

**A Healthcare Reform Salami-Style:
The Role of Public Officials in
Determining Mental Health Policy in Israel,
1995-2009**

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This research examines the influence of sequencing of policy actions by bureaucrats on the development of mental health policy in Israel during the years 1995-2009. The research assumes that time and the institutional context are critical variables in understanding policy processes. The research advances a model of policy development consisting of a process in which a set of policy actions made by bureaucrats creates positive feedback and as a result influences the legislative paths available for elected representatives. An historic-institutional analysis combined with in-depth interviews with major policy actors in the field of mental health policy indicates that Israeli mental health policy in the period under investigation was characterized by senior bureaucrats' attempts to promote policy actions conducive to reform, using policy tools under their control that did not require government decisions or parliamentary intervention. These tools included budgeting and regulatory decisions as well as control of psychiatric hospitals and ambulatory services. Budgeting decisions were found to be most influential policy actions which produced the most positive feedback in the investigated policy domain. As a result, subsequent mental health legislation had to be based on a new reality shaped by bureaucratic actions. This pattern of policy making led to a situation in which, as time passed, many of the reform's objectives were reached prior to legislation.

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