# **Synopsis**

This research project explores shared decision-making between parents, children, and social workers in planning, intervention, and evaluation committees (PIECs). PIECs form part of the work of social services departments, and, according to Israeli social work regulations, their role is to decide on treatment plans for children in at-risk situations that raise concerns that their normal development could be impaired. The committees discuss the circumstances surrounding the children’s conditions, evaluate the level of risk and the family's difficulties, needs, and strengths, and examine possible interventions. Ultimately, PIECs are expected to formulate an optimal treatment plan that maximizes the partnership with family members and establishes agreements between professionals and the family (Ministry of Welfare and Social Services, 2017). In Israel, 18,000–22,000 committees are convened annually to consider treatment plans for 30,000–35,000 children.

The project comprises two successive studies addressing the questions of to what extent, in what form, and under which conditions does shared decision-making take place in the context of PIECs. The first study is based on a content analysis of 73 PIEC protocols. The second study measures shared decision-making by using survey questionnaires completed by parents and social workers who participated in PIECs.

**Background:** Client participation in decision-making is a well-recognized principle in social work theory and practice. Over the past 20 years, it has gained popularity in additional areas, such as health, education, and urban planning. This growing trend is driven both by the perception that people have the right to be involved in decision-making about their lives and by the proven benefits of client participation: Client participation contributes to clients’ sense of empowerment, increases their willingness to cooperate with the designated plan, enhances their ability to exercise their social rights, and improves outcomes. In addition, client participation is a core value in the social work code of ethics and now is a significant element in Ministry of Welfare declarations, regulations, and instructions concerning most social services. Client participation is based on creating more of a balance between the more powerful professionals and the less powerful clients or families. Proactive power-sharing is crucial to achieving client participation.

Researchers have yet to agree upon a definition of client participation. The literature describes a variety of behaviors ranging from a paternalistic approach to varying degrees of power-sharing. Nonetheless, professionals and researchers do agree that certain measures can contribute to effective participation by social work clients, such as trust and respect-based relations, good communication, the provision of clear, detailed information to the client, and support in preparing for decision-making processes. Participatory practices in social work are usually based on a long-term relationship of trust between the social worker and the client, and the discourse between them is characterized by such terms as “hearing the clients' voice,” “cooperation,” “standing by the client,” and “empowerment.”