

The Experience of Arab Social Workers Treating Arab Fathers at Parent-Child Centers in Israel in the Context of Political and Gender Conflict

Abstract

The multicultural approach highlights the need to adapt social services for the general population to different cultural groups and minorities. The need for cultural adaptation is particularly important in Arab society in Israel, which is in a process of social and cultural transition. However, Arab social workers are not trained to provide culturally appropriate responses in this context. Rather, they usually act as representatives of the state in a context of political conflict, and this situation leads to cultural insensitivity on two levels. The article describes and examines the experience of social workers working with men in Arab society, and discusses the conflict inherent in their role as therapists on the one hand and as representatives of the Israeli establishment on the other. The study was based on in-depth interviews with 15 Arab social workers treating Arab fathers at parent-child centers in Israel. The findings indicate that the therapeutic encounter reflects the characteristics of their culture, and reflect the cultural and gender-based tensions that the social workers experience in the encounter with their clients. The findings further indicate that the social workers need to be aware of the social attitude of the fathers, and need to recognize the similarities and differences between their own cultural perspectives and the fathers' perspectives. The article contributes to the literature by focusing on the challenges inherent in the therapeutic encounter between Arab social workers and their clients, and highlights the complexity of their situation. Finally, it points to the lack of adequate academic preparation for Arab social workers in Israeli universities, as well as to the lack of support for those social workers and the challenges they face in their work.

Key words: culturally sensitive therapy, Arab society in Israel, therapeutic work with fathers, parent-child centers, social work