

Child Participation in Social Policy Design: The Role of Social Work

Hanita Kosher¹ and Asher Ben-Arieh¹

In many ways the 21st century is the era of children's rights. Today children are perceived as social actors in society and as active contributors. One of the main components of this new childhood and children's rights is child participation at large and particularly in decision-making that influences their own lives. Indeed child participation stands at the heart of the professional and public discourse on children's rights. In the past child participation was limited to the private sphere in regard to personal issues of a specific child (i.e., custody or formal education). Thus, child participation rarely occurred in the public sphere, and children were excluded from the making of social policy and services. Indeed, for many years policies for children were formatted by adults and from an adult perspective.

This is starting to change as child participation is slowly but steadily entering the public sphere and the policy making process. This paper argues that not only do children deserve a place in the policy making arena, but that this will contribute to better policies and that the most suited profession to take on this challenge is social work. As a profession, social work is committed by its basic values to human dignity, autonomy and the client's right to participate in decisions affecting his own life. For many years social work has led the active participation of citizens in formatting their social environment. Thus, it is only rational to expect social workers to lead again and promote child participation in the making of social policy. The paper discusses the role of the social work profession in promoting child participation in the public sphere, while clearly emphasizing the importance of child participation and its implications.

1 School of Social Work and Social Welfare, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.