Application No. 2207/24

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**Scientific Abstract**

**The emergence of** **informal leaders in local social services and their role in** **social policy formulation**

Background: Social workers can act as leaders in local social services even in the absence of a formal leadership position (a process also known as informal leadership emergence). As informal leaders they can play a decisive role in policy formulation processes. Their ability to operate in diverse policy arenas, to inspire other team members to get involved, and to reshape social policy have the potential to promote social changes. Even though the engagement of social workers in social policy formulationhas received broad attention worldwide in the professional discourse and literature, the focus has hitherto been largely on formal leadership. The way in which informal leadership emerges, the ways in which informal leaders inspire their teams to become involved in the policy process, and the factors that influence the involvement of informal leaders in the policy process have not been studied.

Research Objectives: The proposed study seeks to broaden knowledge regarding the emergence of informal leaders in local social services, thereby contributing to the wider theoretical discourse on the role of leaders in social policy formulation. The three aims of the proposed study are as follows: (1) to understand the process of informal leadership emergence and the conditions under which it takes place in local social services. The study will focus on personal leadership attributes, as well as organizational, social, and task-related factors that may influence social workers who are not in formal leadership positions to take the role of an informal leader; (2) to understand the ways in which informal leaders influence and inspire other team members to engage in social policy formulation, as well as factors that may influence the ways in which social workers are involved in social policy formulation and their level of involvement; (3) to expose the forms (strategies) of engagement in social policy formulation, for both informal leaders and other team members.

Methods: The study will adopt a mixed-methods approach, including a quantitative survey and qualitative semi-structured interviews. Working from a list of all local social services in Israel, we will randomly sample 60 local social service providers with clusters based on ethnicity and size of localities. All social workers employed in each department will be approached. The questionnaires, based on valid existing scales, will be administered by the research assistants. The qualitative component will include semi-structured interviews with social workers identified in the quantitative survey as emerging informal leaders, as well as with social workers who reported that colleagues without a formal leadership position influenced their involvement in social policy formulationprocesses.

Expected Significance: To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first attempt to examine the emergence of informal leadership in social work in the context of engagement in social policy formulationprocesses. The research model integrates two bodies of knowledge: trait activation theory, which explains the emergence of informal leadership, as well as the body of knowledge on policy practice that covers the strategies and conditions under which emergent leaders and their teams become involved in social policy formulation. The focus on informal leadership emergence can make a major theoretical and practical contribution as most previous studies in social work have focused on formal leadership. From a theoretical standpoint, it will deepen the understanding regarding the conditions that influence social workers to become leaders and their unique role in change processes, especially regarding the ways in which they inspire team engagement. Practically, it will develop operational knowledge, which is expected to serve as the basis for developing training and supervision of leadership and its impact on involvement in social policy formulationin social services**.**

It is important to note that there are 258 local social service providers in Israel, whose social workers provide social services to individuals, families, and communities. Senior managers of local social services are required by Social Work Regulation (No. 2.4, 1998) to be registered as professional social workers. They are accountable to the local authority and are also responsible for implementing the Ministry’s policies and regulations. Following the pandemic and recent war, it is expected that there will be an increase in the complexity and severity of social problems, and that social workers will need to formulate long-term solutions for diverse and vulnerable populations. Informal leaders can, alongside the senior managers, play a key role in formulating social policy, for example by reshaping social policies through the design of mechanisms and act to promote these policies.

**Research Program**

**A. Scientific Background**

The role of leaders and their contribution to social policy formulationin social service agencies have captured the attention of scholars worldwide over the last few decades. Gaps between ambitious policy goals and the availability of the resources required to achieve them requires leaders to revise and redesign official policy (Aronson & Smith, 2010; Gassner & Goff, 2018; Sery & Weiss-Gal, 2021; Trappenburg et al., 2020). They are also required to act in diverse policy arenas to influence decision-makers (Gal & Weiss-Gal, 2023; Mendes, 2007) and to influence their subordinates to engage in policy arenas (Boehm et al., 2018; Evans, 2016; Lustig-Gants & Weiss-Gal, 2015; Nouman et al., 2020).

The roles of formal leaders in social policy formulationand in influencing the engagement of their subordinates are perhaps comprehensible given their authority, their managerial position, and their responsibility for planning, executing, and evaluating policies within the organization. By contrast, the leadership role is less obvious for front-line social workers without formal authority or a formal managerial position (a situation also known as informal leadership emergence). Front-line social workers are subject to an organizational culture that is determined by the senior managers (Gal & Weiss-Gal, 2023).

However, evidence supports the assumption that front-line social workers initiate informal leadership processes to promote social change (e.g., ASPIRA Association, n.d.; Germak & Singh, 2010; Latzer, 2019; Nandan et al., 2019; Recanati-Kop-Rashi Award Association, 2018; Nouman & Cnaan, 2021). For example, social workers were shown to influence decision-making in organizations and to enable team members and people in the community to act for change (Ashcroft et al., 2023; King Keenan et al., 2019). Leadership, according to this evidence, is not limited to formal hierarchical roles, but rather is a process that occurs throughout the organization and may include a range of individuals who engage in leadership behaviors aimed at achieving change (King Keenan et al., 2019; Peters, 2018). However, a review of the literature also reveals that no systematic attempt has been made to learn about the emergence of informal leadership in local social services and its effect on engagement in change processes. Consequently, significant empirical and theoretical knowledge of the informal leadership phenomenon (often one of the early stages of leadership before a person receives a formal leadership role) is lacking. This is important because informal emergent leaders have the potential to make an important contribution to social policy formulation processes. Their ability to operate in diverse policy arenas, to inspire other team members to get involved, and to reshape social policy has the potential to promote social changes. Furthermore, informal leadership emergence is the first stage of leadership development, one in which those with no formal leadership position gain leadership abilities and construct leadership identity (Luria & Berson, 2013; Luria et al., 2019a).

The proposed study seeks to contribute to remedying this lack of knowledge. The aim of the study is to develop interdisciplinary theoretical knowledge on informal leadership in social work and its impact on social policy formulation. It will thus contribute to the theoretical discourse on the role of local social services in policy formulation. Conducting the study in Israel will enable us to explore these aspects in a multicultural country where there is significant diversity among local social services in terms of ethnicity and size of localities.

***Emerging leadership in organizations***

Social leadership in an organization starts with a person who is not in a formal leadership position but has the potential to be a leader (Luria & Berson, 2013; Luria et al., 2014, 2019a). In order to realize this leadership potential, certain skills need to be developed (Kalish & Luria, 2016; Lombardo & Eichinger, 2000). These skills may include a range of qualities such as cognitive ability and adaptability (Kalish & Luria, 2021; Luria et al., 2019b).

One of the key factors for the emergence of informal leaders is the perception of their leadership status by group members. In the absence of actual formal leadership roles on which potential leaders can be assessed, group members carry cognitive representations of the attributes and qualities they believe leaders ought to have (Kalish & Luria, 2016). Individuals are perceived as having leadership potential when their attributes match these cognitive representations or prototypes) Dries & Pepermans, 2012; Hogan et al., 1994; Lord & Maher, 1991). Being a leader involves an internalization process that incorporates a leadership identity as part of the individual’s self-image) Day & Harrison, 2007). Furthermore, in the group process known as relational recognition, leader and follower identities are socially constructed: individuals actively claim an identity and others affirm or grant that identity (Kalish & Luria, 2016).

In addition to these qualities and their assessment by the team, certain social conditions are required for potential leadership to be realized. Trait activation theory (TAT), which is adopted in the proposed research, suggests that the relationship between traits and performance can vary depending on the context (Tett & Burnett, 2003; Tett & Guterman, 2000). Extensive TAT literature demonstrates that latent traits are expressed or activated so that they influence performance in reaction to trait‐relevant contextual cues (Judge & Zapata, 2014; Manteli & Galanakis, 2022). TAT points to three sources of trait‐relevant cues: the organizational level, including characteristics such as organizational climate; the social level, arising from interactions with the social environment; and the task level, including day‐to-day duties identifiable by job analysis. Tett and Burnett (2003) suggest that the most obvious cues of each type (organizational, social, and task) trigger the trait activation process by creating demands, which they define as “opportunities to act in a positively valued way” (p. 505). Demands may also be described as expectations about desired behaviors on the part of group members. These demands reflect, in part, the informal prescriptions that arise from group norms, which themselves may vary depending on the organizational and social cues that are present in a given setting. TAT has been found to explain the relationships between leadership attributes and informal leadership emergence (Luria et al., 2019b; Tett & Burnett, 2003).

***Skills and conditions for leadership in social work***

Leadership in social work has generated numerous concepts and diverse theories. Many studies have focused on those who hold roles or positions of authority in organizations and are required to have attributes, skills, behaviors, and motivation to promote change (Fisher, 2009; Holosko, 2009; Lawler & Bilson, 2013; Peters, 2018; Rank & Hutchison, 2000; Sullivan, 2016; Vito, 2019). In recent decades, the leadership discourse has emphasized the role of front-line social workers who initiate leadership processes (Peters, 2018; King Keenan et al., 2019). These social workers may certainly have inherent traits or innate talents, but in order to realize leadership potential, they are required to develop their skills (Bliss et al., 2014; Holosko, 2009; Iachini et al., 2015).

Social work leadership literature focuses on conceptualizations and case studies of core leadership competencies that social workers who aspire to leadership roles in local social services require. These studies point to leadership qualities that include vision, influencing others to act, teamwork/collaboration, problem-solving capacity, and creating positive change (Holosko, 2009). Additional conceptualizations demonstrate how resource management, interpersonal communication, expertise in the field of public policy, and policy practice define leadership development in social work, and are required for effective management in social work ([National Network for Social Work Managers, 2012](https://www-tandfonline-com.ezproxy.haifa.ac.il/doi/full/10.1080/03643107.2013.853008); Thompson et al., 1999). However, literature on the emergence of informal leadership—that is, of personal attributes and informal leadership qualities of social workers that are not in a formal leadership role—is sparse.

The proposed research will focus on examining core social work leadership attributes that may characterize leadership potential—attributes that are frequently associated with leadership emergence: “Big Five” attributes, Self-concept, and Motivation to Lead. Of the Big Five traits,- *Extraversion*, defined as the tendency to be sociable, assertive, and active, has the highest meta-analytic correlation with leadership emergence (Grant et al., 2011; Judge et al., 2002). ship*Conscientiousness*, defined as the tendency to be dependable, persistent, and achievement-oriented, has the second-highest correlation (Judge et al., 2002). The impact of *Agreeableness* on informal leadership is inconclusive: it has been shown to help (e.g., Walter et al., 2012), hurt (McClean et al., 2018) or to be irrelevant (Lee & Farh, 2019) with regard to becoming an informal leader in a group (Badura et al., 2022). *Emotional stability* and *Openness to experience*, defined as an individual’s intellectual curiosity for new concepts (Zhao & Seibert, 2006), exhibit similarly beneficial or neutral implications for both formal and informal leadership emergence (Colbert et al., 2012; Hu et al., 2019; Ogunfowora & Bourdage, 2014).

*Core self‐evaluation* traits including self-efficacy and self-esteem have been frequently studied as antecedent to informal leadership emergence. These studies have shown that viewing the self in a favorable light promotes informal leader emergence (Atwater et al., 1999; Paunova, 2017). Chan and Drasgow (2001) defined *Motivation to lead* as “an individual difference construct that affects a leader’s or leader-to-be’s decisions to assume leadership training, roles, and responsibilities and that affect his or her intensity of effort at leading and persistence as a leader” (p. 482). Individuals who are highly motivated to lead are determined to take necessary steps to become leaders. They seek to improve their leadership skills, knowledge, and style, become informal leaders in their group, and ultimately assume leadership positions (Luria & Berson, 2013; Wellman et al., 2019).

Along with these personal qualities, social workers who are willing and able to take on leadership roles require the support of their colleagues and the organization (Peters, 2018). The contradictory findings regarding relationships between some of the above-mentioned leadership attributes and informal leadership emergence suggest the possibility of moderating conditions. TAT indicates the nature of the interdependence between personal traits and environmental conditions that may affect emerging leadership (Funder & Ozer, 1983; Kelley, 1991). The theory indicates decisive conditions at three levels: the organizational, social, and task levels.

The *organizational level* includes the organizational climate, which refers to employees’ shared perceptions of organizational policies, practices, work methods, and procedures (Luria, 2019). Particularly relevant to leadership emergence is the psychological safety climate (Zhou & Pan, 2015), defined as a shared perception that the work team is a safe environment for interpersonal risk-taking (Edmondson, 1999). In a team with high psychological safety there is trust, respect, and confidence between team members (Edmondson, 1996; Koopmann et al., 2016). In line with this, the team’s psychology safety climate provides employees with a safe, respectful, and trustworthy place to communicate and interact with team members according to their trait disposition, which helps those with traits that are known to be related to leadership to emerge as informal leaders in their group.

The *social level* refers to the culture of origin of the social worker. In multicultural societies, as is the case in Israel, local social services operate within local authorities in Jewish, Arab, or mixed communities (this last group will not be examined in the framework of the proposed study). Although these social service departments are subject to the guidelines of the Ministry of Welfare, they are afforded a great deal of professional discretion by virtue of their training and expertise (Gal et al., 2017). This consideration depends to a large extent on the culture of origin and the cultural hierarchical structure. The departments in Arab localities are mostly characterized by traditional models with a collectivist hierarchical structure and culture subordinate to the heads of the local government (Abu-Younnis et al., 2022). This culture in a leadership context in the organization may impede decision-making processes so as to comply with pre-defined rules (formal leadership) and thus limit trust and informal employee involvement (Lawler & Bilson, 2009). By contrast, Jewish localities are characterized by an individualistic culture where there may be more potential for consideration and joint decision-making within the team and acceptance of informal leadership based on the attributes of social workers who are not formal leaders. This study will examine culture of origin as a factor that moderates the relationship between leadership potential and the emergence of leadership among social workers in local social services, hypothesizing a stronger relationship between attributes and informal leadership emergence in the Jewish population that in the Arabic one.

The*task level* may be another key environmental factor influencing emergent leadership. Social workers in local social services are divided into two categories: direct social workers who provide psychosocial services to individuals and families, and community social workers who work with geographical or functional communities in order to create better solutions and services for community needs, as well as pursuing community development and promoting community strengths (Hovav et al., 2012; Itzhaky & Bustin, 2018; Itzhaky & York, 2002). The professional socialization of community social workers puts more emphasis on leadership practices, which is reflected in community development, community activation, management of social enterprises and community projects, compared to direct workers who are more individually oriented (Boehm, 2016). The proposed study will examine the role of the social worker (direct vs. community) as a factor that moderates the relationship between leadership potential and the emergence of informal leadership among social workers in local social services, and will suggest that a stronger relationship between leadership attributes and informal leadership emergence will be found for community social workers than for direct social workers.

***The impact of leadership in social work on*** ***social*** ***policy formulation***

The involvement of social workers in social policy formulationprocesses is anchored in a professional requirement to promote equality and social justice (AASW, 2020; BASW, 2021; ISASW, 2018; NASW, 2017). Social workers are required as an integral part of their professional work to engage in activities intended to impact policies at organizational, local, and national levels that have the capacity to enhance the well-being of their clients, to prevent distress, and to better solve social problems (Benish & Weiss-Gal, 2023; [Gal & Weiss-Gal, 2013](javascript:;); Guidi, 2019, 2020; [Jansson, 20](javascript:;)18). In recent decades, this involvement has attracted increasing attention in the research literature and professional discourse. Various studies have provided insights into the ways in which social workers operate in policy arenas and the factors that encourage involvement in different countries (Burzlaff, 2022; Carrilho & Branco, 2023; Gal & Weiss-Gal, 2020; Hoefer, 2019; Jaswal & Kshetrimayum, 2020; Kaufman, 2018, 2019; Krumer-Nevo, 2016, 2020; Leiber et al., 2023; Leitner & Stolz, 2023; Mendes, 2013; Mendes et al., 2015; Nouman & Azaiza, 2021, 2022; Nouman & Cohen, 2023; Pawar, 2019; Pritzker & Lane, 2017; Shewell et al., 2020; Ritter, 2008).

In the proposed study we shall assume that informal leaders can play a central role in social policy formulation. Structural inequality, unresponsive service delivery systems, and gaps in services for emerging needs may motivate informal leaders to engage in a range of action strategies and to act in various ways and on diverse levels to influence and reshape social policy. Informal leaders may even promote the involvement of team members in policy change processes. Some initial studies have pointed to the importance of informal leadership in social work, recognizing how social workers can undertake leadership in certain areas at some point in their practice; for example, in order to influence decision-making in the organization and to allow other team members to act for change (Ashcroft et al., 2023; Cullen, 2013; King Keenan et al., 2019). Other researchers suggest that the influence of informal leadership may be expressed, for example, in building relationships based on open communication, mutual support, and sharing of resources and knowledge (Peters, 2018; Vito, 2019). In the current study, we adopt the conceptualization and measurement of informal leadership emergence from the applied psychology field in order to examine the phenomenon in social work (Kalish & Luria, 2021; Luria & Berson, 2013; Luria et al., 2014, 2019a). Studies from applied psychology that have captured informal leadership emergence in work teams found that this contributed to improving team performance and efficiency (Nicolaides et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2012).

Apparently, informal emergent leaders can influence and contribute to social policy formulation by creating motivation of and commitment by team members to reshape policy. However, in order for the processes of influence and engagement of leaders in social workers in policy arenas to occur, certain conditions are required to enable this engagement. The conceptual framework of the engagement of social workers in policy practice, policy practice engagement (PPE; Gal & Weiss-Gal, 2023) reveals four categories of factors that may influence the level of involvement and the ways in which social workers are involved in policy arenas, namely motivation, facilitation, opportunity, and environment.

Motivation refers to factors at the individual level that may influence the involvement of social workers in policy. These include values, attitude, personal attributes (Gal & Weiss-Gal, 2023; McLaughlin et al., 2019; Mendes, 2007), and personal resources such as political interest and political efficacy (Gewirtz-Meydan et al., 2016; Ritter, 2008; Schwartz-Tayri, 2021). Facilitation refers to factors associated with the social worker’s workplace that enable, encourage, or impede engagement in policy practice. These factors include the organization’s goals as well as its heritage and organizational guidelines (Gal & Weiss-Gal, 2023; Jansson et al., 2016; Mendes, 2007; Makaros et al., 2020; Nouman et al., 2020). Opportunity refers to the political institutions in which the policy design process takes place and the nature of opportunities for involvement in policy design processes that are accessible to social workers (Haynes & Mickelson, 2009; Kindler, 2023; Mosley, 2013; Weiss-Gal & Gal, 2014). Environment refers to the structural social and professional environments that have a potential impact on social workers' decisions to engage in diverse policy routes and the form this will take (Gal & Weiss-Gal, 2023). This includes social workers’ perceptions of the severity of social problems and the policies taken to address them; professional socialization; and also how service users and other citizens influence the willingness of social workers to engage in policy arenas (Awad-Elias & Nouman, 2023; Nouman et al., 2020).

Based on these insights, in the proposed study we seek to examine the manner in which emerging informal leaders are influence and inspire other team members to engage in social policy formulation, the factors that explain their engagement in policy formulation, and lastly the forms (strategies) of engagement of informal leaders and other team members in policy formulation.

**B. Research Objectives and Expected Significance**

In the proposed study, we seek to expand our understanding of informal leadership in social work and its impact on involvement in policy formulation. Based on the research model (Figure 1), this study will examine the way in which informal leadership emerges (personal attributes and organizational, social, and task conditions). We will also test the manner in which informal leaders are influence and inspire other team members to engage in policy formulation. We will study the forms of engagement in policy formulation, of both informal leaders and team members, as well as factors that explain their engagement in policy formulation.

Specific aims of the study are (1) to understand the process and the conditions in which informal leadership emerges in local social services by looking at personal attributes as well as organizational, social, and task-related factors that may influence social workers who are not in formal leadership positions to take on and accept the role of informal leaders; (2) to understand the ways in which informal leaders influence and inspire other team members to engage in social policy formulation, as well as factors that may influence the level of involvement and the ways in which social workers are involved in social policy formulation; (3) to expose the forms (strategies) of engagement in social policy formulation for both informal leaders and other team members.

**B.1. Expected Significance**

The study will contribute to a better understanding the of emergence of informal leadership in social work, and to the more specific efforts at policy formulation in social work within the framework of local social services. We have constructed a research model that integrates two bodies of knowledge: trait activation theory (from applied psychology), which explains the emergence of informal leadership; and the body of knowledge of social policy formulation (from social work) that explains the conditions in which social workers (emergent leaders and their teams) will be involved in social policy formulation and the forms (strategies) of their engagement in policy formulation. The focus on informal leadership emergence can make a major theoretical and practical contribution as most previous studies have focused on formal leadership. The impact of leadership on involvement in policy formulation has received little research attention to date, while the limited research that does exist tends to rely mainly on qualitative work and case studies and to focus on formal leadership. A systematic, quantitative examination of informal emerging leadership in social work, as well as its influence and involvement in policy formulation, is lacking. The proposed study seeks to offer a better understanding of this field, particularly regarding policy formulation processes. It will shed light on the process and conditions under which informal leadership emerges, as well as identifying factors that explain the involvement of these leaders in policy formulation, the ways in which they are involved, and how they influence others to become involved. The study will ideally lead to a discussion regarding the development of leadership to promote involvement in social policy formulation. In order to create long-term solutions for diverse and vulnerable populations, informal leaders can reshape social policy through the design of mechanisms and act to promote a benevolent policy.

**C. Detailed Description of the Proposed Research**

**C.1. Working Hypotheses and Questions**

In the quantitative part of the study we will examine the following four hypotheses (Figure 1):

1. Leadership attributes (Big Five traits, core self‐evaluations, and motivation to lead) are positively associated with group members’ perceptions of informal leadership emergence.
2. Organizational conditions moderate the relationship between leadership attributes and informal leadership emergence, such that a high psychological safety climate will promote a stronger relationship between leadership attributes and informal leadership emergence.
3. Social conditions will moderate the relationship between leadership potential and leadership emergence, such that in Jewish cultural social conditions there will be a stronger relationship between leadership attributes and leadership emergence than for Arabic cultural conditions.
4. Task conditions will moderate the relationship between leadership potential and leadership emergence, such that for community social workers there will be a stronger relationship between leadership attributes and informal leadership emergence than for direct social workers.

In the qualitative part of the research we will focus on the following four research questions:

1. What are the ways in which informal leaders influence and inspire other team members to engage in social policy formulation?
2. What are the factors that may influence the level of involvement and the ways in which social workers are involved in social policy formulation?
3. What are the action strategies adopted by informal leaders and team members for influencing social policy formulation?
4. Is there a connection between the level of involvement in social policy formulation and the way the leader enables, motivates, or encourages such involvement?

Responses to these research questions and hypotheses will be drawn from a mixed-methods study that will comprise of a quantitative survey and qualitative semi-structured interviews.

**C.2. Experimental Design and Methods**

**Sample:** The sample in the quantitative study will consist of a total of 60 diverse local social services in Israel, 30 agencies from Jewish localities and an equal number from Arab localities. The research will aim to include all social workers employed in each of the departments. The random sample of local government social services will be constructed on the basis of the official Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services list of local government social services. The questionnaires will be distributed during department meetings by a research assistant (the manager of the department will not be present during the distribution). We will be using a printed code displayed in front of each social worker for observer evaluation purposes; we will ask all social workers in the local agency to indicate whether they regarded each of the other social workers as leaders and indicate the number that are seen as leaders (see similar procedures described in Kalish & Luria, 2016; Luria & Berson, 2013). We will ask all the social workers if they agree to be interviewed; those that agree will provide their email address in order to coordinate an interview.

In the second stage, we will conduct a qualitative study that will include semi-structured interviews with social workers who (a) were identified in the quantitative survey as emerging informal leaders or (b) reported that leaders without formal roles influenced their involvement in social policy formulation. The purpose of the interviews is to gain a better understanding of the process and conditions under which informal leadership emerges, the ways in which informal leaders influence and inspire other team members to engage in social policy formulation, the factors that influence involvement in social policy formulation, and the forms (strategies) of engagement in social policy formulation, for both informal leaders and team members.

**Research tools:** The research model will be examined using validated questionnaires, which will cover the following:

*Big Five* traits will be measured with a Big Five personality traits questionnaire (Frederick et al., 2006). For manageability, we selected the short (20-item) version. (Self-report.)

*Core self‐evaluations* will be measured using the standard 12-item CSE scale. We chose the CSES as a control because its dimensions have been shown to be strong correlates of most of the variables under study, including MTL, leadership outcomes, and in particular leadership emergence (Chan & Drasgow, 2001; Erez & Judge, 2001). CSE is “defined as basic conclusions or bottom-line evaluations that individuals hold about themselves” (Judge & Bono, 2001, p. 80). It focuses, among other things, on the overall value that one places on oneself as a person, as well as on generalized efficacy beliefs. We used the 12 items of the CSE scale (CSES; Judge et al., 2003); these measure specific core traits including self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, emotional stability, and locus of control. Responses will be rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A sample item would be “I am confident I will achieve the success I deserve.” (Self-report.)

*Motivation to lead* will be measured by a survey that includes 27 items assessing the three MTL factors: affective identity (sample item: “Most of the time, I prefer being a leader rather than a follower when working in a group”), social normative (sample item: “I feel that I have to lead others if I am asked to”), and non-calculative (sample item: “I am only interested in leading a group if there are clear advantages for me”) (Chan & Drasgow, 2001). Responses will again range over a 5-point Likert scale. (Self-report).

*Informal leadership emergence* will be measured according to existing procedures (Kalish & Luria, 2016; Luria & Berson, 2013) in which participants will be asked to indicate whom in their group they perceived as informal leaders. Participants will be asked to nominate leaders. Using a percentage of the total number of social workers in the group (to control for group size), scores could range from 0 (not selected) to 100 (selected by all members). (Report of others. Respondents will not report on themselves.)

Psychological safety climate will be measured by a seven-item scale developed by [Edmondson (1999)](https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.551366/full#B18). Social workers will be asked to rate their perception of psychological safety within their teams. Sample items are “It is safe to take a risk on this team” and “Working with members of this team, my unique skills and talents are valued and utilized.” (Self-report.)

\* The forms (strategies) of engagement in social policy formulation of both informal leaders and team members will be examined by open question. The culture of origin of the social worker (Jewish or Arab) and the role of the social worker (direct or community social workers) will be determined by two “yes/no” questions. We sample departments in which social workers are from the same ethnic community (see procedure).

**Procedure:**

**C.3. Preliminary Results**

As a pilot, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 35 senior managers in local social services regarding informal leadership and the role it plays in policy processes. The sample included both Jewish and Arab localities each with different demographic characteristics (size of locality and socioeconomic status), in an attempt to provide as wide a representation as possible. All participants signed an informed consent form before participating. The results indicate that social workers in local social services do play a decisive role as informal leaders in involving and influencing staff in policy processes, although their involvement and influence are largely contingent on organizational, social, and political opportunities and barriers. We believe this finding to be a positive indicator of the worthiness and importance of the proposed study.

**Conditions for undertaking the study:** The proposed study builds upon the experience and expertise of two principal investigators from different fields (social work and applied psychology) with the support of an external advisor (an expert on social policy). The first PI, Dr Nouman, has published multiple papers on policy practice. She leads the Graduate Program for Leadership and Social Change at the University of Haifa. As part of her role, Dr Nouman promotes programs for the training of social workers, teaches courses she has developed in the field, and guides Masters social work students. In addition, she has experience in undertaking large-scale surveys of social workers in Israel (e.g., Nouman et al., 2019; Nouman & Azaiza, 2023) and has established an excellent working relationship with the Ministry of Social Welfare and local social welfare agencies. These connections will facilitate the collection of the data. The second PI, Prof. Gil Luria, has published multiple papers on informal leadership emergence (e.g., Kalish & Luria, 2016, 2021; Luria et al., 2014, 2019; Luria & Berson, 2013) and organizational climate (Luria, 2019). He has conducted multiple large field studies using quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods analysis. Prof. Luria will be the lead PI for the proposed study and will be in charge of the applied psychology–related measures (leadership emergence, leadership attributes, organizational conditions). The consultant, Prof. John Gal, is a professor at the School of Social Work and Social Welfare at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and has published multiple papers on leadership and policy engagement in social work. In the proposed project, Prof. Gal’s theory will be used to explain how informal leaders engage in social policy formulation. He will be an external advisor to the PIs, and will be in communication with them at each stage of the research.

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