

The evaluation of the contribution and effectiveness of research supported by the Shalem Fund

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The Shalem Fund finds there is high importance to assessing the actions it according to their contribution and effectiveness in improving the quality of life for people with Intellectual Developmental Disability (IDD) in Israel. **For that reason, the Shalem Fund asked to study the contribution, impact and effectiveness of the fund's investment in research over the years and of the studies that it finances.**

The evaluation regarding this issue started in 2014 and was conducted in two phases:

- A. The first phase focused on **mapping out studies that had been discussed in front of the Shalem Fund research committee in all its years supporting research**: the studies that were financed were categorized in different aspects, trends in emphasis and priorities were examined, contents and prominent research subjects were identified, and establishments, researchers and fields of research that were granted financing were mapped out. At the same time, an assessment of **referencing, number of publications and citations, and quality of sources** of the studies (except thesis works) was conducted, as an indication of contribution to theoretical knowledge (completed in September 2014).
- B. In the second phase **information was collected – perceptions and attitudes – of experts and interested parties** about the contribution of studies that were supported by the fund and their effectiveness as well as the perception about the actual support given as one of the funds roles (completed in January 2017).

Main findings of the study's first phase – mapping out studies:

- A. Between the years 1997-2014, **253 research grant requests** were submitted to the Shalem Fund.
- B. Of these requests, **65% were approved (N=165)** and received funding and about a quarter were declined (the remaining studies were canceled at the initiative of the researcher or were still under review of the fund's research committee at the time of the current study). The main reason for **declining requests** was the **quality of the proposal** submitted to the fund.
- C. Close to **half** of the requests approved for financing were **masters research projects, 37% scientific studies and 11% PhD. Research projects.**



- D. The most **popular topics** that the studies assess are: **integration in the community, caregivers and staff, children, adolescents, attitudes and social perceptions** (based on 132 studies that were tagged according to contents).
- E. Universities are the most prominent institutions that apply to the Shalem Fund (their applications constitute 77% of all applications), with the **University of Haifa** at the top.
- F. In assessing the specialties of the researchers that apply for grants from the fund, the **disciplines that stand out are Social work and Education**.
- G. Over the years, **research budgets amounting to 5,476,449 NIS were approved** (estimated value). The average application sum of approved applications is **35,597 NIS** (it is noted that the acceptable amount for a master's project is 7,000 NIS and for a PhD project 10,000 NIS).
- H. Over the years there has been a **growth in the volume of applications** for research grants submitted to the fund, and at the same time a **growth in rejection** of applications. Additionally, there has been a **growth in the fund's budgets** allocated to research in general and in the average funding per application.
- I. Out of 64 studies financed by the fund (not including theses), **23 were quoted in academic studies**, and **46** were referenced in non-academic venues.

Main ideas that emerged in the second phase – interviews with 23 participants:

The interviewees represent a wide range of experts and interested parties in promoting the research of IDD.

- 1. The importance of the research in the field: there was a consensus among the participants about the importance of promoting research in the field of IDD, for the following reasons:
 - A. The mere studying of the field puts IDD in the spotlight and contributes to the legitimacy of recognition and knowledge with IDD in the public.
 - B. It is as worthy to conduct academic research on IDD as any other social-professional field.
 - C. The research in the field allows to affect policies and make decisions based on data. The policies in turn are strongly tied with what happens in the field.
 - D. The research advances dialog with the field work and mutual learning: on the one hand, research information enables accommodating responses to the characteristics and needs of the population. On the other hand, it enables understanding of the consequences of the needs and the services provided to answer them.
 - E. The activity in research and its financing can make it a more appealing work field for professionals.
- 2. Perceiving the Fund as promoting the research of IDD: as expected, the Shalem Fund is especially recognized with its work in developing physical infrastructure and in professional training and course development. Despite that, most of the participants also knew about its work in research.



This role of the Fund is less known in wider circles: among municipal employees, parents as family representatives and health care workers (that aren't regularly in touch with the fund).

3. Generally, the impression that its activity in research as well as the funds support in the field are very important and there is need to maintain and even elevate the budget allocated to it, according to the needs in the field and the desired balance with other fields of action.
4. The Shalem Fund is not the only authority recognized with promoting research in the IDD field; some of the participants linked to the ministry of welfare noted that the ministry also acts in this area (according to their needs and demands) through the research department. The uniqueness of the Fund in this aspect is its specific work in IDD alone and in its budgets.
5. In general, most of the interviewees agreed that the Shalem Fund has a central place in promoting the research in the field in Israel. However, three main claims that the fund is not leader in research (but rather as a financing body of research in the field): it does not develop knowledge itself, it is not strict with the academic quality of the research and it does not dictate the research agenda but rather obliges to the desires of the researchers. At the same time, the fund is perceived as a "knowledge center" as it does invest in managing and pooling the knowledge. Two characteristics support this status: it is dedication to the field of IDD and it has the finances to follow through with this role. Forging the knowledge center contributes to the fund's positioning as central in the field, and produces two secondary roles: first, the fund is perceived as an integrating institution that can bridge (using the knowledge that it has accumulated) between the field work, other bodies of knowledge and policy makers. Secondly, the fund is seen as having rich knowledge that can assist it in promoting its other roles.
6. One of the critics that arose was that there is room to tighten the interface between the activity in research (financed by the fund) and what happens in field work on the one hand, and the needs of the ministry and field leaders on the other. The main role that was mentioned in this aspect, especially among interviewees from the field work, is accompanying and supplying research information to the field, as well as implementing research findings to benefit people with IDD. Board members, heads of research committees and ministry workers that were interviewed requested that the research should focus on needs and emphasize that they bring up in light of their perceptions of main issues in the field. A parallel but less important role, is assisting researchers and the academia in connecting with the field and study participants.
7. To the question of the Shalem Fund's involvement in the implementation of research findings, the majority said it is only natural that it be involved, whether directly or via dedicated funding. This perception was especially prominent among the field workers, but also among other interviewees, that see the importance of research and its contribution especially in improving the field work and assisting policy makers in making data-based decisions.

However, others stated that the decision about its involvement in implementation should arise from the authorities given to the fund by law or according to a specific role description. Some were worried about the involvement in implementation would cause another burden on the fund. One of the interviewees proposed that the fund should only bring the findings to the attention of the relevant entities in the ministry of work, well fare and social services, and that they should decide how to implement them.

8. As to the possible success measures of the Shalem Fund as an organization- that will testify to its success in supporting research and assist it in deciding whether to continue perusing this route – it seems that there is feedback to the claims about the importance of the research in this field in general and in part feedback on the perception of the funds roles (in practice and in potential). The measures that were mentioned include: the amount of knowledge (and its quality), as a measure of the funds role in promoting the development of professional knowledge in its field; the amount of attention and exposure of the studies receive in the target audience; the improvement of the IDD field, including the attraction of high quality personal resources to work in the field; and finally, in practice, the impact on the field work on the on hand and the policy on the other (perceptions and decisions of policy makers) that in turn steer the direction of services supplied in the field.
9. Accessibility of the research to the target audience: according to the interviewees, the accumulated knowledge from research in accessible via the data base on the funds website or in brochures that include study abstracts. The benefit of the data base is its accessibility and that it is user-friendly. The problem however, in both these venues, is the requirement of the potential reader to know that the information is there and to actively look for it.
All the interviewees suggested using other, more active outlets for the knowledge; the main recommendations were: holding conferences and seminars based on research findings; incorporating up-to-date research findings in the funds courses; and “pushing forward” the main findings of relevant studies (in an appropriate format) to policy makers.

The general impression is that the target audience for the research findings is wide and divers, starting with those that work daily with people with IDD and up to the entire population of Israel (some recommended creating suitable formats for different audiences).

10. The quality of the research contribution: a central measure of success for studies, that can testify about the impact/effectiveness of a study in the eyes of the interviewees is how applicable its findings are. Most of the interviewees focused on the applicableness in terms of shaping policy, that will in turn impact the decisions about planning services and future developments. The applicableness as a measure of success coincides with the notion that the Shalem Funds role is to steer the field.

The measure that focuses on enhancement of theoretical knowledge and contribution to the body of knowledge is perceived as very important among most of the interviewees from the academic group, and less among others.

11. The common conception is that the Shalem Fund needs to set priorities and criteria for financing studies (assuming the budget is limited). The majority said that the priorities and criteria need to be set according to the fund's agenda. To interviewees associated with the ministry of work, welfare and social services thought that the ministry should determine the priorities and the fund should realize them. Finally, a few interviewees proposed to keep more flexible boundaries in the decision on how to allocate research grants.

Two specific criteria that stood out as needing prioritizing are the study topics (especially their relevance to the fund's agenda and to novelty), and the applicability of the research. Some mentioned the research quality as an important criterion to prioritize.

12. Initiating research topics (via call for research proposals for instance) is an expression of setting priorities for research funding. Most interviewees supported such an initiative on behalf of the Shalem Fund for the following reasons: it is an opportunity for the fund to define the agenda in the field of research and reflect it as a means of positioning the fund in this area; match research topics between the needs of the ministry of work, welfare and social services on the one hand and the field work on the other, thus impacting both policy and practice; in its capacity as an expert or "knowledge center" the fund is perceived as being able to emphasize the research needs and to direct more research accordingly. Interviewees mainly from the academic group (but not exclusively) were shown disdain from directing research (via call for research proposals) in the name of freedom of research and variety, and the opportunity to make breakthroughs in academic research and not from "preordered research".

13. Most interviewees could not name studies that had been supported by the Shalem Fund. Some mentioned explicitly that they do not know studies in the field. Others mentioned knowing studies but could not testify to them being supported by the fund. Most of those who mentioned names of studies were field workers that used them for learning or consolidation of a position paper in an issue they worked on, and responders from academia/training institutions or other organizations that hold positions related to research – due to personal acquaintance with the study or the researcher, or acquaintance with the article through their daily work.