Value Profiles and Perceived Job Performance of Social Workers in Israel

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Abstract

Values play a crucial role in the credo of social work. Recent definitions of the profession delineate the values that should guide social work worldwide. At the same time, social workers' employment patterns and changes in the traditional welfare state have resulted in fragmentations in the profession, highlighting the importance of shared professional values. This study is the first to examine value profiles endorsed by social workers, as well as the association between such profiles and social workers' perceived job performance. Participants in the study were 519 social workers, working in various organizations and with diverse populations in Israel. Its findings delineate three value profiles identified among our sample—growth-focused, social-focused and growth-self-focused. Differences between social workers endorsing each profile were found in terms of workers' perceived job performance and perceived job-related abilities. These findings are discussed with relation to their unique contribution to what is known about values supported by social workers, as well as concerning the relationship between these values and social workers' job-related functioning in the context of the social work profession and social services in Israel.

Keywords: Israel, job performance, social workers, value profiles, values

Introduction

In many Western welfare states, recent decades have seen a consistent decline in the role of the state as a direct provider of social services, inadequate resources for dealing with changing and broadening social needs and the introduction of new styles of management and accountability (Peters, 2012; Hemerijck, 2013). The growing diversity and scope of social services intended to meet evolving social needs, the many different roles social workers are assigned to within them, and the continuously changing nature and extent of expectations, legislation and regulation guiding their work, have all increased the fragmentations historically prevalent in the profession (Carey, 2015; Dustin, 2016). The convergence between trends in welfare governance and social work's splintered patterns of employment, against the backdrop of varying social contexts, arguably highlights the unique position of values as unifying mechanisms among social workers. As stated by Banks (1995), values are central to holding the social work profession together.

In a most pivotal attempt to delineate a broad definition for the social work profession, delegates of federations of social workers and schools of social work from around the world convened in 2014 in Melbourne. The universal definition approved in this convention ratifies that:

> 'Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing' (International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW], International Association of Schools of Social Work [IASSW], International Council on Social Welfare [ICSW], 2014).

As is evident in this definition, social workers worldwide are expected to endorse and promote values associated with social change and development, social cohesion, the empowerment and liberation of people, social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities. The identification of these values as based at the core of the social work profession raises two pertinent questions: Do social workers endorse these values? And what type of relationship exists between values endorsed by social workers and aspects of their functioning in the challenging and diverse contexts in which they operate? The present article describes a study aimed at providing responses to these questions based on a sample of Israeli social workers.

What are values?

Values are abstract concepts that reflect what is important in people's lives and guide their conduct (Schwartz, 1992). Schwartz's theory of basic personal values offers a comprehensive framework for understanding what motivates human behavior. Schwartz (2012) organized people's broad motivations into a system of nineteen values ordered in a circular structure reflecting the dynamic relations among them. These values can be aggregated into four higher order values that are placed on two orthogonal bipolar dimensions. Each oppositional pole on the circular structure reflects opposing motivations, illustrating the dynamics and tradeoffs between them (Schwartz and Boehnke, 2004). The first dimension reflects the conflict between self-enhancement and self-transcendence. 'Self-enhancement values' focus on reaching personal goals through excelling and controlling others. 'Self-transcendence values' emphasize concern for the well-being and interests of others. The second dimension reflects the conflict between openness to change and conservation. 'Openness to change values' focus on the pursuit of change through new ideas, experiences and actions. 'Conservation values' stress the importance of the status quo to preserve the self and society. This structure has been found to be applicable to individuals in over sixty-five countries (e.g. Schwartz and Rubel, 2005).

Although the theory specifies distinct values, at a more basic level, it suggests that values form a continuum of related motivations. That is to say, values close to each other on the circle (presented in Figure 1) share a similar motivation and therefore are likely to lead to similar behaviors. Values that are opposite on the circle have a contradicting motivation and might lead to opposite behaviors. Therefore, some values combinations or profiles tend to be more prevalent than others. For example, people who attribute importance to self-transcendence might also attribute importance to openness to change values as both emphasize growth and intrinsic motivations (and can be defined as growth values). Other people who attribute importance to self-transcendence values might also endorse conservation values as both values emphasize other or social motivations that are not focused on individual needs. Nevertheless, the theory suggests that people who attribute importance to self-transcendence values are not likely to attribute high importance to self-enhancement values as these values reflect contradicting motivations. As opposed to other value typologies, which focus on a narrow set of values (such as family values) or on dichotomous values (e.g. individualism versus collectivism), Schwartz's theory offers a comprehensive model that enables the examination of a full range of values. However, as it is a quantitative-based model, it does not allow in-depth examination of values and their meaning.
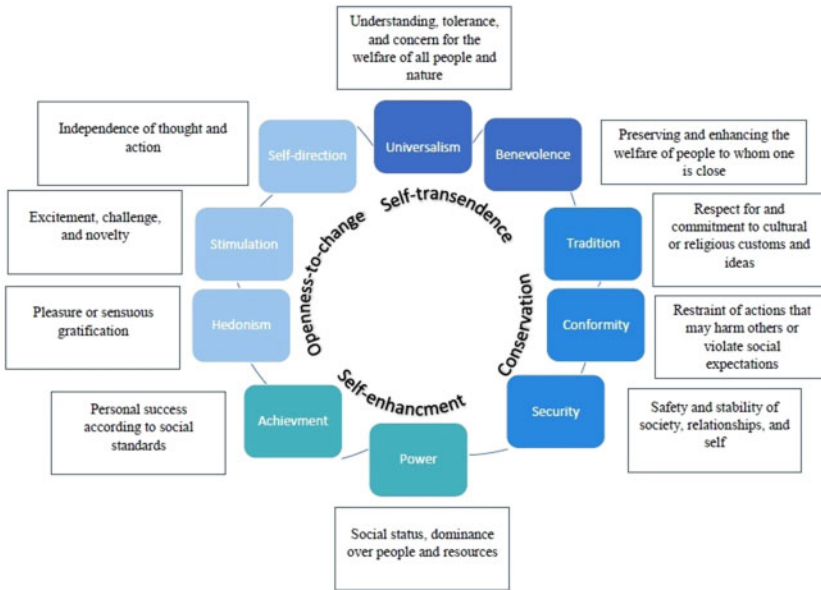
Figure 1: Schwartz's nineteen values model (Schwartz *et al.*, 2012)

To date, only three quantitative studies have researched value profiles: two were conducted among youths (Ungvary *et al.*, 2018; Daniel *et al.*, in press) and one among adults (Lee *et al.*, 2011). It is worth noting that the latter used Cluster Analysis for grouping values together, which is a statistical technique that uses rigid assumptions and relies solely on subjective judgments of researchers (Pastor *et al.*, 2007; Ungvary *et al.*, 2018). Among social workers, previous research using Schwartz's theory has been mainly performed in Israel and has focused on the relations between single values and different work-related factors, such as burnout (Tartakovsky, 2016) and professional skills (Itzhaky *et al.*, 2004). While the issue of the nature of values held by social workers has been dealt within some qualitative studies from various countries (including the UK, Ray *et al.*, 2015; Israel, Baum, 2010; and Romania, Frunză and Sandu, 2017), to the best of our knowledge, the present research is the first quantitative study to investigate the value profiles espoused by social workers.

From a practical perspective, social workers need to simultaneously negotiate different motivations on a daily basis. In their work, they may often be required to balance between different goals and values that may even contradict each other (Ellis, 2011; Levin, 2015; Mänttäri-van der Kuip, 2016; Nouman *et al.*, 2019). Previous research (e.g. Kim, 2011) has shown that complex work environments which demand finding

balances between conflicting values and expectations significantly influence social workers' ability to perform well at work. This echoes several classic and contemporary organizational theories, such as Katz and Kahn's (1978) social psychology of organizations or recent developments of Raisch and Birkinshaw's (2008) theory of organizational ambidexterity, which stipulate that frontline employees' ability to identify balance points between sometimes contradictory demands, expectations and moral considerations is key to their attainment of professional and organizational goals.

In order to gain more insight regarding this issue, this study sought to understand the relationships between the value profiles social workers endorse and elements of their job performance.

Job performance

Job performance is the assessment of the extent to which workers fulfill the expectations attached to their role descriptions (Onweze *et al.*, 2014). Such an assessment can be objective (e.g. relating to the number of tasks performed or goals achieved) or subjective (i.e. as perceived by workers themselves, management or service supervisors; Motowidlo, 2003). Subjective measures, such as the one used in this study, are more widely used in complex professional settings, where employees deal daily with highly diverse situations and are expected to adhere to both professional and organizational norms and requirements (Iaffaldano and Muchinsky, 1985).

Meta-analyses of literature dealing with job performance (e.g. Riketta, 2002) reveal that the concept of job performance is commonly divided into two main dimensions. One is the scope of goals workers manage to achieve. The other pertains to their potential to take on more responsibilities and move up the organization's management ladder. In this study, we examined social workers' perceived job performance as entailing two factors: their perceived task performance, as a measure of how well they think they fulfill the tasks they are afforded; and their assessment of their job-related abilities, as a measure of how well they think they can do their job and could advance toward more senior positions in their current workplace. These two factors are considered complementary in the sense that when examined together, they provide a cohesive look into workers' self-assessed functioning within an organization (Onweze *et al.*, 2014).

Previous research tapping factors associated with job performance have found that job performance decreases as conflicts in workers' lives are more salient. Role ambiguity, role conflict, role overload, job insecurity, work–family conflict, environmental uncertainty and situational constraints have all been found to correlate negatively with workers' job

performance (Gilboa *et al.*, 2008). Alternatively, a sense of belonging to the organization, peer support, a positive organizational culture, as well as workers' self-esteem, self-efficacy, internal locus of control and emotional stability have been found to predict better work functioning (Carmeli and Freund, 2003; Odle-Dusseau *et al.*, 2012). In terms of values, it has been shown that shared values among colleagues correlate with better job performance (Goodman and Svyantek, 1999; Kristof-Brown *et al.*, 2005). While studies on job performance are abundant, this study is the first to examine workers' own value profiles and their association with workers' perceived job performance.

The Israeli context

Social workers in Israel deal with an extremely large scope of needs, corresponding with Israel's high poverty rates, aging society (a lot of which suffer the consequences of traumas that occurred before the establishment of the state, such as the Holocaust), cultural diversity and clashes among different cultural groups and the ongoing strain of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Social services employing social workers in Israel are rooted in all market sectors (especially the public sector and the nonprofit sector), and in general, the working conditions of social workers in Israel (in terms of safety, salary, promotion possibilities and caseloads) are considered poor (Katan, 2013). According to previous research, social workers in Israel hold rather progressive attitudes toward welfare policy and tend to attribute causes of social problems, such as poverty or unemployment to structural inequalities and problematic social policy (Weiss-Gal *et al.*, 2009). At the same time, their main inclination is to perform social work on the individual service-user level, which is also the most prevalent level of intervention in social services, while practices such a social/class advocacy and policy practice are used to a much lesser extent (similarly to other countries; Weiss-Gal, 2017). Approximately 35,000 social workers are listed in Israel's social work licensing registry; however, the number of people actually practicing social work in Israel is unknown and is presumed to be much lower. In terms of the values they support, social workers in Israel have been found to endorse more self-transcendence than self-enhancement values (when examining values separately and not as constituting value profiles; Tartakovsky and Walsh, 2018), in themselves and in comparison with other, less 'social' professions (Knafo and Sagiv, 2004). Research using Schwartz's theory has pointed out that in general, different groups in Israeli society (such as Israeli-born Jews compared to Jewish Immigrants) endorse different values and cannot be discussed as one homogeneous society in terms of culture and values (Tartakovsky *et al.*, 2017).

The current study

In this study, we report findings regarding two main questions: (i) which value profiles do social workers in Israel endorse? and (ii) what are the associations between values endorsed by social workers in Israel and their perceived job performance?

Method

Sample and sampling

A total of **519** social workers living across Israel and working in different social service organizations participated in the study, most of them were female (87.9 per cent), with a mean (*SD*) age of 36.5 years (6.54). In their attitude to religion, most of the respondents (66.8 per cent) described themselves as secular, 17.2 per cent as religious (observant) and 16.0 per cent as 'traditional'.

More than half (63.3 per cent) held an MSW degree; 34 per cent held a BSW, the entry-level degree to practice social work in Israel; and 2.7 per cent held a PhD. Their average number of years in the social work profession was 13.5 (SD = 10.1), and their average number of years on the job was 8.6 (SD = 8.2). Most of them (68.8 per cent) worked in the public sector (municipalities or ministries), 16.2 per cent in NGOs and 15 per cent in the private or other sectors. While it is not possible to determine the representativeness of this sample (due to lack of updated official information regarding this population), its features seem consistent with those found in other recent studies on social workers in Israel (e.g. Tartakovsky, 2016; Levin and Tayri-Schwartz, 2017).

Measures

Demographics and professional background

Participants reported their gender, age, education, financial situation and religiosity. They also reported the type of service employing them (e.g. public sector, private sector) and their role within it (e.g. frontline worker, middle-level manager), as well as years in the profession, on the current job and in their current place of work.

Values

In order to assess which values participants endorse, the revised version of the Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ-RR; Schwartz *et al.*, 2012) was used. The PVQ-RR includes fifty-seven items in which every item

includes a short verbal description of a person's goals, aspirations or wishes, implicitly conveying the importance of a single value (e.g. 'It is important to him/her to make his/her own decisions about his/her life', 'It is important to him/her to have all sorts of new experiences', 'It is important to him/her to have the power to make people do what s/he wants', 'It is important to him/her to be tolerant toward all kinds of people and groups'). For each description, participants were instructed to rate on a six-point Likert scale (1 = not like me at all to 6 = very much like me) how similar the person described in each item was to them.

In order to test the extent to which data gathered corresponds with the structure offered by Schwartz's (2012) theory (presented in Figure 1), ordinal multidimensional scaling (Bilsky *et al.*, 2011) was performed. The results of this test showed that three items pertaining to 'face values' did not converge with other conservation values. Therefore, these items were removed from the analysis. Based on the analysis' findings, participants' four higher order values were calculated as an average of items included in each of them. To control for response tendency, participants' responses were centered around their average response to all items (Schwartz, 1992). The following subscale scores were calculated after this adjustment.

Self-enhancement. Self-enhancement values emphasize one's own interests, success and dominance over others (e.g. 'It is important to him to have the power to make people do what he wants'.; nine items, $\alpha = 0.82$).

Self-transcendence. Self-transcendence values emphasize the concern for the welfare and rights of others (e.g. 'It is very important to him to help the people dear to him'.; 15 items, $\alpha = 0.83$).

Openness to change. Openness to change values emphasize stimulation and independence of thought, action and feeling (e.g. 'It is important to him to form his views independently'. twelve items, $\alpha = 0.82$).

Conservation. Conservation values emphasize order, self-restriction, preservation of the past and resistance to change (e.g. 'It is important to him never to violate rules or regulations'; eighteen items, $\alpha = 0.89$).

Job performance

This construct was assessed by a questionnaire based on Goodman and Svyantek's (1999) task-based job performance scale. It consists of nine items tapping perceived job performance. Respondents were asked to indicate the applicability of each of the items to them, on a five-point

Likert scale (ranging from 1 = totally not applicable to 5 = totally applicable). Factor analysis with oblique rotation yielded two factors. The first, 'perceived task performance' includes five items (e.g. 'I achieve the objectives of my job') that explained 40.36 per cent of the variance. The second, 'perceived abilities' (e.g. 'I am suitable for a higher level role') includes four items that explained 11.43 per cent of the variance. Based on the mean of the items comprising each of the scales, three scores were calculated: a general score of perceived job performance ($\alpha = 0.81$) and two subscales: perceived task performance ($\alpha = 0.75$) and perceived abilities ($\alpha = 0.65$). Higher scores indicate higher levels of performance or abilities as perceived by the respondents.

Procedure

Using Qualtrics® software, the questionnaire was distributed through online platforms and social media pages used by social work professional communities in Israel, including online forums for exchanging information among professionals operated by the Ministry of Social Affairs, closed Facebook groups that are used by social workers to discuss professional issues and the online newsletter distributed to all members of the Israeli Association of Social Workers. An indication stipulating the understanding of the study's goals and the principles of informed consent was required before being redirected to the questionnaire itself. Data were collected over a period of four months, between August and November 2016. The study was approved by Tel Aviv University's Ethics Committee.

Results

Descriptive statistics

Means, standard deviations and correlations for demographics, values and job performance are presented in Table 1.

As can be seen, participants ranked self-transcendence values as the most important to them, followed by openness to change values. Conservation values were ranked third in importance, and self-enhancement values were ranked as the least important. Age was positively related to perceived job performance and its factors, that is, older social workers reported higher levels of job performance. Level of education was positively related to two of the scales—perceived task performance and perceived job performance. That is, social workers with a higher level of education reported higher levels of job performance.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations of demographics and values in relation to job performance and job performance factors

Demographics and study's variables	Mean (SD)	Perceived abilities	Perceived task performance	Perceived job performance
Gender		−0.06	−0.001	−0.04
Age	41.43 (10.68)	0.10*	0.13**	0.13**
SES		0.04	0.05	0.05
Education		0.07	0.09*	0.09*
Self-E	3.07 (0.59)	0.07	0.05	0.06
Self-T	4.58 (0.40)	−0.02	−0.001	−0.001
Open	4.29 (0.43)	0.12**	0.03	0.09*
Con	3.61 (0.54)	−0.17**	−0.09	−0.14**

*$p < 0.05$,
**$p < 0.01$, Self-E = Self-enhancement values; Self-T = Self-transcendence values; Open = Openness to change values; Con = Conservation values.

Gender and socio-economic status were not significantly associated with any aspect of job performance.

Participants who attributed importance to openness to change values also reported higher levels of perceived job performance and perceived abilities. No significant relation was found for perceived task performance. A mirror picture was obtained for conservation values. Participants who attributed importance to conservation values also reported lower levels of job performance and abilities. No significant relation was found for perceived task performance. Furthermore, no significant relations were found between self-enhancement and self-transcendence values and perceived job performance and its subscales.

Values profiles

As presented in the Introduction section, our main aim was to identify different patterns of value endorsement among social workers across the four higher order groups of values. In order to identify the number of profiles that best fit the data, Latent Class Analysis (LCA) was performed in Mplus version 8 (Muthén and Muthén, 2017). LCA is a person-centered approach that uses profiles instead of variables to predict outcomes. LCA has numerous advantages over other methods of grouping individuals, such as cluster analysis. The LCA is a model-based analysis that allows the identification and comparison of different profile solutions using several reliable indices of model fit in addition to theoretical considerations, rather than arbitrary or researcher-dependent model solutions that cluster analysis provides (Ungvary *et al.*, 2018).

A series of models was run to find the best solution deriving from the data. We started with one profile adding another profile to each run.

Table 2. Latent model analysis model fit

Number of profiles	AIC	BIC	Entropy	LMR-LRT	*p*-value
1	2,946.45	2,980.46	–	–	
2	2,740.44	2,795.72	0.64	209.31	<0.01
3	2,634.73	2,711.26	0.74	112.13	<0.01
4	2,542.98	2,640.78	0.7	98.59	0.06
5	2,503.68	2,662.74	0.7	47.77	0.26

The summary of this procedure is presented in Table 2. The models were assessed according to the recommended indices of model fit, including the 'Akaike Information Criterion' and the 'Bayesian Information Criterion', which are indices used to compare the fit of two or more models estimated from the same data set and smaller values are preferred (Lanza and Cooper, 2016); 'Entropy', which evaluates the quality of the measurement instrument as a whole, values close to one indicating a clearer delineation of classes (Asparouhov and Muthén, 2014); and the 'Lo–Mendell–Rubin Likelihood Ratio Test' that compares the model to a model with one less class, for which $p < 0.05$ indicate that the model is significantly better than a model with one fewer class.

Table 2 shows the indices for one to five profiles solutions. As can be seen, the three-profile solution best fit the data. The profiles were named accordingly to the dominant higher order values they reflected. The 'growth-self-focused' profile (8.2 per cent of the sample) included participants who attributed high importance to openness to change and self-transcendence values and the highest level of self-enhancement values (compared to other profiles). The 'social-focused' profile (36.6 per cent of the sample) included participants who attributed high importance to self-transcendence values and the highest level of conservation values (compared to the other profiles). The 'growth-focused' profile (55.2 per cent of the sample) included participants who attributed higher levels to openness to change and self-transcendence values. A graphic representation of the profiles appears in Figure 2.

In order to test whether value dimensions significantly differed among the three profiles, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tests were conducted for each higher order value (Table 3). *Post hoc* followed to examine mean differences. As can be seen in Table 3, all profiles significantly differ in value levels except for self-transcendence, for which no difference was found between social- and growth-focused profiles.

Chi-square analyses revealed no differences between the profiles in terms of workers' type of employing service ($\chi2 = 11.49$, $p = 0.07$) and role in the workplace ($\chi2 = 17.4$, $p = 0.14$).
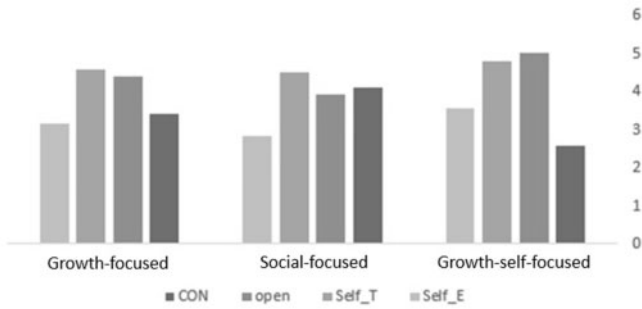
Figure 2: Value importance by value profile association. Con = Conservation values; open = Openness to change values; Self-T = Self-transcendence values; Self-E = Self-enhancement values.

Table 3. Differences among values profiles

Study's variables	Growth-self-focused $n = 48$ Mean (SD)	Social-focused $n = 182$ Mean (SD)	Growth-focused $n = 285$ Mean (SD)	F-value (2)
Self-E	3.59[a] (0.59)	2.83[b] (0.55)	3.17[c] (0.54)	43.99**
Self-T	4.81[a] (0.43)	4.50[c] (0.37)	4.58[c] (0.40)	11.39**
Open	5.01[a] (0.27)	3.99[b] (0.31)	4.41[c] (0.31)	275.28**
Con	2.58[b] (0.33)	4.14[a] (0.29)	3.41[c] (0.28)	660.68**
Perceived job performance	4.08[a] (0.43)	3.89[c] (0.47)	3.98 (0.40)	4.93**
Perceived abilities	4.15[a] (0.56)	3.93[c] (0.57)	4.09[a] (0.49)	5.97**
Perceived task performance	4.09 (0.38)	3.94 (0.45)	3.97 (0.41)	2.51[†]

Means with different superscripts (a, b, c) significantly differ.
[†] $p < 0.10$,
**$p < 0.01$, Self-E= Self-enhancement values; Self-T=Self-transcendence values; Open=openness to change values; Con=Conservation values.

Perceived job performance across value profiles

Next, we ran ANOVA tests to examine whether value profiles differed in relation to job performance and its factors: perceived task performance and perceived abilities. As shown in Table 3, we found a significant difference between the value profiles on job performance. Participants in the growth-self-focused profile reported significantly higher levels of job performance than participants endorsing the other-focused profile. We found also a significant difference between the values profiles on perceived abilities. Participants in both growth-self-focused and growth-focused profiles reported significantly higher perceived abilities than participants in the social-focused profile. No difference between the profiles was found on perceived task performance.

Discussion

The aims of this study were to uncover value profiles endorsed by social workers and the associations between these profiles and social workers' perceived job performance. Its findings provide some instructive insights regarding social workers' values and the role they play in the workplace. They will be discussed in the following order: values social workers' endorsed, value profiles derived from them and the relations between identified value profiles and social workers' perceived job performance.

Regarding the importance social workers in this study attributed to various values, quite decisively, the higher order value most endorsed by them was self-transcendence. While this may not be surprising and is in line with findings of previous findings (e.g. Tartakovsky, 2016), it highlights the strong relationship prevalent between participants' own personal values and the declared values of the social work profession. As mentioned, social work's current global definition requires social workers to seek social change, social justice and the liberation of all people (IFSW, IASSW, ICSW, 2014). Similar sentiments also appear in social work codes of ethics around the world (BASW, 2014; NASW, 2018; IASW, 2018). The congruence between social workers' own values and the moral and ethical principles underlying their profession in the sample of the current study is noteworthy and may reflect the deep internalization of professional values. It may also be the result of a predisposition or inclination of individuals celebrating values of self-transcendence to enter the social work profession in the first place (Arieli *et al.*, 2016) despite the often poor working conditions attached to it in Israel, as in many other countries (Katan, 2013; Fabricant *et al.*, 2016; Ravalier, 2019).

The second higher order value most endorsed by social workers in this study was openness to change. This too resonates with social work's current definition. A profession that charges its practitioners with promoting social transformations, especially in current times of local and global increasing inequalities and social conflict, encourages finding innovative solutions to complex social problems (Mor Barak, 2018). The interdisciplinary nature of social work, as stated in the same definition, encourages social workers to draw knowledge from several sources and obliges them to detach themselves from overriding oppressive social structures, challenge existing dominant powers and pursue the liberation of oppressed groups in society. These elements of the profession's definition, all echo values that reject the current status quo and actively aspire to change it.

The third and fourth most endorsed higher order values among social workers in this study reflect a mirror image of values associated with self-transcendence and openness to change and include self-enhancement and conservation values. It would appear that both these

groups of values are in conflict with, or contrast, some of the altruistic and change-motivated elements considered closely associated with the social work profession (Green and Carey, 2017). Schwartz's (2012) theory allows us to predict that the endorsement of seemingly opposite values also leads to varied or contradictory behaviors among social workers. It also teaches us that individuals can support several values at the same time, creating interesting combinations and behaviors in reaction to various situations.

In order to deepen our understanding of this issue, higher order values were grouped in this study into value profiles identifiable among our sample. As could be seen, a strong endorsement of self-transcendence values was apparent across to all three profiles despite other salient differences between them. This yet emphasizes the coherence that can be found between values of the social work profession and the values endorsed by social workers who participated in this study and the focal role self-transcendence plays in their world of values. As mentioned, previous research using Schwartz's (1992, 2012) theory has shown that in Israel, socially oriented professionals (such as social workers, psychologists or teachers) tend to be more supportive of self-transcendence than of self-enhancement values (Knafo and Sagiv, 2004). This may also demonstrate one of the defining elements of professionalism, which is a shared acceptance of certain values over others, among all those belonging to the same profession (Cribb and Gewirtz, 2015).

Also notable is the fact that two of the value profiles found among social workers in this study reflected significant endorsement of values associated with openness to change. This further underlines the importance social workers attributed to such values, which, again, are coherent with the social work profession's major principles. Certainly, in professional climates that require balancing between the demands of policymakers, management, supervisors and service users, as well as the goals and ethical principles of the profession, social workers are constantly forced to find creative responses to problems of individuals, families and communities (Payne, 2006). According to Schwartz (2012), endorsing values reflecting openness to change also contains finding satisfaction in innovation. The occurrence of this element across the profiles most common among social workers in our study implies that perhaps, being resourceful and associating positive feelings with frequent changes and flexible atmospheres is tied to the ability to continue working in the social work profession and within social services over time, at least in Israel. The possibility that value profiles may, in some way, be linked to turnover or retention among social workers in various work settings could be pursued in future studies. While research on turnover and retention among social workers typically addresses organizational factors (e.g. Webb and Carpenter, 2012), or the implications of workplace and professional challenges (such as burnout, or secondary trauma,

e.g. McFadden *et al.*, 2015) on social workers, this issue has not been examined with relation to social workers' value profiles and could be interesting to investigate.

In addition, most social workers in our sample chose to integrate values focusing on the well-being and acceptance of others, with values supporting inventiveness and finding gratification in deviation from the status quo and pursuing movement and action over stagnation and passivity. The predominance of this combination in the current sample may also signify a 'mix' needed in order to sustain in welfare services and maintain the frame of mind and strengths needed to deal with the acute challenges doing social work entails.

Oppositely, the second most common profile in our sample reflected values deeply rooted in caring of others, in combination with support for conservation and conformity. These social workers apparently cope with the harsh realities that often unfold in social services in Israel (Itzick *et al.*, 2018) by working toward maintaining the status quo, thus attempting to secure a stable environment for themselves and/or others. It can be said that in this, the two most salient profiles found among social workers in this study demonstrate one of the most defining tensions inherent to the social work profession—between preserving and protecting the social order, on one hand, and changing and challenging it on the other (Dominelli, 2004). The findings of this study suggest that this tension prevails also in the values held by social workers themselves and clearly distinguishes between them in terms of the values they endorse.

With respect to the least common profile in our sample, the difference between it and the profile most frequently found was that social workers endorsing it supported self-enhancement values to a greater extent than social workers represented in the other two profiles. So, as is quite reasonable, also among social workers in the sample of this study, some valued their own personal advancement alongside their deep concern for others. Self-enhancement can play a role in social workers' choice to engage in the social work profession or be employed in their current workplace, as social work is typically carried out in distinctly hierarchical systems (Healy and Meagher, 2004; Hasenfeld, 2010), which include options for promotion. The fact that this profile categorized only a rather small proportion of our sample echoes findings of previous studies, which found that self-enhancement values are relatively rarely found among social workers, in Israel and elsewhere (Arieli *et al.*, 2016).

As for the associations between social workers' value profiles and their perceived job performance, social workers categorized in the growth-self-focused profile rated their overall performance at work significantly higher than their counterparts that endorsed values comprising the social-focused profile. Possibly, the former are more aware or pay more attention to their functioning at work than the latter, as a result of their aspiration to be promoted through gaining achievements in the

workplace. They may also place gaining achievements through good job performance as a high priority while doing their job, which may in turn increase their functioning.

Additionally, social workers characterized by profiles that supported growth values (self-transcendence and openness to change, with or without higher levels of self-enhancement) assessed their abilities to perform their job well as higher than social workers in the social-focused profile. Conceivably, if high performance in social services is associated with being able to withstand and adapt to professional work that is typically characterized by ongoing emergencies and unexpected situations (Stalker, 2003), social workers motivated by seeking change rather than preservation may feel more able to maintain high levels of job performance even when faced with such challenges. So, as a result of their experiences of 'thinking outside the box' and dealing with frequent crises, they may feel more resilient or equipped to continue coping with such crises in the future, thus assessing their abilities as higher.

Finally, no differences were found in social workers' perceived task performance across all three value profiles. This could imply that when it comes to the fulfillment of specific concrete tasks in Israeli social services, none of the value profiles are more advantageous than the others. Perhaps social work in Israel, which responds to so many varied challenges, requires such diverse abilities and competencies that social workers supporting each value profile can utilize their own approaches and strengths, eventually fulfilling the same scope of tasks. Or maybe, at the end of the day, the self-transcendence all profiles had in common is the most overriding value needed to successfully perform tasks in the social services in which participants in this study operate.

Although these findings, like the other findings of this study, derive from an Israeli case, they may be helpful toward a wider understanding of the various ways in which social workers' value profiles and job performance intertwine with broad issues faced by social workers in many countries. The basic similarities between some elements of the Israeli welfare state and other Western welfare states (such as the UK, the USA and countries in the South of Europe and certain areas in the Middle East; Tarshish, 2017), also suggest a potential relevance of this study's findings and the conclusions based on them to additional contexts as well.

Study limitations, contributions and suggested future studies

This study has some methodological limitations that should be taken into consideration when reviewing its findings. First, data were collected through online platforms and social media pages used by social workers in Israel. This raises a question regarding the generalizability of our

findings. Moreover, it is possible that the voluntary nature of participating in the study and the self-report questionnaires that were used might have introduced a social desirability bias (although in the study of values, social desirability has been described not as a bias that skews reports but as a personality trait that is essentially related to value endorsement; Schwartz *et al.*, 1997). Finally, since the study is cross-sectional, causality of the relationships between value profiles and job performance cannot be inferred.

To avoid these limitations, it is recommended that future studies draw representative samples, use a longitudinal research design and broaden the examination of the relationship between social workers' value profiles and aspects of their functioning at work to additional countries and contexts.

Nonetheless, the study's interesting findings have theoretical and practical contributions. First, the circumplex structure of the values model allows us to expand the one-dimensional investigation of values to multi-dimensional examinations, based on Schwartz's theoretical structure, which was corroborated in this study. Second, this study's findings concerning the centrality of self-transcendence values draws attention to contemporary opportunities to utilize social workers' joint value base in order to enhance professional unity and promote wide professional process, even in times of professional fragmentation, mentioned in the Introduction section. Our findings also highlight the importance of creating more venues for promotion and professional development for social workers, in order to provide ambitious workers with options to realize their career aspirations.

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