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

**and Sense of Calling**

Social work is a profession designed to help individuals, groups, and families improve their social functioning, with a focus on assisting the disadvantaged populations in a 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). This raises questions regarding what motivates them to continue in this profession. One explanation relates to the concept of having a sense of calling, and the meanings they attribute to their work. To date, most research in this area has explored various aspects of the sense of calling among students of social work (Freeman, 2007; Sherr et al., 2006; Trulear, 2007). 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 broadens the current knowledge of the relationship between social workers’ professional motivation and their sense of calling.

Interviews were conducted with fifteen male and female social workers, having between two and thirty-five years of professional experience, who currently work directly with mental health clients. Due to restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic, thirteen of the fifteen interviews took place on Zoom. Participants were asked about what motivated them to choose to become social workers, and the meanings and motivations they attribute to their decision to continue to practice social work long-term. They were also asked whether they feel a sense of calling, and if so, to elaborate on this.

All interview transcripts were analyzed by applying a thematic method surrounding three central themes: 1) the decision to study social work, 2) motivations to practice social work long-term, and 3) the sense of a calling. Further analysis of the interviews uncovered similarities and differences between sub-groups of interviewees, and identified six archetypes. Although this research was based on a small sample, it revealed different definitions of the sense of calling, perspectives on it, and ways in which it manifests experientially. These results contribute to the existing knowledge on the sense of calling and promotes future research on this concept in Israel.