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Abstract

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One of the attributes of any profession is the existence of an obligatory and specialized education and training system that serves as a necessary condition for entrance into the profession (Greenwood, 1957). Professional training seeks to further a process of professional socialization through which a body of knowledge, skills and values is conveyed to those seeking to engage in the profession.

Social work, too, has established specific education and training systems in order to serve as corridors through which individuals can join the profession (Hokenstad & Kendall, 1995). It is assumed that social work education should provide the knowledge, the skills, the behavioral norms and the values that are crucial for anyone engaging in social work (Gambrill, 1997), even if there is less consensus on the specific content of these. In particular, one of the often emphasized goals of social work education is that of instilling in new members of the profession its fundamental values and developing a strong commitment to these values on the part of these individuals (Abbott, 1988).

The goal of this article is to further our understanding of the professional socialization role of social work education through a cross-national panel study that looks at individual change over the course of studies in the professional preferences of students participating in social work education programs with differing emphases.

SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION AS PROFESSIONAL SOCIALIZATION

The notion of socialization has been employed to describe the process "by which people selectively acquire the values and attitudes, the interests, skills and knowledge–in short, the culture–current in the groups in which they are, or seek to become, a member" (Merton, Reader & Kendall, 1957:287). Bragg (1976) claimed that the socialization process is one in which the individual gains identification with a specific group and adopts a professional identity. In social work as in other professions, this process incorporates mechanisms by which individuals seeking to join the profession internalize the values, interests, skills and knowledge that characterize the profession they seek to join (Ryan, Fook & Hawkins, 1995). The emphasis in this process is upon

the internalization of a professional identity and the values and attitudes that comprise it, rather than the mere acquisition of knowledge and skills (Becker, Geer, Hughes & Strauss, 1961).

The question whether social work education does indeed influence the values and attitudes of social work students has been the focus of many studies that examined the impact of this education process upon a wide range of variables. Among them are humanistic attitudes of the students (O'Connor, Dalgleish & Khan, 1984), values or ethical judgements (Bargal, 1978; Landau, 1999; Wodarski, Pippin & Daniels, 1988), attitudes towards social justice issues (Enoch, 1989; Moran, 1989), views on persons on public assistance (Merdinger, 1982), views on the urgency of social problems (Cnaan & Bergman, 1990) and their sources (Ryan et al., 1995), approaches to social work practice (Neikrug, 1978), interpersonal and professional skills (Wodarski et al., 1988), self-identification (Bogo, Michalski, Raphael & Roberts, 1995), and professional preferences (Aviram & Katan, 1991; Bogo et al., 1995; Butler, 1992; Jack & Mosley, 1997; Perry, 2001).

The research methods employed in these studies were: (1) Comparisons between different groups of social work students at various stages in their education with conclusions on the impact of the education process in these studies based upon the differences found between the student groups (e.g., Neikrug, 1978); (2) Studies that examined students at a single point in time (generally upon graduation), with the impact of education being inferred on the basis of an analysis of the "result" or by way of comparison between social work students and students in other disciplines (e.g., Abbott, 1988); (3) Longitudinal studies of students at the points of entry and graduation into their program of studies (for example, Wodarski et al., 1988), most of which compared findings on an aggregate basis rather than focusing upon change over time in the attitudes of individual students.

Though the findings reported in some of these studies revealed little or no change in the variables examined, others found change that deviated from the views that social work seeks to convey. An additional group of studies found major change in the direction sought by social work education, while a final category of studies found changes in the variables examined, some of which were in the expected direction while others were not. As such, they do not offer solid conclusions regarding the role of social work education in the professional socialization process. More specifically, the findings of these studies do not provide a clear-cut answer regarding the question of whether social work educa-

tion has an impact upon the values and attitudes of social work students and, if so, what direction this takes.

Research on Professional Preferences

As noted above, professional preferences have been a subject of studies that sought to examine the impact of social work education. This focus has been motivated by an assumption that professional preferences of social work students, say their interest in private practice or their willingness to work with disadvantaged client groups, can serve as indicators for an adherence or deviation from the basic values of the profession. As such, it has been claimed that profession preferences are a useful indication of the ways in which underlying values are translated into concrete and practical choices and a beneficial tool for examining values and a commitment to the mission of social work (Bogo et al., 1995; Butler, 1992).

While the direction of findings on the impact of social work education on the professional preferences of graduate social work students in different countries has not always been clear cut, a number of common trends have emerged. It would appear that graduates (with the exception of Canada) tend to distance themselves from some of the more disadvantaged client groups, such as the chronically ill and the elderly, and from the services that provide for these populations while preferring to work with children, families, and young couples (Aviram & Katan, 1991; Litwin, 1994). A large proportion of students (with the exception of Britain) at the beginning of their studies and upon graduation want to engage in private practice (Butler, 1990; Rubin & Johnson, 1984). Finally, regardless of the stage that students are in the socialization process or of their nationality, they express a marked preference for direct or psychotherapeutic oriented practice over engagement in social action or policy development activities (Abell & McDonell, 1990; Bogo, Raphael, & Roberts, 1993; Guttmann & Cohen, 1992).

The findings of these studies have generally been perceived as indicative of a trend among social work students to express professional preferences that are not those that reflect the basic values and goals of the profession. These preferences have been the cause of much consternation among social work educators, researchers, and other members of the profession (Specht & Courtney, 1994).

Longitudinal studies comprise a minority of the studies on the impact of social work education upon the professional preferences of students. Of these, some compared entry and graduation findings on an aggregate

basis. Rubin et al. (1986) studied changes in the perceptions of 118 direct practice students undertaking MSW level studies in three U.S. universities and found a modest decline in the students' preferences from entry to graduation while Jack and Mosley (1997) noted that their "results seem to suggest that in general the experience of students on these social work programmes has not altered their user group preferences" (p. 899). The obvious methodological weakness of these studies was that they did not examine change on an individual level. By contrast, research that employs a panel methodology, which undertakes individual comparisons, can contribute to a more accurate depiction of change over time.

A limited number of studies have indeed employed a longitudinal panel methodology. Bogo et al. (1995) discovered that among social work students in Toronto changes in practice interests did emerge following their course of studies. However, these changes occurred only in some of the dimensions studied and only in some of the cohorts. In the most recent panel study, Perry (2001) found that social work training has an impact upon the preferences of students in California regarding practice interests, noting that worries regarding the tendency among social work students to abandon social work's social mission have been over-stated. No attempt has been made to employ this methodology in cross-cultural studies. Cross-national studies of the impact of social work education programs upon the professional preferences of social work students can enrich our understanding regarding the role of specific cultural contexts upon the impact of educational programs upon professional preferences. Moreover, such studies can lead to conclusions that can be detached from the limitations of a single national context.

The study reported in this article seeks to contribute to our understanding of the professional socialization process in social work by examining the impact of social work education upon the professional preferences of students through a panel study in three schools of social work in two countries. More specifically, two main questions are discussed: First, does social work education influence the professional preferences of social work students? The preferences examined relate to: (1) client groups, (2) places of employment, (3) types of employment and (4) professional strategies. Second, do different social work training programs have a differential impact upon the professional preferences of students? This question will be investigated by way of a cross-national comparison of change in different social work training programs. At the basis of this study is a sample of cohorts of students at

the two leading schools of social work in Israel, each of which has a different emphasis in its educational approach. In order to introduce a cross-national dimension to the study, a cohort from a major school of social work in the United States was also surveyed. The inclusion of the American school was intended specifically to minimize a sense that the findings are peculiar to the Israeli context.

METHODOLOGY

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 U.S. school is housed in a private research university in the Northeast United States. It is an urban school with a strong social justice emphasis. Both of the Israeli schools are state funded schools and adhere to a generic approach to social work practice. However, in one (ISR1) there is a greater emphasis on direct practice with individuals and small groups while the other (ISR2) stresses a more macro level approach to social work practice. In comparison to all other schools of social work in Israel, this school offers a greater emphasis upon social policy and its implementation. Policy-practice is a focus of both courses and fieldwork alongside more traditional direct practice with individuals (Gal & Weiss, 2000). The students in all three schools were undertaking basic studies required for qualifying for a license to engage in social work–an MSW at the U.S. school and a BSW degree in Israel.

Sample

The participants in this study consisted of 223 students who completed a questionnaire both during their first weeks of study and again after a period of two or three years, just prior to graduation at the three universities. At the American university, 74 students participated in both measurements (64% of all graduates); at ISR2 79, participated in both measurements (58% of all graduates); and at ISR1, 70 participated in both (50% of all graduates). The relatively low rate of the final sample is not a consequence of a major student dropout rate between entrance to the program and its completion but primarily a result of technical obstacles regarding the matching of a significant number of questionnaires (unclear or missing identification numbers in one of the

two measurements) and a lower response rate in the second measurement. The demographic characteristics of all three student groups and the results of a χ^2 test can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1 indicates that there were statistically significant differences between the groups with regard to all the variables apart from marital status. In all the sub-groups 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. With regard to the age of the participants in the study, most 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.

Procedure

The questionnaires were distributed to the students in required courses at two points in time: First during the first 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 com-

TABLE 1. Demographic Characteristics of Students at Each University and the Results of χ^2 Test of the Demographic Differences

Variable	Values	USA (N = 74)		ISR1 (N = 70)		ISR2 (N = 79)		
		N	%	N	%	N	%	χ^2
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	Married	6	8	1	2	8	10	Not significant
Status	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 to some of the variables, the totals may not equal the specified N due to missing data.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$

parison, the respondents were asked to provide the last four digits of their social security number (U.S.) or their student ID (Israel). It was stressed that this information was intended purely for statistical needs and not to identify the respondent.

Instruments

Four dependent variables were measured: (1) preferences for client groups; (2) preferences for social service organizations; (3) preferences for welfare economy sectors; and (4) preferences regarding types of social work practice. These four variables were measured by employing questionnaires developed by the authors specifically for this study. As in other questionnaires developed to measure professional preferences of students, the participants were asked, "Upon graduation, to what degree would you prefer to work with . . . ." The questionnaires employed a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 ("strongly reject") to 5 ("strongly prefer"). The first questionnaire presented the respondents with nine client groups, which represent major client groups with whom social workers deal in both the United States and Israel: children, teenagers, married couples, the poor, the mentally ill, substance abusers, the physically disabled, the chronically ill, and the unemployed. While there is inevitably a degree of overlap between these groups, the intention of the categorization was to emphasize the primary focus in each of the groups (age, personal status, social problem, etc.). The second questionnaire presented them with eight types of common social service organizations: A marriage counseling agency, an elementary or high school, an infant health clinic, a mental health hospital, a public welfare office, a prison, an employment office, and an old age home. The third questionnaire was comprised of four sectors of the welfare economy–work in a governmental agency, work in a non-profit organization, work in a private sector organization, and private practice. The fourth questionnaire presented them with four major types of social work practice–direct practice with individuals, group work, community organization, and involvement in the formulation of social policy.

Content validity of the instruments was examined by distributing the questionnaires to a panel of experts, all senior teachers in various schools of social work in Israel and the United States. They were requested to ascertain whether the items did indeed represent the major components of social work practice in both of the countries.

RESULTS

In order to determine whether any change in the students' preferences took place between the two points in time, and if the changes were due to the different study programs of the various social work schools, MANOVA (2×3) (two points in time by three universities) with repeated measure on time were undertaken. Following are the results of these MANOVA procedures regarding the four fields of preferences.

Preferences with Regard to Client Groups

Students' preferences with regard to nine different client groups were examined in the study. The MANOVA revealed significant differences in preferences between the first and the second measurements ($F(1,204) = 6.63$; $p < .001$) and a significant interaction of University $\times$ time ($F(2,204) = 2.53$; $p < .01$). The means and standard deviations of the preferences of the students at the three universities towards the various client groups at both points in time are presented in Table 2. The results of the univariate ANOVA performed for each specific client group are also shown in the table.

The findings indicate that no significant change over time or interaction was found in the students' preferences towards four of the nine client groups (unemployed, mentally ill, married couples, and people with disabilities). In the case of three of the client groups (chronically ill, children, and the poor) change over time was significant and took the form of a decline in support but the interaction was not significant, indicating that there was no difference in the change that occurred between the two measurements in the various universities.

However, significant change over time and significant interaction were found in the students' preferences regarding work with substance abusers and with teenagers. In order to examine the source of the interaction simple effects analyses were undertaken. The results showed significant change among the ISR2 students only ($F(1,69) = 19.14$; $p < .001$) which took the form of a decline in willingness to work with substance abusers. With regard to teenagers, significant change in preferences over time were found among members of the ISR2 and ISR1 groups ($F(1,69) = 24.03$; $p < .001$ and $F(1,66) = 9.19$; $p < .01$ respectively), though not among students from the American school. Once again, change took the form of a decline in the willingness of students to work with teenagers. Indeed, the table shows clearly that the changes in the preferences of members of the American group with regard to all the

TABLE 2. Means and Standard Deviation Scores of Student Preferences Regarding Client Groups Across Three Universities and the Univariate ANOVA Results

	USA (N = 74)		ISR1 (N = 70)		ISR2 (N = 79)			
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After		
	M	M	M	M	M	M	F	F
	(SD)	(SD)	(SD)	(SD)	(SD)	(SD)	(time)	(University × time)
Children	4.44 (.86)	4.20 (.97)	4.59 (.92)	4.14 (1.03)	4.48 (.83)	3.85 (1.21)	29.17***	1.90
Teenagers	4.24 (1.02)	4.20 (.97)	4.61 (.65)	4.20 (1.02)	4.44 (1.01)	3.61 (1.35)	23.44***	6.79**
Married couples	3.50 (1.26)	3.37 (1.25)	3.82 (1.31)	4.04 (.97)	3.47 (1.31)	3.48 (1.18)	.14	1.11
The poor	3.80 (.95)	3.67 (1.12)	3.32 (1.10)	3.10 (1.06)	3.28 (1.16)	3.04 (1.10)	5.15*	.16
The mentally ill	3.22 (1.14)	3.32 (1.22)	3.28 (1.43)	2.86 (1.41)	2.82 (1.48)	2.77 (1.38)	1.45	2.16
Drug addicts	3.07 (1.13)	2.82 (1.16)	3.04 (1.31)	3.11 (1.10)	3.51 (1.42)	2.72 (1.35)	9.58**	5.96**
The physically disabled	2.92 (1.15)	2.82 (1.20)	3.34 (1.18)	3.09 (1.26)	3.01 (1.24)	3.18 (1.33)	.44	1.86
The chronically ill	3.01 (1.21)	2.94 (1.08)	2.94 (1.16)	2.49 (1.21)	2.62 (1.32)	2.48 (1.17)	5.97*	1.61
The unemployed	2.75 (.92)	2.77 (.99)	2.38 (1.05)	2.59 (1.04)	2.62 (1.29)	2.54 (1.12)	.26	.92

$*p < .05$; $**p < .01$; $***p < .001$

client groups were smaller than those found among students in the other two universities but, as noted above, significant interactions were only found with regard to substance abusers and teenagers.

Preferences with Regard to Social Service Organizations

The MANOVA results with regard to social service organizations indicated that there was a significant difference between the two measurements ($F(1,202 = 13.69$; $p < .001$) and a significant interaction ($F(2,209 = 2.25$; $p < .01$). Table 3 shows the means and standard deviations of the students' preferences at the beginning and the end of their studies as well as the results of the univariate ANOVA regarding each of the services.

The table shows that neither significant change over time in the students' preferences nor any significant interaction were found with regard to three of the services–an old age home, a mental health hospital,

TABLE 3. Means and Standard Deviation Scores of Student Preferences Regarding Social Service Organizations Across Three Universities and the Univariate ANOVA Results

	USA (N = 74)		ISR1 (N = 70)		ISR2 (N = 79)			
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After		
	M	M	M	M	M	M	F	F
	(SD)	(SD)	(SD)	(SD)	(SD)	(SD)	(time)	(University × time)
A marriage counseling agency	3.44 (1.21)	3.08 (1.30)	4.30 (1.05)	4.09 (.97)	4.02 (1.08)	3.57 (1.18)	15.18***	.61
An elementary or high school	3.91 (1.00)	3.61 (1.19)	3.89 (1.15)	3.42 (1.20)	3.69 (1.27)	3.25 (1.34)	21.76***	.37
An infant health clinic	3.38 (1.14)	3.27 (1.35)	3.57 (1.46)	3.22 (1.31)	3.50 (1.22)	2.98 (1.27)	11.95**	1.55
A mental health hospital	3.11 (1.13)	3.24 (1.23)	3.31 (1.40)	2.81 (1.44)	2.90 (1.53)	2.72 (1.34)	3.08	2.85
A public assistance office	2.75 (1.01)	2.41 (1.16)	3.59 (1.17)	2.66 (1.18)	3.21 (1.18)	2.14 (1.05)	62.82***	5.15**
A prison	2.41 (1.28)	2.51 (1.24)	3.09 (1.36)	2.63 (1.28)	3.40 (1.36)	2.67 (1.35)	13.60***	6.36**
An employment office	2.52 (.95)	2.38 (.98)	2.57 (1.17)	2.31 (1.16)	2.25 (1.03)	2.41 (1.03)	3.84	.23
An old age home	2.10 (1.16)	2.21 (1.12)	2.51 (1.29)	2.56 (1.31)	1.97 (1.05)	2.21 (1.14)	2.34	.42

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

and an employment office. Regarding a marriage counseling agency, an infant health clinic, and a school, significant changes over time occurred though the interaction was not significant. As can be seen from the table, the students' willingness to work in these three services dropped between the beginning and end of their studies. With regard to two services–a prison and a public welfare office–significant change over time and significant interaction can be discerned. Simple effects analyses of the source of the interaction in the case of a prison revealed a decline in the willingness to work in this type of institution in the preferences of the ISR1 ($F(1,65) = 6.5$; $p < .05$) and the ISR2 ($F(1,75) = 19.74$; $p < .001$) student groups. With regard to work in a public welfare office, significant change was observed in all three groups. The analyses showed a significant decline in the desire to work in this type of service with the drop largest among the ISR2 students ($F(1,75) = 41.32$; $p < .001$), followed by their ISR1 counterparts ($F(1,65) = 26.80$; $p < .001$) and finally by the American students ($F(1,69) = 4.30$; $p < .05$).

Preferences with Regard to Sectors

The results of the MANOVAs indicated that there were significant differences between the first and second measurements (F(1,213 = 8.25; p < .001) but the interaction of University × time was not significant (F(2,213 = 1.50; p > .05). The means scores and standard deviations of the students' preferences regarding sectors are presented in Table 4 as are the results of the Univariate ANOVA for each of the sectors.

From the table it is possible to detect a change over time with regard to two of the sectors–a non-profit organization and private practice. Students from all three groups were less enthusiastic about finding work in these sectors at the end of their studies than they were when they first began studying social work.

Preferences with Regard to Types of Social Work Practice

The MANOVA results indicated significant change between the measurements (F(1,215 = 5.62; p < .001) and a significant interaction of University × time (F(2,215 = 3.20; p < .01). Table 5 presents the means and standard deviations of the students' preferences regarding types of practice and the results of a Univariate ANOVA for each type.

The findings in the table indicate no significant change over time in the case of two types of practice–community organization and involvement in social policy formulation. As for direct practice with individu-

TABLE 4. Means and Standard Deviation Scores of Student Preferences Regarding Sectors Across Three Universities and the Univariate ANOVA Results

	USA		ISR1		ISR2		
	(N = 74)		(N = 70)		(N = 79)		
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	
	M	M	M	M	M	M	F
	(SD)	(SD)	(SD)	(SD)	(SD)	SD)	(time)
Work in non-profit organization	4.13 (1.03)	3.84 (1.00)	4.04 (1.02)	3.94 (1.04)	4.03 (.97)	3.78 (1.15)	7.37**
Work in for-profit organization	3.83 (.93)	3.62 (.94)	3.97 (1.09)	3.72 (1.20)	3.51 (1.27)	3.77 (1.10)	.59
Private practice	3.58 (1.31)	3.26 (1.42)	4.27 (.99)	3.69 (1.38)	3.72 (1.32)	3.31 (1.41)	19.70***
Work in governmental agency	3.27 (1.22)	3.43 (1.03)	2.94 (1.26)	3.17 (1.14)	3.17 (1.26)	3.00 (1.18)	.52

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

TABLE 5. Means and Standard Deviation Scores of Student Preferences Regarding Types of Social Work Practice Across Three Universities and the Univariate ANOVA Results

	USA		ISR1		ISR2			
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After		
	M	M	M	M	M	M	F	F
	(SD)	(SD)	(SD)	(SD)	(SD)	(SD)	(time)	(University × time)
Direct work with individuals	3.90 (1.39)	3.80 (1.48)	4.68 (.60)	4.39 (.87)	4.55 (.75)	4.18 (1.21)	8.45**	.90
Group work	3.93 (.96)	3.68 (1.08)	3.60 (1.07)	4.15 (.93)	3.42 (1.08)	3.74 (1.14)	4.81*	6.37**
Work with community organizations	3.87 (.93)	3.62 (1.18)	2.88 (.99)	3.10 (1.19)	2.94 (1.11)	2.88 (1.25)	.13	2.25
Involvement in the formulation of social policy	3.29 (1.37)	3.30 (1.36)	3.65 (.95)	3.59 (1.18)	3.41 (1.20)	2.96 (1.38)	3.51	2.78

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$

als, significant change occurred in the willingness of students to engage in this type of practice between the two points in time but the interaction was not significant. The direction of change was a decline in their willingness to adopt this type of practice. The preference for group work did, however, change significantly over time and a significant interaction emerged. In a simple effect analysis significant changes were found in the preferences of the students in ISR1 ($F(1,68) = 9.80$; $p < .01$) and in ISR2 ($F(1,76) = 4.04$; $p < .05$) only. In contrast to the other preferences, the direction of change was an increase in willingness to adopt this type of practice.

The Link Between Demographic Variables and Students' Preferences

In order to determine if links exist between the demographic characteristics of the students (gender, age, and work) and their preferences and if the differences in the preferences of the members of the various groups were a consequence of demographic variation between them (see Table 1), MANOVA tests were undertaken with regard to categorical variable (gender and work) and MANCOVA tests were undertaken with regard to the age of the respondents. No significant interactions between gender or work × time were found in the MANOVA analyses. Hence, the change in the students' preferences over time was not linked

to these two demographic characteristics. Moreover, in analyses that included the demographic variables, the findings relating to the differences between the universities were similar to those that emerged in the MANOVA analyses that did not include the demographic variables. Nor did the inclusion of the age variable as a covariate in the MANCOVA analyses lead to any impact upon the differences between the three student groups in the changes in their professional preferences over time. It should be noted that analyses that examined the links between gender, age, marital status and work, and professional preferences of the students at the point of entry did not reveal any significant findings apart from a link between marital status and a desire to engage in private practice.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study has been to examine whether the process of social work education is one of professional socialization, in the sense that it has an impact upon the professional preferences of social work students. Changes in professional preferences were employed as indicators for social education's ability to socialize students. The study also sought to discover whether different social work programs had a distinct influence upon the professional preferences of students.

Before discussing the findings, certain limitations of the research need to be considered. First, the three social work schools that served as research sites obviously cannot be seen as representative of all the social work schools or all of the social work students in the two countries. Second, due to its panel structure the students included in the study were only those that filled out the questionnaire at both points in time and could be clearly identified. Thus, while the response rate was acceptable, the sample was not random. Nevertheless, the findings of this study may provide fruitful data on the impact of three education programs in two major schools of social work in Israel and a leading school of social work in the United States. Conceivably this data can provide a direction for future research that will examine the impact of education in social work in other countries.

The findings of the study indicate that significant change in the students' preferences did indeed occur over time with regard to some, but not most, of the issues examined and that this change generally took the form of a decline across the board among students in all three universities. These findings are similar to those that emerged in earlier studies of

social work students' professional preferences (Bogo et al., 1995; Jack & Mosley, 1997; Rubin et al., 1986) and have been described as "desensitization" (Cnaan & Bergman, 1990). These earlier studies also tended to find only modest change in the professional preferences of social work students upon graduation in different countries and this generally took the form of a decline.

Despite this declining trend, at both the beginning and end of their studies students from all three schools preferred to work with children and teenagers and to seek employment in services that dealt with these client groups in comparison to their willingness to deal with populations such as the unemployed, the chronically ill, people with disabilities, and the elderly in old age homes. In addition, at both points in time their willingness to engage in social policy formulation was less than that for direct practice with individuals and small groups.

As for differences in the change in students' preferences in the three education programs, the most important finding was that only in a small number of the variables in which change occurred over time was there significant variation between the programs. In other words this study did not find any major differences in the impact of the various programs upon the profession socialization process of students. An examination of those preferences in which differences in the change was observed showed that it was primarily a result of very limited change in preferences among the American students as compared to a more marked change among students at the two Israeli schools. This may be a result of the fact that the American students reach their studies more mature professionally and that they participate in a program that is only two years long as compared to three years in Israel. In the American case this may reflect the impact of what has been termed "anticipatory socialization" (Bucher, Stelling & Dommermuth, 1969). By contrast, variables linked to the actual education process may be more dominant in the Israeli case because Israeli social work students generally have no prior academic experience and they participate in a longer education program.

The decline in the preference levels of social work students at the schools studied does not appear to reflect any specific trend nor is it concentrated in variables that can be associated with any specific approach within the profession. Rather it would appear to indicate a process by which at the completion of their studies and perhaps due to a better appreciation of the complexities and responsibilities of the tasks undertaken by social workers, students' enthusiasm for a wide spectrum of client groups, types of employment and of intervention had waned. A

single exception to the overall trend of decline was the rise in the willingness to engage in group work within the two Israeli groups. This may be a result of the mediocre level of willingness to engage in this type of practice upon entry into the education system (probably due to a lack of knowledge of this type of intervention) and a consequence of the theoretical and practical emphasis on this type of practice during the training process at the two Israeli universities.

Contrary to expectations concerning the crucial role of the educational system as an agent of professional socialization, the findings in our study indicate that the education process did not alter in a major way the professional preferences of the students that reached the social work schools studied here. To a certain degree these preferences do not appear to be in line with the changing demands of the profession, for example, the growing demand for social workers to deal with the needs of the unemployed and elders in both the United States and Israel (Carlton-LaNey, 1997; Lowenstein, 1998). Moreover, students reach the schools with patterns of professional preferences which could be interpreted as diverging from the declared values of social work in the sense that the profession is committed to serving the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in society (Haynes & White, 1999) and to undertaking a leading role in promoting social justice (International Federation of Social Workers, 2001; Figueira-McDonough, 1993). The programs do not change these preferences. They only marginally instill in students a commitment to populations that suffer from severe disadvantage, such as the unemployed and chronically ill, and the services that focus upon them. Further, they only partially lead students to seek to join the public service (a governmental agency remained the least preferred sector for employment as compared to a greater preference for private for-profit sector) or to engage in social change (no increase over time in willingness to prefer community organization or social policy formulation was found).

While the degree of decline in the level of professional preferences of the students was more marked in the Israeli cases in comparison to very little change in the preferences of the American students during their studies, the findings of the study also do not reveal any major cross-national differences in the direction of change in the preferences of the Israeli and American students over time. This would appear to strengthen the conclusion that the limited impact of the educational process upon students' professional preferences is not a singular consequence of the unique characteristic of the Israeli social work education system. However, in order to ascertain whether this claim is indeed justified and rele-

vant to the wider universe of social education it will require additional investigation into the professional preferences of students of social work in other types of social work programs and in different national settings.

This portrayal of trends among social work students at the completion of their training process should be a source of concern for social work practitioners. Indeed the conclusions of this study may even underestimate the degree of displeasure among social work students with aspects of the profession. The findings presented here relate only to those students who actually completed their course of training and participated in both the measurements taken. Conceivably, the students most displeased with social work dropped out before the second measurement was even taken or due to their dissatisfaction did not participate in the concluding part of the study.

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