

- **Name of the study:** Findings from the Feedback Evaluation of Workshops on Legal Competency
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### **Abstract**

**This research was conducted by the 'Michlol' Unit – Research and Evaluation, Shalem Foundation.**

### **Background**

The Legal Competency Project focuses on developing knowledge on implementing Amendment 18 to the Legal Competency and Guardianship Law for social workers in local authorities. In recent years, there has been significant legal development both in Israel and globally regarding the legal competency of individuals with disabilities, especially those with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), which was enshrined in Amendment 18 to the Legal Competency and Guardianship Law in 2016. Recent studies have shown a substantial gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, highlighting issues in social workers' decision-making regarding legal competency. These decisions are often based on outdated parameters without giving sufficient weight to the principles of autonomy and will (see further details in the introduction section). Therefore, the project's goal is to develop tools that promote the realization and advancement of the principles established in Amendment 18, ensuring the legal competency rights of individuals with IDD. The organization chosen to run the project is the Disabilities Rights Clinic. The Legal Competency Project includes two phases: workshops and the creation of a decision-making support tool. This survey refers only to the first phase, the workshops. The goals of the first phase are: a. to introduce participants to the legal competency field and the changes that occurred following Amendment 18; b. to hear and gather dilemmas and challenges faced by participants in their work related to the legal competency of individuals with disabilities; c. to assess participants' familiarity with the amendment and the principles enshrined in it; and d. to identify main barriers to implementing the principles and provide assistance in overcoming these barriers.

### **Workshop Evaluation Feedback**

The purpose of the feedback is to evaluate the workshops on legal competency (Amendment 18) attended by the social workers. The feedback aims to collect anonymous responses that will be

used both for learning and improving the workshops in the future and for building an online tool to assist social workers in dealing with this subject. The questionnaire was developed by the 'Michlol' Unit (Research and Evaluation, Shalem Foundation), in collaboration with the project's steering committee and focused on topics such as prior familiarity with the subject, areas of work, workshop benefits, changes in professional perceptions and feelings following the workshops, and more. The feedback questionnaire was built on the Google Forms platform and was administered to social workers during the final workshop sessions, held between May and July 2024. The data (both quantitative and qualitative) received from 87 respondents (out of approximately 172 workshop participants) were processed and analyzed by the 'Michlol' Unit and are presented in this document.

### **Participants' Background Characteristics**

About a third of the social workers who participated in the workshops identified themselves as general disability social workers, about a quarter as family social workers (with a family member with a disability), another quarter as social workers specializing in disabilities with an autism profile, and slightly more identified as social workers specializing in disabilities with a rehabilitation or IDD profile, social workers for adults with disabilities, and social workers responsible for guardianship or legal matters. A few participants identified as managers/supervisors, training coordinators, or social work supporters. The social workers provided services in a wide range of local authorities, including different geographical regions in the country, various types of authorities (municipalities, regional councils, local councils), and diverse communities and sectors (secular, ultra-Orthodox, mixed authorities, and Arab authorities). Approximately half of the participating social workers had up to 10 years of experience, and the other half had more than 10 years of experience, indicating a diverse range of seniority levels represented in this survey.

### **Findings**

Out of 87 respondents, 79% reported having prior knowledge of the legal competency field, while 21% stated they did not. Those who indicated prior knowledge were asked about the nature of their familiarity, and their responses were categorized as follows: basic, minimal, or general familiarity (f=12), familiarity through courses, training, seminars, and lectures (f=10), familiarity with specific topics (f=9), familiarity through their role as social workers in the field (f=9), field-based knowledge from working directly with clients (f=9), providing assistance to families and offering referrals and recommendations (f=7), writing reports for courts (f=4), familiarity through the frameworks in which they worked/managed (f=4), consulting experiences (f=3), and personal familiarity (f=1).

Out of 86 respondents, 51% reported that they deal with the legal competency issue as part of their role, while 49% do not. Those who do not were asked who in their authority handles this issue. Half of them cited social workers responsible for legal orders, about 19% mentioned the welfare officer

for protected persons or team leaders/managers, approximately 17% noted guardianship social workers, and two respondents (about 5%) mentioned municipal social workers for protection laws.

Regarding the general contribution of the workshops, 64% of respondents reported a significant or very significant benefit, 31% reported a moderate benefit, and only 5% reported little or no benefit. When asked to point out specific things they learned and intend to implement, the answers were varied and categorized into the following: knowledge and familiarity with decision-support topics (f=14), awareness and new thinking (f=12), the ability to provide appropriate responses, guidance, and consideration (f=9), understanding the importance of the legal competency law amendment (f=9), exposure and consultation (f=7), deepening discussions (f=7), the workshop's impact on daily work (f=6), knowledge of guardianship (f=5), understanding the differences between a decision supporter and guardianship (f=4), and a few additional individual responses. However, six participants noted that they did not feel benefited from the workshops (unanswered questions, familiarity with the field, etc.).

Out of 66 respondents, 79% reported changes in their attitudes and perceptions following the workshops, while 21% reported no change in their attitudes. When asked what changed in their perceptions, the responses were varied and categorized into the following: giving importance to empowering individuals' choices, independence, and capabilities (f=10), recognizing the complexity of the issue and the existence of alternatives (f=8), understanding the meaning and importance of a decision supporter (f=8), understanding the difference between guardianship and a decision supporter (f=7), raising awareness and openness – both among the participants and the need to raise awareness among families (f=5), exercising discretion in making non-automatic choices (f=5), better understanding and precision (f=4), and three participants who noted changes without specifying the nature of the change. Additionally, 14 other participants stated that there was no change in their attitudes or perceptions on the subject.

Regarding the influence of the workshops on their feelings toward the subject, 75% reported an increase in their sense of capability and willingness to engage with the subject, while about 9% developed an aversion to it. Another 9% noted no change in their feelings following the workshops, and 5% (four respondents) indicated that they feel the need to further understand the subject (i.e., there was an interest to deepen their knowledge, but it did not necessarily lead to immediate action).

Responses from 46 participants regarding ways to improve the workshops touched on several areas: a. connecting theory to practice – the need for more case studies, examples, and practical applications from the field (f=18), b. a desire for more participant engagement during the workshops (in activities, role-playing, group discussions, consultations on real cases, etc.) (f=6), c. requests for additional knowledge in various formats (such as brochures in Arabic, information sheets, lists of organizations, specific online services on the topic, etc.) (f=8), d. the need to focus

and shorten the workshops (f=5), e. difficulties with the Zoom platform (preference for in-person sessions) (f=4), f. focusing and tailoring content for different audiences, such as separating social workers dealing with elderly populations from those specializing in disabilities, and creating specific content for social workers who are not experts in the field (f=4). Additional individual suggestions addressed the need for policy changes, using slides in presentations, raising public awareness of the topic, involving additional bodies in the process, and the desire for further consultations and personal guidance (f=9). In this question, 15 participants noted that the workshops were very good, important, and enriching, and therefore no changes or improvements were necessary.

### **Conclusions, Insights, and Recommendations**

1. Overall, the survey results were highly positive, indicating significant benefits for participants in terms of acquiring knowledge and changing perceptions and attitudes on the subject in various aspects.
2. The findings regarding familiarity with the topic and involvement in the field suggest that a significant portion of the participating social workers are exposed to the subject, even if it is not their central focus. In other words, the topic is present in their professional lives, with most participants being aware of it, and about half reporting that they deal with it directly or indirectly to some extent.
3. The primary goal of the survey was achieved, as social workers in local authorities were exposed to the topic, became familiar with important and relevant concepts, and discussed significant issues in the field. The attendance of social workers from various authorities in the workshops was impressive, with approximately 170 social workers participating. However, it appears that some participants expected and would like to receive additional knowledge and tools to assist them in the field. The second phase of the project aims to address exactly this need, with the survey results, combined with the materials collected by the workshop leaders (case studies, dilemmas, barriers, etc.), providing a foundation for developing an interactive online tool to support social workers in this field.
4. It was suggested to consider offering similar workshops to additional local authorities

### **Keywords**

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Legal competency, Amendment 18, guardianship, decision supporter, disabilities, social workers, workshop feedback.

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