attitudes About Social Policies at the Beginning and at the End of the Study**

	USA (N=74)		ISR1 (N=70)		ISR2 (N=79)	
	Beginning	End	Beginning	End	Beginning	End
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
State responsibility for welfare	4.11 (.75)	4.19 (.75)	4.28 (.44)	4.31 (.50)	3.09 (.47)	4.21 (.53)
Willingness to finance the welfare state	3.79 (.80)	3.88 (.73)	3.34 (.59)	3.18 (.78)	3.46 (.51)	3.12 (.84)
Support for selective services	2.52 (.83)	2.51 (.85)	3.04 (.93)	2.65 (.80)	2.67 (.59)	2.79 (1.09)
Support for universal services	3.03 (.92)	3.06 (1.04)	2.82 (.78)	3.11 (1.01)	3.29 (.62)	3.01 (1.06)
The negative implications of welfare provision	2.47 (.96)	2.30 (.78)	3.04 (.77)	2.95 (.90)	3.43 (.58)	2.99 (.87)



do so. As for attitudes toward the negative implications of welfare provision, significant change over time was only observed among the ISR2 group,  $F(1, 77)=15.11; p<.001$ . By the end of their studies, these students were less convinced of the negative implications of welfare provision than at the beginning of their social work training with the level of their conviction becoming moderate.

In sum, the simple effects analyses indicate that no significant changes over time occurred among the USA students' views on all the five aspects of social policy examined in this study. In the ISR1 group, significant changes over time were observed and took the form of a drop in

personal willingness to finance the welfare state, a decrease in support for selective welfare services, and an increase in their support for universal services. In the ISR2 group by the end of their studies students were much more supportive of state responsibility for welfare, their support for the view that welfare has negative implications upon the individual weakened, and their personal willingness to finance the welfare state declined.

**Discussion**

The aim of this study was to examine the impact of social work education on social policy preferences of students in two countries

**TABLE 4. Analysis of Variance on Student Attitudes About Social Policies at the Beginning and at the End of the Study**

Source	SS	df	MS	F
State responsibility for welfare				
Time <sup>a</sup>	18.77	1	18.77	88.28***
University x time <sup>b</sup>	28.79	2	14.40	67.70***
Error	46.57	219	.21	
Willingness to finance the welfare state				
Time	2.07	1	2.07	6.23*
University x time	3.49	2	1.74	5.25**
Error	72.73	219	.33	
Support for selective services				
Time	.94	1	.94	1.57
University x time	5.31	2	2.66	4.47*
Error	129.98	219	.59	
Support for universal services				
Time	.02	1	.02	.04
University x time	5.89	2	2.95	5.01**
Error	128.71	219	.59	
The negative implications of welfare				
Time <sup>a</sup>	6.29	1	6.29	15.11***
University x time <sup>b</sup>	2.58	2	1.29	3.09*
Error	91.21	219	.42	

<sup>a</sup>This score indicates whether, and to what degree, significant change in attitudes occurred between the first (the beginning of studies) and the second measure (graduation).

<sup>b</sup>This score relates to the question of whether change over time occurred in all the universities or only in part of them.

\* $p<.05$ , \*\* $p<.01$ , \*\*\* $p<.001$

by comparing their attitudes toward social policy at the beginning of the professional socialization process and upon its completion. The underlying assumption was that social work education seeks to enhance a sense of identification with notions of social justice and a commitment to social responsibility among future social work practitioners. However, as Gambrill (2001) noted, this was not previously empirically studied. Before discussing the findings, certain limitations of the research need to be considered. First, the three social work education programs that served as research sites obviously cannot be seen as representative of all the programs or all of the social work students in the two countries. Second, because of its panel structure the students included in the study were only those that filled out the questionnaire at both points in time. Thus, while the response rate was acceptable, the sample was not random in that it included only students willing to fill out the questionnaire at both points in time. Third, the choice of a research design that forgoes a control group obviously limits our ability to control the impact of exogenous variables. Nevertheless, the findings of this study may provide fruitful data on the impact of three different education programs in two major schools of social work in Israel and a leading school of social work in the United States. They can provide an initial glimpse into a field not investigated in depth in the past and start the discourse in this area.

An examination of the changes in the social policy preferences of the students in the three cohorts studied here indicated that no significant changes occurred in the views of the U.S. cohort over time. Both at the onset of their studies and at their completion, members

of this group were supportive of the role of the state in welfare provision, showed a relatively high degree of willingness to finance the welfare system, preferred universal over selective services, and expressed a low level of support for the notion that the welfare system has a negative impact upon individuals. By contrast, among members of the two Israeli groups during their course of social work studies, statistically significant changes occurred in their attitudes toward some of the aspects of social policy examined in this study. The greatest changes were observed in the ISR2 group. On average upon graduation, these students were much more likely to be supportive of state responsibility for welfare and much less convinced of the negative implications of welfare provision than they were prior to their entrance into the social work training system. Among the other Israeli group, ISR1, change occurred primarily in their attitudes toward types of welfare services. While prior to their social work studies these students preferred selective over universal services, upon graduation their support for universal services had not only grown but it was much higher than that expressed for selective services. In short, the students at the end of their studies in all three schools expressed views that can quite comfortably be described as encompassing the notion of social justice promoted by social work.

How can the differences in the degree of change in the social policy preferences of the students in the three cohorts be explained and what can be learned from this? When students reached the social work education process with social policy preferences that diverged significantly from the core principles of social justice identified with social work and when the pro-



gram stressed the importance of these values, as was the case of ISR2, significant change occurred in these attitudes in the direction sought by the program. As noted, the program offered at ISR2 was one that emphasized social activism among social workers and that includes a significant amount of compulsory courses devoted to social policy and policy practice. The methodology adopted in this study does not enable us to control other variables that may have played a role in this result. These could include exogenous factors that are not linked to the educational program itself, such as major changes in the welfare state. However, as has been indicated above, no dramatic changes of this nature occurred in Israel or the United States when we collected the data. They could also include a possible tendency of students to express views that are not necessarily their own but rather what they perceive as those desired by their faculty. However, an analysis of the expressed professional preferences of the members of these cohorts using the same methodology revealed major gaps between their preferences and those advocated by faculty), apparently indicating that the students do not necessarily replicate the expressed preferences of their teachers (Weiss, Gal, & Cnaan, 2004). An example of this was a marked tendency among students to distance themselves from more disadvantaged service user groups despite a clear-cut emphasis on the profession's commitment to these groups on the part of faculty. It would appear then that the ISR2 program apparently did have a major impact on the students' attitudes to social policy. This finding would seem to support the claim that, when students reach social work education with attitudes not supportive of a major role

for the state in social welfare, a program that emphasizes social justice can have an impact on these attitudes.

By contrast to the ISR2 students, little change was observed in the attitudes of the American cohort over time. This lack of change may be due to a process of self-selection, sometimes described as "anticipatory socialization" (Bucher, Stelling, & Dommermuth, 1969; Merton, 1957), by which students take on the values of the profession to which they are attracted or *a priori* matched with these values. Clearly they reached the educational program with attitudes toward social policy that were broadly supportive of the idea of the welfare state and the role of the state in welfare provision. Though the U.S. school included in the study does indeed emphasize issues of social justice in its curriculum and requires courses on racism and social policy, in effect it would appear that the primary role of the training program in this case was one of maintenance. The impact of this educational investment is not visible in the findings because of the fact that this may have simply reinforced views already held by the students. However, because of the nature of the research design, which did not include a control group, it is possible that the students would have maintained their attitudes even without the experience of social work education.

In the case of ISR1, the findings indicate that although this was a more individualistic school of social work with a program that emphasized direct practice with individuals and small groups rather than policy practice, there was no decline in the students' support of welfare state principles. These were high at the onset of their studies and remained so at



their completion. Thus, it appears that even an individualistically oriented social work program manages to preserve support for social welfare when the students reach the training program with attitudes that are already supportive of the welfare state.

In conclusion, the findings of this study indicate that the degree of impact of different social work education programs upon the attitudes of students toward social policy is apparently dependent both upon the nature of the curriculum and upon the views held by the students prior to their entrance into the education process. Major change occurred among those students with views less in tune with social work's accepted notion of social justice who reached an education program that emphasized the positive implications of social provision and the contribution of the welfare state to individual well being and social progress. Among students who began their social work studies with attitudes supportive of the welfare state, regardless of the degree of emphasis on social justice issues, the education process appears to have contributed to the maintenance of these attitudes. These conclusions should serve as a basis for additional research into the effect of different social work education programs on attitudes toward social policy while controlling the impact of other possible variables, such as the role of academic studies on attitudes and the maturation process of students.

The implications for social work education are that, when formulating social work education programs, educators must take into account the possibility that candidates for social work education do not necessarily hold views that adhere to the accepted social work approach to social justice, one that is sup-

portive of state provision of social welfare. In such cases it would appear that a program that emphasizes both theoretical aspects of social policy and offers students field placements that provide training in policy practice can lead to a significant change in student attitudes toward social justice. ISR2, the school included in this study in which substantial change occurred in the attitudes of social work students, can serve as an example of this. The curriculum includes at least one compulsory course of social policy during each of the six semesters of the training program. These courses include both introductory courses on the welfare state and welfare ideologies, detailed analyses of major social welfare programs and more practical studies of types of policy-practice interventions. Students are also required to choose at least one elective course on social welfare, and macro-practice field placements are offered in a wide variety of settings. Finally, members of the faculty are engaged in research on social policy and are actively involved in policy formulation and advocacy. Yet, even in cases where students do reach training programs with attitudes that are supportive of the welfare state, it would appear that there remains a need to maintain a strong social policy component in the social work education curriculum in order to both reinforce these attitudes and to provide a more solid theoretical and empirical foundation for them.

While this study examined the impact of training programs with varying emphases that took place in different cultural contexts, by the end of the course of studies the attitudes of the students were similar and supportive of the welfare state model. The students appeared to graduate with views that, on a whole, reflect



the social justice values that are central to the social work profession. However, more formidable will be the task of determining the degree to which social policy preferences that concur with the social justice goals of the profession actually translate into practice that seeks to further social justice among social workers in the field.

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Accepted: 07/04

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