

# The Mother-Based Intervention

Social Work, Fatherhood and the Persistence of  
the Unequal Distribution of Labor in Israeli  
Families

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# Background

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## Why is father engagement meaningful?

- Fathers are under-represented in interventions
- Father Presence is crucial in interventions

## Why are fathers absent?

- Fathers
- Mothers
- Social Workers
- Structure/Organization?

# Methodology

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## 2-Tier research Project

- Funded by Israel Science Foundation grant 1269/17

## Policy Study

- Semi-Structured interviews with 11 top-level bureaucrats

## Institutional Ethnography

- 6 Departments of Social Services (DSS)
- Mainly Interviews, but also participant observations and collection of texts
- Family Social Workers as 'Starting Point'
- 42 Interviews overall

# The Primary Contact Person assumption

Both policymakers and field workers express commitment to gender equality

- Absence of fathers attributed to outside sources or to past processes

The Primary Contact Person assumption

- Workers prefer interacting with one person in each family
- That person is usually the mother

While the worker's choice may seem un-gendered, the context of the choice dicatates a gendered decision

Interaction of structural and cultural sources

Like, all our contact, most of the contact, is with the woman. [...] she's also the one that contacts us more, she's the one that... Once there's a figure that's more in contact with us it's something that's reciprocal! I mean, it's not that I can't address him and make a phone call, but I have less of a talk with him, like... I don't have, he doesn't see fit to.... And many times he might say 'ask my wife' or something like that.

(Tamar, Family Social Worker)

# When do social workers contact fathers?

Fathers are contacted when mothers are unavailable

Fathers are contacted in 'complicated' or 'serious' situations

**Q:** Do you reach fathers if things are more complicated?  
**A:** As a single mother she can tell me—I want to open a case, I won't start inviting the father. She's the one managing this unit. But when significant decisions have to be made, like sending a child to a boarding school or intervention planning, we invite the father. In general, we invite the father even if they're divorced with the mothers, less with family. When it's actually concerning therapy, we invite them. (Ira, SW)  
**Q:** But until then (Ira) at this point, women in the workshop, like a child of her illness she can't come. (Eran, Team Leader)  
**A:** In the case, and she's managing the family unit, then no, we won't make efforts to locate the father at this stage. Only later, when there are decisions [to be made].

# Organizational Constraints

## Complexity

- Working with Both parents requires time and effort
- Austerity and caseload
- Efficiency vs Effectiveness

## Work Hours

## Municipal Organization

It was a new, very complex case, and we always insisted on hearing them both. It was draining. Listen, today, in retrospect, I don't know how I could, for each event, open it to both of them. I don't know. It took two people [...] It took two people and sometimes three and sometimes our secretary was involved in this too. We had to, around the clock, check what was really happening in these cases. (Michael, Department Head)

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*if I be honest with myself, I assume fathers are less comfortable coming to a [female] social worker. And when a family worker puts less resources and energy and time because she has 100 more families, so there's something that. The connection is formed less often with a man, with a father. (Lior, Team Leader)*

# Mandatory Father Presence

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## Intervention Planning and Assessment Committee

- Both parents are required to attend
- Opportunity for engaging fathers
- Not always taken
- Limits of 'Involving Fathers in Serious Situations'

## Intake Meetings

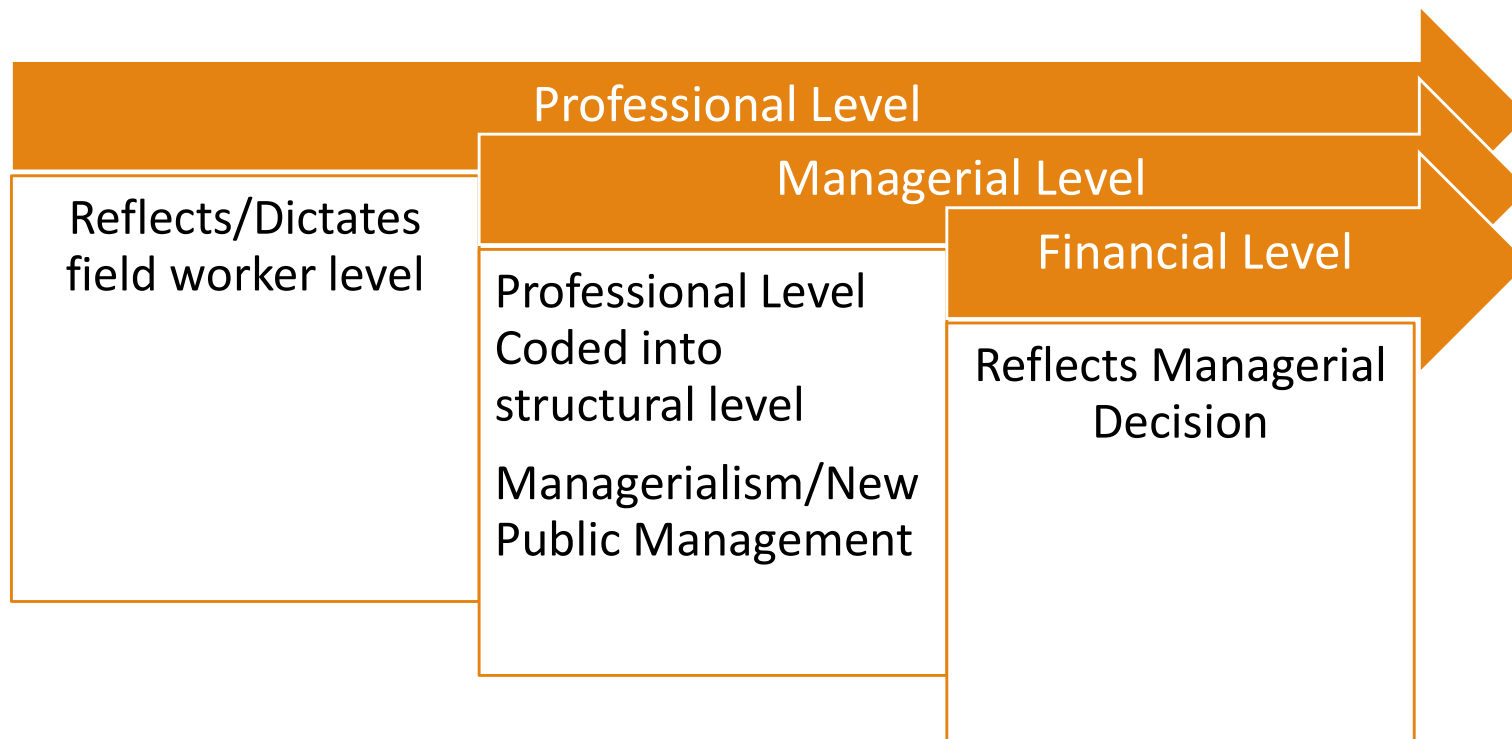
- Varies between departments
- Apparent limited effectiveness

## Adoption

- Result of a court case
- Effective in extreme situations

# PCP at Policymaker Level

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# Summary

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## Implication for Practice

- Father engagement throughout the intervention
- Organizational Support

## Limitations

- Generalizability