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

**Content**

1. This proposal expertly covers the structure of the proposed research; however, how far the analysis might go beyond confirming or refuting the four (quantitative) hypotheses and specifically answering the four (qualitative) research questions is not really addressed. The opportunity here would be to make the proposal more analytically open and perhaps more innovative in this regard, if that is considered necessary to secure funding or otherwise desirable (it may not be). On the other hand, as a research team you are clearly experienced and could be expected to push on beyond direct determinations, if a somewhat wider scope is chosen; and in any case it would be inappropriate to make specific predictions about further analysis in advance of the core work. But general indications might be helpful. For example, in section A, Scientific Background, the paragraph on p. 3 beginning “One of the key factors” mentions group members’ cognitive representations, citing Kalish & Luria (2016), Dries & Pepermans (2012), Hogan et al. (1994), and Lord & Maher (1991). This might be a useful area to indicate for additional analysis around your qualitative research question 4.
2. Relatedly, looking at cited references such as Gal & Weiss-Gal (2023) and Mendes (2007), the literature seems to cover inquiry into “why” and “how” questions regarding engagement with social policy. Your research hypotheses and questions, in contrast, center more around “what” questions. Without knowing the reasoning behind your choice of scope, this may not be a problem, but alternatively there might be opportunities to suggest further analysis in these areas, particularly if the semi-structured interviews are seen as open-ended and potentially generating findings beyond the four specified research questions (see also my Methodology comment 3 below).
3. Specifically on “how/why” as opposed to “what”-centered inquiry: in Section A, at the foot of p. 6 you say that “this involvement has attracted increasing attention in the research literature” – if you choose to pursue my point 2 above, you could expand here about the results of this attention, picking a couple of concrete findings from the string of cited works at the top of p. 7.
4. On p. 7, do you need to back up your assumption “that informal leaders can play a central role in social policy formulation”? You touch on this later, in section C.3 Preliminary Results where you discuss the pilot study, but you might also make that point at this earlier stage. Also, and perhaps more usefully, you could cite findings in the literature that support this (admittedly very reasonable) assumption. Separately, but later in the same paragraph (from “Some initial studies…” to the end of the para), the focus seems to drift from policy to operational level, and thus away from your study focus – could this be addressed?
5. Section B, Research Objectives and Expected Significance, reads as slightly generic when it comes to the first part, on leadership emergence: this could be simply a study of the informal emergence of leadership that happens to be sited in the social services context. The opportunity here, which you may be anticipating for the study but have not identified in this proposal, would be to inquire into differences in leadership emergence patterns between the social work field and other, non–social service contexts. This would make good use of your cross-disciplinary PI pairing, which is undoubtedly a key strength of your proposal in terms of breaking down siloed areas of study. As with point 2, you need not be specific about what you might find, but could indicate possible targets of further analysis.
6. If useful, could you connect the leadership emergence and policy engagement parts of your proposed study? The last two sentences of Section B.1 “tease” this possibility, so you might be able to say a bit more.
7. In section C.3, I commented on the specific wording “worthiness and importance of the proposed study” – beyond this, I am wondering if you should expand a bit here in terms of the value of the study for expanding insight into the issues investigated through the choices of context (social services) and informal (as opposed to formal) leadership, rather than just the fact that these choices are under-investigated in the literature.

**Structure**

The proposal is generally very clearly structured; for instance, section A on Scientific Background (the longest section) is logically well organized to set up the study aims and ultimately the research hypotheses and questions. Two minor points:

1. The Abstract has a few close repetitions of phrases or sentences in the main part of the report; for instance, the sentence “The research model integrates two bodies of knowledge…” appears under Expected Significance in both the Abstract and section B.1. This is hard to avoid given the closely paralleled structure of the Abstract and the proposal proper, and is not crucial in any case, but there might be an opportunity to expand on such points when they recur, or at least to vary the phrasing somewhat.
2. Given that you have already piloted the semi-structured interview protocol, this would be an opportunity to share the specific questions asked of the pilot participants at interview. While these questions might need to be adapted going forward – which could be seen as a sign of adaptability to circumstances – you could cover this by making it clear that you are presenting pilot questions.

**Coherence**

Again, the proposal is clear and coherent, with just one minor issue to raise: It took me a while to piece together the government-provided nature of the service centres studied, and it wasn’t until toward the end that the full structure (not to mention the full name of the responsible Ministry) was clarified. Better to do this at the outset.

**Methodology**

1. Could you relate how the four quantitative hypotheses will be tested to the specific research tools listed under section C.2 – would you perform a formal statistical correlation of the results obtained with these tools? For hypotheses 3 and 4, given the open-question nature of the final research tool, what strategy would you adopt to test these latter two hypotheses?
2. How, if at all, might you link the quantitative and qualitative results? This might not be part of the formal study design but it could be useful to consider how potential links might be interrogated.
3. Breaking down siloing of knowledge through a cross-disciplinary PI partnership is a strong feature of this study. Could you offer some ideas on how this might be leveraged, beyond the fact of siting an investigation of emerging leadership within a social work context? I have already made a sample suggestion in point 5 of my “Content” comments, but it might be worth developing this idea, if desired, under methodology also. For example, how (methodologically) might you compare your findings on leadership emergence in social service teams to related findings in other contexts elsewhere in the literature? Again, would you consider extending beyond a straightforward test of Hypothesis 2 to consider other organizational influences on the leadership potential–leadership emergence dynamic besides the psychological safety climate, perhaps by linking to semi-structured interview responses?
4. Your explanation in section C.2, Experimental Design and Methods, of the initial sample procedures doesn’t explicitly cover issues of privacy/anonymity. Even as covered in the more detailed descriptions in Kalish & Luria (2016) and Luria & Benson (2013), I feel it is worth making explicit mention here of what seems like an important aspect of implementing the procedure and selecting the sample, from the point of view of eliciting unbiased responses as much as protecting respondents’ privacy on principle.
5. Regarding the final, open-question research tool, you propose offering “yes/no” responses to the two questions. This raises a possible concern about neutrality in that there might be an unconscious bias toward viewing the option that happens to be “yes” as superior – which could also be a sensitivity issue for the Jewish/Arab cultural question. This could easily be avoided by offering “Jewish/Arab” and “direct/community” as more specific reply options.
6. Could you address additional ways in which the Jewish and Arab foci might be compared, beyond Hypothesis 3? Relatedly, would it be possible to cover why, beyond restricting to a direct test of this hypothesis, you are not looking at mixed communities? For the qualitative part of the research, doing so might create opportunities for richer insight.