**Sapir College**

**School of Social Work**

**November 2020**

**Proposal for a Continuing Education Program:**

**Integrating Social Work Graduates from Arab Universities Within Social Services in the State of Israel**

**The Rationale**

The training of social workers in Arab universities became acceptable once their bachelor’s degree was recognized by the state in 2016 and they were listed in the social workers’ register.

Social work graduates of universities in the Palestinian Authority and Jordan deal with many challenges. These include using professional language, adapting the practice to the target population, and dealing with their inferior status relative to social work graduates of universities in Israel. Social services departments, in turn, deal with the challenges of absorbing these social workers and creating a unified work team on the ground.

The profession of social work in the Arab world is far behind in all aspects, compared to the West. The main challenge, aside from gaining formal institutional recognition and being informally recognized by society, is establishing it as a profession by bolstering the theoretical and practical training, adapting the theoretical and practical knowledge to the characteristics of Arab society, and adopting values that integrate Islamic law with the Western code of ethics.

Hasnin (2014) finds that one of the key challenges the social work profession faces throughout the Arab world is building a preliminary training system that balances between theoretical studies and practical training. He uses the term “pedagogy of social work” to “reveal the secret” of how ineffective and unbeneficial the practical training is across the board (in terms of goals, content, students, instructors, certifying institutions, and results) in the oldest and most reputable social work schools in Palestine. According to Hasnin, the profession suffers due to the fact that the curriculum is biased in favor of theoretical studies (many of the lecturers are not social workers), while the aspect of practical training has continuously been neglected.

Researchers claim that the challenges facing social work in Palestine involves learning the essence of the profession from “international” social work and adapting it to the unique characteristics of the target population. The vast experience of social workers in international organizations can provide theoretical and practical knowledge that is appropriately suited to the uniqueness of various populations. As such, social workers in Palestine are asked to learn from UNRWA[[1]](#footnote-1) social workers who have gained a lot of international experience working in various areas in the Middle East (Ibrahim, 2015; Ibrahim, Hasan & Ali, 2014).

Ibrahim (2017a) finds that one of the ways to bypass the “professional imperialism” in the Arab countries, which is not where the profession of social work developed, is to strive to provide initial professional training based on “international,” or “glocal” social work. According to Ibrahim, this enables Arab graduates to learn from the experience of the international community and ensures continued collaboration between the local and global professional arenas. The ultimate objective is to develop a “local professionalism” suited to the uniqueness of the Arab culture.

Ibrahim (2017b) sheds light on the relationship between the profession of social work and religious belief in the Arab world. Despite the differences between the three parts of the Arab world—the Middle East (Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Palestine), the Gulf (Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, Oman, Bahrain, and Qatar), and North Africa (Egypt, Libya, Sudan, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco) and Yemen—Islamic law is the central source of legislation throughout the entire Arab world (with the exclusion of Lebanon). As such, Islam has homogenized Arab culture. Therefore, there is a demand among some of the Arab social workers to reinforce the status of Islamic law in the teaching and practice of the profession of social work in the Arab world as a means of adapting it to the environment in which it is performed. This measure would indeed challenge the hegemony of the West over the profession in the Arab world. However, it would also carry the risk of distancing professionals in the Arab world from the international professional community.

Ibrahim (2017c) points to the disconnect between the theory taught to Arab social work students and what is required of them as part of their practical training. There are several reasons for this disconnect, the main one being the gap between Western knowledge (originating mainly in North America and Central Europe), which the students absorb during their studies, and the social problems of the local populations in the places where the practical training takes place. The present program, therefore, calls for developing knowledge, expertise, and skills that are appropriate to the needs and issues experienced by the local community.

Many welfare office managers have claimed that the Israeli Ministry of Welfare covertly instructs them to direct graduates of Arab institutions toward privatized or voluntary services, or, if faced with a lack of choice, to institutions that are not part of the social welfare office system (e.g. senior citizen’s clubs, rehabilitative work centers, employment factories for at-risk youths, and clubs for the blind), and that under no circumstances are they to be directed toward the core fields. The rationale provided by the representatives of the Ministry of Welfare, is that these social workers “have not undergone sufficient training” and “cannot speak Hebrew.” The office managers estimate that the Hebrew-speaking supervisors at the Ministry of Welfare are challenged by the Arabic spoken by the graduates and by their alternative professional worldview. Despite the covert exclusion of graduates from Jordan and Palestine, they present a major challenge to those exercising the profession in Arab society. Their presence increases the exposure of graduates from Israeli institutions to the Arabic version of the professional language of social work and undermines the professional axioms on which we have been “raised.”

**The Program**

The proposed program is able to help position these social workers as equals within the social work profession and among their peers who have graduated from universities in Israel. Likewise, the program will instill knowledge and skills, and provide participants with the opportunity to practice the knowledge and practical experience they acquired in Arab universities, while adapting them to the Israeli context. We believe the right investment in these social workers will render them a unique and important resource in social work teams operating in social services departments in the Bedouin community.

**The Structure of the Program**

One day of professional training and practical experience in Israeli academia, for a period of one year. The program will include theoretical knowledge, learning the Hebrew language, practical knowledge acquisition, and implementation of the acquired knowledge, while addressing the participants’ personal experience and developing social enterprise and intervention skills.

A practical training day in the departments of social services: a professional instructor will guide each pair of students and we will examine the possibility of graduates receiving wages as professional aids in departments for social services.

**The Structure of the Program**

8:30–11:45 Introduction to the theoretical content we will learn today, what do we know and what do we not know.

A look at working with the individual.

11:45–12:00 Break.

12:00–13:30 Practice, implementation of the material learned in the lab (using rooms with mirrors).

13:45–15:15 A look at working with groups (beginning from the second semester, students will be required to facilitate a group).

**Budget**

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| **Details** | **Amount** |
| Coordination | 31,312 |
| Practicum | 62,624 |
| The Individual and the Environment (course) | 62,624 |
| Group Social Work (course) | 62,624 |
| Practical training | 280,800 |
| Insurance and other expenses | 40,000 |
| Administration and overhead | 107,997 |
| **Total overall cost for a group\*** | 647,981 |

\* **The budget refers to a group of 30 students**

**The cost of the program for 90 students is 1,943,943 NIS.**

1. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)