

## Who Guards the Guardians? Social Workers in an Era of Privatization

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This paper focuses on the implications of the employment of social workers through intermediate non-governmental agencies, for-profit and non-for-profit, within the Israeli welfare system. These agencies are often funded by the public treasury (often the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services and the Ministry of Health), and thus serve as government "contractors", as part of the policy of the outsourcing of social services.

It should be noted that, according to its advocates, outsourcing *is not* advanced, in this case, as a policy designed to *remove government responsibility* for this population. Indeed, government officials are quick to clarify that, over the past 20 years of outsourcing policy being advanced in full throttle, they are able to focus and excel their capacities in areas where they are most needed – setting standards, monitoring and enforcing. We find, then, that monitoring and enforcing constitute, in effect, a major justification for the policy.

However, as this article shows, it is specifically in the context of the welfare system that we find an inherent difficulty to implement traditional monitoring and enforcement procedures by government officials. Against this background, it is the social worker who is always present at the ground level where service is supplied in the non-governmental agency, who may serve as a guardian of care and as a monitor of the quality of service and of the necessary standards.

So much for the theory. At the heart of this paper is the claim that, due to the terms and conditions of employment prevalent in non-governmental agencies supplying welfare services, social workers are essentially disempowered to fulfill such a task, prevented from raising warning signs on necessary occasions, and often complicit with actions that defy the professional standards to which they are bound.

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