**Social Workers’ Perspectives on their Professional Motivation**

**and their Feeling of having a Calling**

Social work is a profession dedicated to helping individuals, groups, and families improve their social and personal functioning: most of the profession serves the disadvantaged segments of society (Bradley, Maschi, O’Brien, Morgen, & Ward, 2012). Social workers engage with people in complex life situations and tend to be deeply affected by their work (Buchbinder, 2007; Dorfman, 1996), raising the question of their motivations for engaging in this profession. One explanation is that many social workers view their work as a calling. To date, several studies in the field have explored various aspects of the feeling of having a calling among students of social work (Freeman, 2007; Sherr et al., 2006; Trulear, 2007). A few studies have explored social workers’ motivations for working in this profession or the meanings they attribute to it (Bradley et al., 2012; Buchbinder, 2007). This study complements the existing research on the relationship between social workers’ professional motivation and their feeling of having a calling.

Interviews were conducted with fifteen male and female social workers with between two and thirty-five years of professional experience who currently work directly with mental health clients. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, only two interviews were conducted in-person, while the remaining thirteen took place using the remote Zoom platform. Participants were asked what motivated their choice to become social workers and the meanings that they attribute to their decision to continue to practice social work long-term. They were also asked whether they regard themselves as having a calling and if so, to elaborate on this.

All interview transcripts were analyzed by applying a thematic method based on three central themes: (1) the decision to study social work, (2) motivations to practice social work long-term, and (3) having a calling. Further analysis of the interviews uncovered similarities and differences between sub-groups of interviewees, identifying six archetypes. Although this research was based on a small sample, it revealed varied perspectives and definitions having a calling, as well as its experiential manifestation. These results contribute to the existing knowledge on the phenomenon of social workers’ seeing themselves as having a calling and may be beneficial in promoting future research on this concept in Israel.