**THE REPRODUCING ACT OF INSTITUTIONAL LOGICS: THREE PATHS TO EXAMINING THE COMMITMENT TO PROTECT SURVIVORS OF ECONOMIC ABUSE**

**Abstract**

In Israel, economic abuse survivors, meaning women whose partners have blocked their access to their own economic resources, turn to three state welfare organizations for help. These are the National Insurance Institute, the welfare services including violence prevention centres, and during divorce processes, the family courts’ assistance units. Recently, a unique opportunity has been created for investigating these organizations’ employees’ commitment to these survivors. The issue of economic abuse and the policy agenda concerning the women’s right to support has received public attention, strengthening the possibility that the organizations’ routine actions would be challenged accordingly. At the same time, patriarchal priorities have continued to reinforce the reproduction of routine acts that do not recognize the economic abuse survivors’ state of emergency nor their right to receive support. The institutional logics perspective is particularly suitable for analyzing the employees’ commitment to economic abuse survivors as well as their positioning processes vis á vis the women’s need for support. An analysis of 48 structured interviews designed to identify the institutional logic guiding the employees’ commitment by examining sources of authority, occupational identity, sources of legitimacy, and the normative base, points to three paths through which organizational practices that reflect a patriarchal institutional logic are reproduced. In addition, the analysis reveals a typology of challenging processes embodying various levels of distancing from reproduction routines. This typology reflects the difficulty involved in developing the commitment to economic abuse survivors.

**Keywords: institutional logics, economic abuse, welfare institutions, gender**

**INTRODUCTION**

Economic abuse is defined as the behavior of an intimate partner who controls his partner and prevents her from using and managing her own as well as the joint financial resources, and this includes preventing her from education or employment (Adams et al. 2008). While awareness regarding the phenomenon has risen in Israel and around the world, economic abuse is not included in the Domestic Violence Prevention Act of 1991. This identifies Israel with a complex patriarchal approach. On the one hand, the state has formally adopted the principle of being committed to protecting women. On the other hand, on the practical level, this commitment is limited in three ways. Frist, the extent to which the rights of intimate partner abuse survivors are exhausted remains limited (Yasour Borochovitch, Benjamin & Renan Barzilay 2021). Second, budgets allocated to the Ministry of Welfare earmarked for the topic of intimate partner abuse are sometimes returned to the Treasury because they have not been exhausted, and moreover, the programs do not include the emancipation of economic abuse victims from financial dependence (Oxenberg 2020). Thirdly, patriarchal priorities effectively preserve the hegemonic masculine norms, which include the husband’s role as provider and economic leader (Renan Barzilay & Youseri 2016).

This complexity, alongside increased awareness of the nature of economic abuse and its long-term implications on women’s lives, creates an opportunity for us to ask how this complexity is reflected in the activity of the state’s welfare organizations. These include the National Insurance Institute, social services including violence prevention centers, and family court assistance units women turn to during divorce proceedings. The question arises whether the commitment of these welfare organizations’ employees to meet the needs of economic abuse survivors is affected as the organizations become more aware of the nature of economic abuse. Our aim here is to understand the welfare authorities’ treatment of economic abuse survivors as an expression of the encounter between the institutional logic characteristic of each welfare organization and the patriarchal institutional logic, and by focusing on the commitment of the welfare organizations’ employees towards the survivors’ right to recognition and rehabilitation.

When focusing on welfare organization employees as those whose level of commitment is likely to be significant in terms of making solutions accessible to economic abuse survivors, the institutional logics perspective emerges as particularly relevant. According to Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury (2012), institutional logic is the aggregate of sources from which social actors in organizations draw their commitments and guidelines for action. It informs their ability to endow a situation with meaning and experience it as logical; it provides the vocabulary and justifications they use as well as their identity or self-perception. Institutional logic constitutes the totality of principles, practices, and symbols of the institutional order that is acceptable and beneficial to the social actors and differentially shapes the manner in which conclusions, thinking processes, considerations, and deliberations take place. In short, institutional logic outlines the way rationality is perceived and experienced within the institution. The relevance of the institutional logics perspective to understanding the actions of welfare organizations is rooted in its contribution to understanding the normative, ethical, and moral context in which organizational loyalty and the commitment to those turning to the organization for support grows and develops. In addition, the term “embedded agency” (Thornton, Ocasio & Lounsbury 2012, 79) has the potential to map the tension between reproducing the organizational action, which diminishes the significance of information regarding economic abuse, and challenging the organizational action, by amplifying the significance of information regarding economic abuse. This can be done by addressing four dimensions of institutional logics: sources of authority, occupational identity, sources of legitimacy, and the normative base (Toubiana & Zietsma 2017). According to this approach, both loyalty to organizational routines and the level of commitment to those seeking support are embedded in the identities of individuals just as much as they are embedded in the system of organizational guidelines that constrains the individuals’ agency (Thornton, Ocasio & Lounsbury 2012). Until recently, research in the field investigated reproducing behaviors as opposed to challenging behaviors without addressing the possibility that “embedded agency” was shaping the level of distancing from reproduction available to those acting within organizations, a level expressed in challenging acts. Implementing the institutional logics approach to investigate the growth of the employees’ commitment to the women turning to them for support, when this commitment is not part of the organizational practice, allows us to analyze various types of challenging actions. The various types are expected to emerge from the analysis of encounters between welfare organization employees and women turning to them for help, while taking into account occupational identities and identification with trends of social change. The responses of those whose agency is embedded in specific welfare organizations may answer the question of whether someone who is not exposed to physical violence can be recognized as eligible to receive the range of solutions provided to victims of intimate partner abuse as well as unique solutions tailored to her rehabilitation requirements.

**ECONOMIC ABUSE**

Economic abuse in intimate partner relationships is gendered and generally inflicted upon the woman (Renan Barzilay 2017). Researchers propose assessing it in regards to three aspects. The first deals with economic supervision as representing men’s tendency to supervise and restrict women’s ability to freely use family resources. The second focuses on economic exploitation as reflecting these men’s tendency to create debts and damage their partner’s credit rating. The third refers to men economically blocking their partners by thwarting employment opportunities or opportunities these women have to establish themselves and advance in their work (Stylianou, Postmus & McMahon 2013). These three aspects include a dimension of coercive control (Stark 2007), which distinguishes economic abuse from the normative male commitment to take on the role of the “good provider.” However, the blurring of the distinction between the two is still commonly typical of professional discourses, and this is strengthened by the legal system’s marginal treatment of non-physical abuse (Renan Barzilay 2017). A recent study found that the aspect of coercive control in the context of economic abuse also includes the intention to take over resources by isolating the partner and undermining her knowledge and ability to manage finances (Duron et al. 2020). Therefore, social support and accompaniment in dealing with financial institutions are central to the rehabilitation of economic abuse survivors (Schrag, Ravi & Robinson 2020).

The literature dealing with the state’s response to economic abuse points to a gap between lacking or partial legislation addressing economic abuse (Renan Barzilay 2017) and awareness of the difficult economic crisis economic abuse survivors face and the understanding that they require a multidimensional rehabilitation process (Weissman 2020). Such a gap exists also in the Israeli context: the Domestic Violence Prevention Act of 1991 recognizes women’s right to protection from intimate partner abuse but does not recognize economic abuse as intimate partner abuse. Therefore, a critical condition for a survivor of intimate partner abuse to receive welfare support, even if it is not rehabilitative or specifically tailored to her situation, is that she must be recognized as a survivor of domestic abuse. This raises the question of whether welfare organization employees representing the state in fulfilling its declared commitment to protect survivors of intimate partner abuse connect to a personal commitment that enables them to recognize women who have not been exposed to physical abuse as abuse survivors. Such recognition would establish these women’s eligibility to receive the range of solutions provided to survivors of intimate partner abuse as well as solutions that are specifically tailored to their rehabilitative needs.

The Domestic Violence Prevention Act of 1991 obligates welfare organization employees to identify cases of intimate partner abuse and offer survivors the possibility of staying in a women’s shelter, even when this does not suit the survivor’s life circumstances. In this way the law reproduces a patriarchal approach: alongside the commitment to providing protection, there is no explicit commitment to freeing them from being dependent on their abusive partners. Furthermore, the law makes no reference to economic abuse or coerced debt (Adams, Littwin & Javorka 2020). In this context, the possibility that the welfare organization employees’ commitment to economic abuse survivors will develop into a challenging act is shaped by the encounter between the employees’ social identities and feminist activism in Israel, which similarly to other countries, is demanding recognition of economic abuse survivors’ right to have their economic functioning rehabilitated. To deepen our understanding regarding the possibility of such a commitment to emerge, we have adopted the institutional logics perspective.

**INSTITUTIONAL LOGICS IN ORGANIZATIONS AS NOURISHING THE COMMITMENT TO REPRODUCE OR CHALLENGE ORGANIZATIONAL ROUTINES**

Organizational practices and employee identities shape organizational loyalty and the commitment to those turning to the organization for support. Both the practices and the identities are shaped by institutional logics. Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury (2012) claim that when there is a need to understand how to act in a concrete empirical space as part of organizational processes, it is correct to ask which institutional logics provide the context in which this understanding develops. In other words, which sources provide the context from which social actors in an organization draw their commitments and guidelines for action? In what ways do they experience their actions as being logical? What justifications do they use and what self-perception do they maintain in relation to their actions? It cannot be assumed that actions are a reflection of a dogmatic institutional logic, and in change processes the actions taken may even contribute to the emergence of a new institutional logic. Nevertheless, the rationality, justifications, and sources of authority shaped by institutional logics are critical to action (ibid., 129). As the action taken by those working within the same organization is not uniform, the institutional logics approach was developed to investigate clashes between them (Friedland &Alford 1991). The existence of multiple logics indicates that in the same professional field there are multiple courses of action that are considered rational, as Mayer and Rowan have already claimed (1977). As part of the process of developing an institutional logic, organizations legitimize their actions by developing formal practices that are considered rational in regards to their core occupations. The action templates considered rational in regards to core occupations nourish the development of institutional logics. However, as Abbott (1980) has shown, the conflict between professional groups within the same occupation creates splits and struggles over authority. Hence, the development of occupations as action plans that are considered rational are central to institutional logics and emerge as dominant guidelines in shaping the organization’s action as well as its sources of authority and legitimacy. The advantage gained by adopting the institutional logics perspective is in its emphasis on embedded agency, that is, on understanding the difficulty experienced by actors in an organization in regards to challenging it and distancing themselves from the commitment to reproducing its routine acts. Despite this emphasis, until recently the degree to which challenging acts were distanced from reproducing acts had not been articulated as an expression of the level of commitment employees had to the organization versus their identification with intra- or extra-organizational trends that challenge it. Rather that examining the possibility that embedded agency limits the degree of distancing from reproduction, emphasis has been placed on reproduction as being reinforced by principles accessible to the organizational actors that become guidelines and points of departure which they can further develop. This is done as an expression of loyalty to the organization and its goals. According to Thronton and Ocasio (2008), institutional logics are the “historical templates of socially structured material practices which the actors in the organization use to organize their time and space in order to experience their work as meaningful and aligned with the values, their beliefs, and the organizational regulations to which they are subject” (ibid., 101). Based on this definition, what makes the comparison of distinct institutional logics analytically fruitful is the possibility of comparing the way actors in specific organizations understand daily situations and the meaning they attribute to their routine actions. When the routine act is perceived as rational, distancing from the commitment to reproduce it to the point of performing a challenging act is no simple matter. Therefore, we can expect to encounter various levels of distancing from the institutional logic, which has become established through political, cultural, and social processes. The institutional logic adopted by a specific organization expresses how it perceives its goals, rationale, and professional operating methods. An examination of the institutional logic allows us to map the relationship between the individuals acting in the organization and the social space itself, in a way that demonstrates how individuals operate within the space created by the encounter between professional principles.

The emphasis on the contribution of individuals to reproducing or challenging acceptable organizational practices inspired Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury (2012) to examine embedded agency within the context of institutional logic and therefore as being shaped by the totality of components shaping the institutional logic itself. To understand this process, the researchers propose a theory focusing on the actions of individuals in light of opportunities created by the existence of many institutional logics within their organization. The theory assumes that human behavior develops within a situation and is limited and directed by its attributes. According to this theory, individuals’ courses of action are limited and therefore organizational practices tend to be preserved more than they tend to be challenged. Furthermore, organizational practices can only be challenged when the individuals’ identities and goals and the cognitive schemes they have developed enable them to hone their commitments and defend them based on what the researchers refer to as “bounded intentionality.” In other words, while actors in the organization aim to achieve their goals, their ability to act is bound by the mindset prevalent within the organization.

The literature proposes comparing between various institutions based on their institutional logics by focusing on four primary aspects: sources of authority, occupational identity, sources of legitimacy, and the normative base (Toubiana & Zietsma 2017). Each of these draws from the cultural-social context as well as from developments in the specific occupational space. Sources of authority refer to the employees’ perception of the organization’s role. Occupational identity refers to how they position themselves professionally in relation to clashes between occupational approaches and the extent to which they hold a position of power in regards to their occupation. Sources of legitimacy refer to the types of justification employees give for their actions, and finally, the normative base focuses on the question of when an act is experienced as appropriate in relation to the individual’s professional status, as suitable in regards to the type of request and the needs of the person seeking support, and as moral. Attrash-Najjar and Strier (2020) recently discussed the normative base, highlighting processes in which moral stances are learned from those higher above in the organizational hierarchy. According to Sacks (1989), who focuses on marking the moral self, an individual’s professional moral stance exists alongside an internalized code that specifies what it means to be a worthy member of a specific social category. The connection between these two approaches allows us to extract the normative dimension of the institutional logic.

**WELFARE INSTITUTIONS IN ISRAEL**

The change in public policy in Israel in the wake of the neoliberal project is characterized by a withdrawal of the state from its willingness to finance formal support organizations beyond the minimum and has led to a polemic between various social forces and ideological stances (Maron & Shalev 2017). Neoliberalism is defined as a policy that implements competitive markets in all fields of life, including economics, politics, and society (Birch 2015, 572). The welfare state, assistance practices, and financed material aid have become one of the focuses polarizing social and political forces, pitting those who support the continued existence and development of the welfare state against those who denounce it and seek to marginalize it (Doron 2014).

**The National Insurance Institute**

The National Insurance Institute was established in 1954 for the purpose of ensuring the social security of the population in Israel. During its first 20 years important changes took place that led to large-scale developments in its scope of activity. For example, its entry into new fields (unemployment, disability, and healthcare) expanded the range of treatment it offered as well as its authority as a social institution. By instituting additional types of insurance, increasing the retirement level, and liberalizing eligibility conditions for insureds, the National Insurance Institute has become a body that deals with supplementing and guaranteeing income based on the socialist principles of narrowing gaps and expanding the net of services offered to insureds (Nitzan 2014). The National Insurance Institute provides financial aid to assist with pregnancies, childbirth and children, disability, illness and termination of employment, guaranteed minimal income, and retirement based on procedures for determining eligibility.

The welfare state’s prevailing principle of universality, which refers to the inclusion of all population groups in its framework of activity and the expanded protection it offers is what shifted the entire issue of national insurance from the margins to the center of the State of Israel’s social policy. The demand for selectivity, which has grown since the Budget Arrangements Law of 2003, is built on the opposite principle of excluding groups of people from receiving benefits. It aims to weaken the principle of universality, marginalize the issue of national insurance, and decrease the commitment of the general public to the entire population, thereby limiting it exclusively to underprivileged groups (Doron 2014). A recent study found that the National Insurance Institute conducts eligibility tests in a way that reflects a suspicious stance towards those seeking support, assuming that they are not eligible to receive the assistance they are asking for, while at the same time strengthening its commitment to the exhaustion of rights (Yasour Borochovitch, Benjamin & Renan Barzilay 2021).

**The Social Services Division and Violence Prevention Centers**

The Ministry of Labor, Welfare, and Social Services serves as a central link in the Israeli welfare state and manages a system of services that cater to a diverse range of target audiences. Over the years the profession of social work has undergone a process of professionalization, which is expressed in the improved level of training social workers undergo, the progress made in research in the field, and the diversification of fields of practice (Paz-Fuchs & Schlossberg 2012). The profession’s rising status in Israel over the years is due, among other things, to the therapeutic clinical perspective it has appropriated. Accordingly, as various needs of the population were identified, various fields of specialty and occupational frameworks developed, such as healthcare and mental health services, employment placement services, community courts, and more (Shapiro et al. 2002).

In 1991, the Domestic Violence Prevention Act was legislated, stipulating that the state was responsible for providing relief to domestic abuse survivors. A year later, Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty was legislated, stipulating that “All persons are entitled to protection of their life, their body, and their dignity.” These two laws inspired the commitment to develop services and knowledge aim at preventing abuse and put an end to it, and this was articulated as part of the guidelines of the Social Work Regulations. Following this legislation, domestic violence prevention centers were established and there are currently 108 centers operating throughout Israel. They provide solutions ranging from diagnosing, assessing the level of danger, building means of protection, treating and rehabilitating families caught in the cycle of abuse, and offering support to both the victims and the perpetrators (Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Social Services, 2020). Krigel and Peled (2016) present the activity of these centers as taking place alongside that of civil society organizations such as Ruach Nashit (*Women’s Spirit).*

**The Assistance Units**

The assistance units near the family courts were established in 1997 under the Family Court Act of 1995, first as entities that assist the courts in handling the civil aspects of family disputes. Their initial purpose was to assist the families engaged in litigation in family court as well as the judges, by integrating the therapeutic and emotional aspect into the legal proceedings. This was based on the assumption that family disputes have long- and short-term emotional and social implications for the parties and their children, which continue even after the disputes have ended (Inbar, Nevo & Lehman, 2008). Later on assistance units were set up near the religious courts and the Law for Settling Litigation in Family Disputes was legislated, stipulating that the assistance units are the first mandatory stage in family disputes, even before appealing to a tribunal. In fact, prior to filing a claim a Motion to Resolve a Dispute must be submitted to the assistance unit, where four MAHUT (Hebrew acronym for information, assessment, and coordination) sessions take place with the participation of both partners. These sessions are mandatory and are conducted with the unit’s employees. Their purpose is to inform the parties of the expected legal proceedings, set expectations in relation to it, and refer them to mediation procedures in the community. The assistance units’ primary mission is to lead the parties to a quick and consensual resolution of the family dispute (Bayer-Topilsky, Manor & Szabo-Lael, 2015).

In Israel, assistance units are currently operating throughout the country alongside family courts, rabbinical courts, and sharia courts (Bayer-Topilsky, Manor & Szabo-Lael, 2015). One of the fields family courts deal with is the field of domestic violence. Assistance units assess, intervene and assist during family crises, but they do not treat the violence. The intervention assumption is based on the approach that many cases call for urgent and immediate intervention involving special treatment that might ease the tension between the parties and help them reach an agreement, including in regards to temporary visitation arrangements, seeking therapy, or separating. In high-risk situations, the speed of response is highly important in terms of assessing the situation, coordinating the logistics, and referring the women to the welfare services (women’s shelters and violence prevention and treatment centers) (Inbar, Nevo & Lehman, 2008).

The current study examines the commitment of employees in these three welfare organizations to support and protect survivors of economic abuse as formed in two opposite directions. One direction involves diminishing the significance of information regarding economic abuse and avoiding addressing the survivors’ rehabilitation needs and right to be recognized as eligible for protection from domestic violence. This direction was investigated in order to deepen the discussion regarding the support offered to victims of economic abuse (Schrag, Ravi & Robinson 2020). The second possibility we investigated was that the welfare organization employees are committed to survivors of economic abuse and act to expand the significance of the information regarding economic abuse shared by the women turning to them for help, in order to strengthen their eligibility to receive support resources. Investigating this possibility allowed us to address the literature dealing with the institutional logics perspective while qualifying the accepted distinction between preservation acts and challenging acts (Thornton, Ocasio & Lounsbury 2012). It also allowed us to examine the possibility that there is a range of challenging acts at various levels of distancing from existing organizational practices. We will now present the research design.

**METHODOLOGY**

We used structured interviews to interview 48 employees in three state welfare organizations. These included 21 clerks and managers at the National Insurance Institute, 21 social workers in the social services division and violence prevention centers, and six social workers, lawyers, and mangers from the assistance units operating near the family courts. The interviewees ranged from 25–55 years of age and were diverse in terms of their seniority and position within the organizational hierarchy, as they included clerks, social workers treating the families, and managers from various fields and divisions. No distinction was made between the interviewees’ roles based on the understanding that the process of approaching a specific welfare organization develops gradually as the individual seeking help is referred from one role holder to another. Given that our purpose was to investigate the logics according to which the organization generally provides assistance, we examined the perspectives of the employees who first meet the women requiring assistance and the managers the women approach themselves or are referred to by the employee who first met them and is seeking guidance. The interviewees were all native Israelis - Mizrahi and Ashkenazi women and a minority of Arab women. Their education and training changed based on their professional role. Their level of religiosity was diverse, ranging from secular through traditional to religious, although most were secular and none were from the ultra-orthodox sector. Most of the interviewees had a family and some were married or divorced. We approached them after obtaining approval from the appropriate authorities and based on the recommendations of their supervisors or others we had already interviewed. The interviews were conducted prior to the outbreak of the Covid-19 crisis and were presented to the interviewees as being conducted as part of a study on their work with survivors of intimate partner abuse.

**The Interview Structure**

The interviews dealt with mapping the information sources: the professional sources, those regarding gender violence in general, and those regarding economic abuse in particular. We investigated the working approach, the image of the customer, and the decision-making processes. The analysis was conducted based on Sliverman’s proposed method of content analysis (Silverman 1993), which exposes the positioning of the speakers’ identity. We did this to reveal the premises through which the structuring of the employees’ responsibility and commitment to the organization, their role within it, and to the women seeking help can be interpreted. The findings section includes quotes that demonstrate our arguments, which are followed by initials that do not represent the interviewees’ names but allow us to identify the speaker. The advantage Silverman’s content analysis method offers is the possibility of mapping premises, categories, classifications, and institutional logics that may be important, within the context of “what everyone knows.” This refers to descriptions that relate to institutional cooperation, institutional silencing, and institutional ambiguity.

We applied this method to extract the institutional logics and their justifications by examining the interviewees’ rhetorical dialogue with the premises, terms, classifications, and practices originating from the broad institutional discourses. This was mainly done through “moral stories” that allowed us to interpret the employees’ commitment as reflected in how they position themselves as being morally and professionally responsible. We adopted Silverman’s premise according to which the interviewees’ stories were “local achievements” from which we could learn about acts they experienced as being “morally satisfying.” Thus, we focused on the interviewees’ self-presentation and particularly on how they presented themselves as being moral (or in their own words, “professional” or “committed”) and from this, we learned about their commitment in regards to the issue of economic abuse.

**THE REPRODUCING ACT OF WELFARE ORGANIZATIONS IN THE ENCOUNTER WITH SURVIVORS OF ECONOMIC ABUSE**

Following the lead of Toubiana and Zietsma (2017), we extracted the institutional logics characterizing each of the welfare organizations we examined. Based on the method they developed, we examined the “activation” of the institutional logic in light of four aspects that corresponded to the material we gathered, out of the seven they examined. These were the sources of authority, occupational identity, sources of legitimacy, and the normative base. Table no. 1 presents these four aspects as distinguishing between the institutional logics that emerged as indicative of “identity or commitment” (ibid., 928). In our case, commitment to the welfare organizations’ institutional logic also represents commitment to the occupational guidelines, as opposed to the commitment to survivors of economic abuse and their right to protection and a rehabilitation process that is suited to their needs.

**The National Insurance Institute: A Bureaucratic Institutional Logic**

The National Insurance Institute is not directly responsible by law for preventing violence against women, and therefore it is possible that its clerks are unfamiliar with the tern “economic abuse.” Indeed, when these clerks were asked about economic abuse a sharp transition was noted from answers along the lines of “I have no idea what you’re talking about” to clear-cut responses when they related the issue to domestic violence. This transition sheds light on the administrative source of authority: executing the policy based on the category stipulated by the law. Without applying the category of “domestic violence,” these employees are unable to act in favor of the women and the category can only be applied with the approval of a social worker.

One phone call is enough for me, without issuing a report or anything like that. She generally confirms that she’s been in an violent marriage. She tells me she thinks she’s still being threatened, that’s part of the reason she’s not claiming alimony, she thinks she’s afraid of him, and that’s for example something I wasn’t aware of, of course. (A. D., rehabilitation social worker)

The use of the term “violent” indicates that the social worker has identified the violence. Once the category has been applied, she explains the possible solutions she is now able to offer. From the perspective of clerks at the National Insurance Institute, the category of “domestic violence” as defined under the law is the single criterion for their commitment. The solution of separating accounts emerged as central in regards to the issue of economic abuse. The bureaucratic institutional logic does not contradict the commitment to the woman seeking help, however it does make it necessary to disconnect the woman’s specific situation from the accepted organizational practice. One example is the lack of thought given to the possibility that going to the bank will not be possible if funds are transferred to a separate account to which the woman has no access. The institutional logic assumes that a separate account is always accessible. In other words, the source of authority is the administrative execution of the welfare policy and focuses on what the organization can offer the women seeking help.

That’s what I just said, that he doesn’t want to. He limits her shopping. He takes the entire stipend. True, it’s not a very big one, but it still helps them get by. When she can’t even get one shekel, I can say to her, “No problem, if he doesn’t give you money, we can split things up.” I can invite him, say to him “From now on, starting next month, this is how it’s going to be: her part goes to her, your part goes to you.” That’s actually the solution. (H. R., social worker, income support department manager)

Based on an assumption that is disconnected from the economic abuse survivor’s world, according to which she has a separate and active account that has not been seized, a routine procedure emerged repeatedly in all the interviews: the separation of bank accounts is presented as a solution based on the bureaucratic institutional logic. This is done despite the fact that the information contained in the phrase “he limits her shopping” implies the possibility of forceful control and therefor supports the possibility that even if the woman’s part of the stipend does go into her own bank account, these funds will be appropriated in other ways. In the context of such a restriction, it is difficult to imagine the partner allowing the woman to manage her own account. In other words, the institutional logic limits the employee to examining the woman’s relationship with the National Insurance Institute but not with her family members, and therefore does not allow for information regarding economic abuse to be addressed.

The second solution that emerged as expressing commitment to the organization as shaped by bureaucratic institutional logic can also only be provided if the economic abuse survivor is recognized as a “domestic violence” survivor. This solution refers to guaranteeing or supplementing the woman’s income to establish her status as a recipient of welfare support, which grants her additional discounts such as discounts on rent, electricity bills, municipal property taxes, and medication through HMOs. Bureaucratic institutional logic requires its employees to determine eligibility based on responsible use of the organization’s resources. This responsibility leads to a suspicious attitude toward the women seeking help, as expressed in the following excerpt from the interview of a claims clerk, which implies that she must first consider information regarding economic abuse to be false and as intended to misrepresent the couple as living separate lives:

I can tell you that I come across many divorced couples that end up living together. They’re divorced but in the end they’re a couple. Death-related benefits for example, when one of the partners dies and then suddenly it turns out that they were a couple all along, because they want to receive the survivor’s stipend. The couple gets divorced and then one of them dies, and then usually, let’s say the woman comes and asks for a widow’s stipend and we say to her, “You were divorced.” And she says, “No, we were living together.” And that can happen a lot. That actually happens. (A. T., claims clerk and receptionist)

This quote corresponds to the commitment to determine eligibility, which is central to the organization’s procedures, and which at times leads to labeling those seeking welfare support as people who are asking for what they do not deserve – an approach which generates an attitude of suspicion. The bureaucratic logic reproduced in the way the employee exercises her discretion instructs her to prevent the possibility of a woman receiving support she is not entitled to receive by law and thus prevents others from receiving the support they require. The interviewee’s statement describes her acts as committed to preserving the National Insurance Institute’s reputation for strictly adhering to procedures as its source of legitimacy, and the employee validates it by adhering to the organizational guidelines, which do not include intervening in the couple’s relationship. On the other hand, from the employee’s perspective, ensuring eligibility, which has recently been phrased as the commitment to exhausting rights (Yasour Borochovitch, Benjamin & Renan Barzilay 2021) based on the normative base of that same logic and its broader significance, involves a higher level of commitment and intense and difficult work:

The price is the workload. Listen, when you collapse with your tongue hanging out because of the workload and you want to help everyone and help and help, and you come home exhausted, it’s hard. Because the work is hard. It’s one of the difficult departments at the National Insurance Institute… For example, in a recent case where the woman had many assets, her claim was denied. I denied it and closed the claim, because if you have a lot, you don’t really need help. The total stipend is 3,000 NIS. And then on Sunday the social worker called me and told me that he pulled some maneuver and took over her bank account and now she has nothing. Write, we’ll contact the head office, let’s see what we can do. It’s not something I can decide to do on my own. (Y. K. income support department manager)

While the employee describes the pressure of her work life using the moral code of being a worthy employee who wants to help everyone, guided by the logic of exhausting their rights, she nevertheless closed a typical case of economic abuse. She describes her dependence on the social worker who has the information regarding economic abuse and who is organizationally authorized to address the context of the relationship and therefor is authorized to demand that the speaker reopen the claim. The possibility of addressing economic abuse depends on cooperation with the social worker, however the path to ensuring assistance is blocked. The commitment to exhausting rights (“let’s see what we can do”) allows the speaker to contact the head office, however the organizational procedures do not grant her the authority to allocate the stipend (“it’s not something I can decide to do on my own”). Here we have an occupational identity that is morally committed to providing help and challenges the routine organizational activity. The significance of the information pertaining to violence and abuse is expanded, and consequently so is the employee’s treatment of the case, from being the administrative source of authority to focusing on pooling resources: placing a call to a shelter when necessary and talking to the social worker to gain a better understanding of cases that require special treatment. However, by doing so she is in fact going beyond her ability in a way that requires her to make a huge effort. This is the effort involved in challenging the response that embodies bureaucratic logic, which demands that employees focus solely on the relationship between those seeking support and the National Insurance Institute and on providing concrete solutions. This is illustrated by how debts incurred by abusive partners in the women’s name are addressed:

Q: And do you have any solutions for debts?

A: Not too many, only for national insurance income support cases, then the debt goes down with the minimum deduction. (H. R., social worker, income support department manager)

The debts suffered by economic abuse survivors are not included in the institutional logic emerging from the practice of deducting a minimum, which refers to deducting debts to the National Insurance Institute from the income it provides. The practice is limited to cases where according to its calculations a woman receiving income support has received more than she is entitle to receive. Other debts are not part of the dialogue between the employee and the woman seeking support, even if they might be significant, for example, if the woman cannot access her bank account because it has been seized by writ of execution. This logic once again limits the clerks’ ability to focus on the couple relationship as the relevant context. They must focus on the relationship the woman has with the National Insurance Institute while disconnecting her from the relationships in her environment. The employees justify limiting the focus to the woman’s relationship with the National Insurance Institute by invoking the value of respecting the women’s privacy:

You hear things here and there, not much, but you hear about it [stories of economic abuse]. There was one woman who told me. She came to ask for income support and I told her to fill in the forms and so on, and then she said that she used to work for a short time because she had to, financially, but then she stopped because she couldn’t take his behavior, and I felt very uncomfortable when she opened up about the situation with me. The truth is I said to her, “You don’t have to tell me anything, you don’t need to share any of this with me.” It’s also not something that affected anything. I mean, I was very uncomfortable that she shared that with me.

Q: And did you have tools you could give her, aside from income support?

A: I said to her, again, maybe the welfare department can help, I don’t have any other tools… I’ll tell you what. On one hand, I think it’s great because that way you can help them. On the other hand, it’s National Insurance and it’s a bit problematic because our reputation is already not that great, we’re notorious for digging into people’s lives and asking questions and investigating. If we add more questions like these, I don’t know how much they’ll be perceived as coming from a place of wanting to help. That’s what I mean. Again, we don’t really deal with the relationship between the couple, it’s not really our job. I agree that it’s good to know for the purpose of providing assistance, but I don’t know to what extent it will be perceived as positive, that’s what I mean. (A. T., claims clerk and receptionist)

The bureaucratic institutional logic on which the employee’s response is based is directed at two aspects: on the one hand, shielding herself from the discomfort of being aware of private information, which the organizational procedures define as irrelevant and which from her perspective cannot influence her action (“It’s also not something that affected anything”). On the other hand, preserving the National Insurance Institute’s good name and refraining from reinforcing its notoriety for “for digging into people’s lives and asking questions and investigating.” In fact, addressing information regarding economic abused is experience as being “not really our job,” that is, beyond the boundaries of the organizational guidelines. In this context, it is possible to understand the lack of interest taken in the woman’s state of emergency. In other words, the organization’s established definition of normative action does not obligate the clerk to take an interest in the woman seeking support, to make calls on her behalf, not to connect her to formal or informal sources of social support. Clerks and managers that take it upon themselves to provide such a service do so as a challenging act that goes beyond the boundaries of the organizational guidelines. Therefore, the institutional logic that emerges is comprised of (1) the source of authority, which is the commitment to a concrete bureaucratic procedure anchored in the confirmation obtained from a social worker validating that the woman is a survivor of abuse; (2) the clerks’ occupational identity, which allows them to use information to preserve organizational routines while challenging acts remain relatively rare; (3) the source of legitimacy, which is adherence to the organization’s guidelines; and finally (4) the normative base of defining bureaucratic eligibility and the exhaustion of rights. Such an institutional logic allows employees to respond to economic abuse survivors by helping them fit into the organization’s existing definitions and particularly that of “domestic violence.” As long as a case has not been classified under this category, for example, if there is no validating document from a social worker, the significance of information regarding economic abuse is diminished in a way that prevents national insurance clerks from making appropriate solutions accessible to women in need of support.

**The Welfare Services Division and Violence Prevention Centers: A Therapeutic Institutional Logic**

In the social services division and domestic violence prevention centers the predominant discourse is therapeutic and focuses on discussing the problem. Even when social workers are aware that they alone hold the authority to recognize a woman’s status as being relevant in the context of the Domestic Violence Prevention Act, at times they refrain from recognizing it as such:

Even if we do issue some kind of approval, let’s say for example that she’s asked for assistance with rent because she’s a battered woman in the community, because of our experience we’re careful with the terminology we use. We always say, “the woman says,” “the woman would attest,” and we never treat it as objective reality. That’s the idea, that we’re a treatment-focused place. In providing treatment we’re not supposed to get to the truth, we’re supposed to be with the patient in their experience, which is also subjective. That’s our job, that’s why we’re not part of the courts vis-à-vis the police and we’re also unrelated to any legal proceedings or criminal proceedings. We’re a place that offers treatment. We can only help her get stronger, get out of the cycle of violence, accompany her afterwards… but no… approvals. And I truly believe that’s the way it should be. (B. A., center director and treating social worker)

The employee’s words emphatically express the therapeutic approach, which focuses primarily on the woman and her ability to get out of the emotional place she is in. According to the speaker, information regarding violence is subjective. While social workers help by writing letters to secure rent assistance, they do not stand beside the women and make sure to avoid validating their reports of abuse, justifying this by “not taking sides.” Similarly to the National Insurance Institute, in the social services the reproduction of the institutional logic is made possible by being loyal to the value of caution: making sure that the encounter with the woman seeking help is therapeutic rather than legal. The employees reproduce the therapeutic focus by refusing to arrive at any definite conclusions regarding the woman’s “objective situation.”

In other words, the prevailing organizational practice encourages employees to hold a professional identity as social workers committed to the therapeutic process, who lean on the normative base of empowering the women seeking support and strengthening their assertiveness. Social workers emphasized their ability as family social workers to get to know the families’ needs and refer them to appropriate projects in the community, including women’s empowerment groups, employment groups, and possibilities of pursuing education. This is done despite the routine that limits the possibility of making material resources accessible:

My job here is to empower her, so she starts to understand that this is abuse. It’s not that I’m trying to convince her that there’s abuse, but if she describes things – and here we’re also talking about the psychosocial explanations… “it sounds to me like,” she’s living her life and she knows if she’s in an abusive situation or not. I say to her, “It sounds like there’s economic control going on, this could be a case of economic abuse, if he controls all the resources and you’re going around with no money and all that, then maybe, what would happen if you kept some of the money with you?” I suggest solutions, it’s a process. I’ve been accompanying her for a few months now, she’s still in it… the solution I can offer her – first recognize that there’s abuse or that she’s under some kind of control, and then see if she wants to set herself free. (D. B., family social worker)

The social worker explains that the woman she is treating has “been here for a few month now,” i.e. suffering from economic abuse, and has not been offered any solution that addresses it. The long period of time is attributed to the woman’s inability to take action based on acknowledging the economic abuse or defining her desire to break free from it. The social worker’s source of authority as a professional is that she is responsible for mediating the welfare policy to the woman seeking support. Alongside treatment and awareness, solutions customarily made accessible to recipients of welfare support in cases of financial distress are also offered. The reproduction of organizational practices takes place alongside acts that challenge them. Challenging acts take the form of connecting the women to civil society organizations who do act in concrete ways in the face of economic abuse and the unique needs it creates by providing legal and financial counselling:

When the woman leaves it’s easier, she has her own bank account. In the bank pilot, if the income level and the credit limit are low – they can increase the credit limit. If she has a loan, they can lower the interest rate. Mortgages can even be frozen for a certain period, until she gets back on her feet. There are all kinds of steps that can be taken.

Q: Is this personalized treatment provided by the bank?

A: Personalized, tailored to the needs of the specific woman. It’s not something that’s generally applied – you can do a certain thing for one woman and not for the other. The bank in the branch itself, appoints contact people and we transfer the cases to them. (K. G., center director and treating social worker)

Alongside loyalty to preserving the therapeutic institutional logic, these words also express a commitment towards survivors of economic abuse. Social workers ascribe extra-organizational meaning to the source of authority rooted in mediating the welfare policy and create a sequence between the therapeutic focus and providing relevant aid such as legal counselling or help with dealing with the bank. The sources of legitimacy are anchored in the professional knowledge, skills, and experience and therefore it is appropriate to look for extra-organizational sources of rehabilitative assistance. Loyalty to the organizational practices validates professionalism, while the identity recognition that survivors of economic abuse require more than the therapeutic process establishes the commitment to provide additional solutions. While “therapy” is the dominant organizational practice, whether economic abuse survivors are referred to “legal counselling” or “assistance from the bank” depends on the social worker’s commitment, even if she has no control over them. The heavy workload at the citizen counselling service for example, means that many survivors remain with no solutions. Similarly, the treatment of seized bank accounts or debts is extra-organizational.

The normative base for the social worker’s act emerges as a combination of providing reflection and therapy and connecting survivors to third- and business-sector initiatives. It is important to note that these initiatives are not universal and the solutions they offer are not accessible to all the social services divisions, and not even to all the violence prevention centers. For example, a lawyer working on behalf of a nonprofit organization used to be available in a certain center, however the cooperation with the nonprofit ended and no replacement arrived. Thus, locating relevant initiatives becomes a challenging act.

Hence, the institutional logic guiding social workers’ actions, which allows them to experience themselves as committed to the criteria of professionalism and attentiveness, or to use institutional logic terminology, such as “moral” and “rational,” is making treatment and counselling accessible, empowerment, and raising awareness. Connecting women to resources relevant to their situation as survivors of intimate partner abuse in general and economic abuse in particular, is a challenging act that requires additional effort on their part. In regards to protecting survivors from further abuse, the therapeutic logic creates a hierarchal relationship between the social worker who “knows” and the economic abuse survivor who “does not know” and at times even shifts the responsibility for coping with economic abuse to the survivor:

In fact, there’s a woman and there’s economic abuse there. She transfers all the money to her husband, she goes around with practically no money, sometimes not even for the bus, these kinds of situations. It’s undefined… but she still doesn’t quite see it that way. It’s all mixed up with the bankruptcy that’s going on there. She gives him all the money even though they filed for bankruptcy and they pay for everything in cash. Economic abuse is very subtle, but it exists… (M. B., family social worker)

Skills, knowledge, and experience emerge as the basis for legitimizing the response to the survivor, with professionalism referring to convincing the survivor that they are in an abusive relationship, which could include various types of abuse. The solution presented in the excerpt above essentially involves explaining and developing awareness, however no action is presented in regards to the specific case aside from the social worker’s role of equipping the survivor with a perspective the latter does not always share. In the social services, a “good” social worker is required to use the knowledge hierarchy in a way that does not necessarily get the survivor out of her abusive situation. The form of response that reproduces the therapeutic institutional logic in regards to protecting survivors creates situations in which no action is taken, and this is explained by a lack of resources:

Q: What do you do in situations where there’s a type of tension around money with one of the women you treat who turns to you for help?

A: The financial aid we give is a joke. We’re allowed to give [for] clothing, that’s about 300 NIS a year. It depends, if you have many kids, you get 600 NIS. Amazing. If you buy a cupboard, [you need to] bring in three quotes, based on your income – we’ll see if we can help you. If there’s an after-school activity for your child, show us a quote. Some things we help with indirectly, clothing is something more direct. You asked me how we help when there’s economic abuse?

Q: Is there anything you do?

A: The only thing we used to offer was [referral to] the Pa’amonim nonprofit organization. I don’t really know if that has anything to do with economic abuse. They came to give a lecture here once, I connected them to two families. It was more about how to manage finances properly, I didn’t associate it with economic abuse. (M. D., violence referent social worker)

The social worker presents her commitment to providing financial assistance as rendered ridiculous in light of the low sums she can approve and the outcome of no financial aid being given to the survivor as dependent on civil society organizations such as Pa’amonim. In other words, the possibility of providing practical help is transferred to other, nonpublic institutions. The employees are shackled under the institutional logic shaping the way their role is defined, the training they undergo, and the lack of solutions they can offer. The dominance of the therapeutic institutional logic is reproduced, with challenging acts taking the form of connecting survivors to solutions offered by other organizations. These challenging acts are not sufficiently distanced from the institutional logic and are performed in its shadow, without undermining the loyalty to reproducing it.

The institutional logic that emerges is comprised of (1) a source of authority based on mediating the welfare policy as well as a commitment to providing long-term treatment; (2) an occupational identity from which the commitment to provide a therapeutic solution stems; (3) a source of legitimacy for the social workers’ action, which stems from the professional knowledge, skills, and experience they bring to their encounters with women seeking help; and (4) a normative base, which focuses on empowering and accompanying the women seeking help. In light of these four aspects of the institutional logic, the possible response involves providing a therapeutic solution and a small amount of material help while maintaining a commitment to caution, based on the therapeutic perspective that recognizes that stories of economic abuse are subjective. Given that the commitment to caution stems from the perception that the appropriate response should be therapeutic rather than legal, the significance of information regarding economic abuse is diminished in a way that highlights the lack of understanding regarding the woman’s state of emergency. This causes the provision of long-term treatment to remain a dominant commitment that can only be challenged in extra-organizational ways.

**The Assistance Units: A Mediating Institutional Logic**

The assistance units’ mediating institutional logic emerges from their source of authority, which is based in the mediation mechanisms they offer the partners. The occupational identity of assistance unit employees comprises social workers and a few lawyers who use mediation terminology and adopt a “neutral” approach as an effective means of dealing with disputes between parties in divorce proceedings. Part of the mediation mechanism, according to these employees, emerges as being anchored in this “neutral” approach, and they explain that this is in order for both partners to experience the process as balanced and in order for them to be interested in going along with it and cooperating with the staff. This is illustrated in the words of a social worker in an assistance unit:

We fill out this form, we get the injured party to sign it, the party who’s suffered the abuse, and of course we also have relevant information regarding the violence prevention centers in each city, we have telephone numbers, we give her this number. We provide the information, to both the offending party and the injured party, we refer both the offending party and the injured party to the violence prevention centers in each city… If we think there’s a problem, that the person is at some kind of risk, that they’re experiencing abuse and aren’t fully acknowledging it, we make them aware of how we see things. The longer a divorce proceeding goes on, as it progresses, you can expect things to escalate and become more extreme. (G. Z., social worker)

The speaker explains that in the assistance units the form of response is to use a form to refer the woman to a violence prevention center. This expresses the mediating institutional logic, which aims to preserve the “symmetric” situation between the partners without expanding the significance of information regarding economic abuse during the sessions. Apparently, the signature validates that the information has been relayed and with it, the referral along with the responsibility for dealing with the abuse is transferred to the violence prevention centers. The social worker makes sure to maintain neutrality as she speaks, implying that the man may be the victim suffering the abuse. Interestingly, the employee is aware that the abuse is bound to escalate during the divorce proceedings, however she is unaffected by this under the mediating institutional logic, which does not allow her to expand the significance of information regarding economic abuse nor the significance of the measures that can be taken in light of it. In other words, this institutional logic’s source of legitimacy is the responsibility of conducting the mediation process and therefore referral is necessary and feeds the organizational practice of informing and raising awareness. The social worker obtains the signatures and highlights the risk. As the normative base in the assistance units is being responsible, she uses referrals as the appropriate response when information about economic abuse arises during sessions. In fact, in responding by informing and raising awareness, the social worker is being responsible and following the organization’s guidelines. All the interviews we conducted in the assistance units indicate that when social workers address risk, they focuses on physical abuse, while victims of economic abuse are not perceived as being at risk. The mediating institutional logic directs employees to use referrals as an expression of their commitment to inform and raise awareness and to recommend seeking legal counselling, as the following quote demonstrates:

You come across it and you hear about it also unrelated to divorce proceedings. A history going back years of not being allowed to use credit cards or being limited in terms of going out to work or needing to report every expense, or being given an amount of money that’s supposed to be enough. I mean, that too, that’s a type of control.

Q: What do you do when you come across these kinds of stories?

A: It’s the same treatment, more or less. We recommend legal representation, consulting someone about their rights. Because it’s a pattern of abuse, we always recommend contacting the violence prevention centers. It’s not right to go through a divorce without having any therapeutic support in the background. Some steps can put them at risk. It’s a combination of receiving accurate and relevant legal counselling regarding the status, the necessary legal proceeding, and being professionally accompanied by a violence prevention social worker. That’s an integral part of the process. If she’s not being treated, we’ll see to it that that connection is made, whether it’s economic abuse or any other type of abuse. To me it makes no difference. (G. Z., social worker)

The mediating institutional logic allows the speaker to experience her conduct as moral when she becomes aware of the existence of abuse and realizes that she must turn to another institution for help, that is, transfer the matter to the violence prevention centers that offer a therapeutic solution. The same approach that makes no distinction between various types of abuse is echoed in the quote bellow. However, deviation from the mediating institutional logic seems possible in certain situations; challenging acts emerge in the form of directing the economically abusive partner to change his ways. The employee’s challenging act expresses a higher level of commitment to the survivor, yet it is still limited by the organizational framework and the institutional logic that is based on transferring information, taking responsibility, informing, and raising awareness.

Again, in the same way, it’s not how human beings behave to one another. The minute you have one party who’s controlling the other party’s funds and preventing them from going about their business freely with the money that legally belongs to them, that’s control. That’s control, that’s intimidation, that’s threatening, that’s definitely abuse. I don’t need the law to define it as a criminal offense – from my perspective as a professional, that’s abuse for all intents and purposes. I act the same way I would in any case of abuse, I inform… This could involve sitting in front of people [and saying to them], “This can’t be. Right now, tell her what the bank account number is. Go on, say it.” There were situations where people acted all innocent and said, so I said, “Why don’t you say what the bank account number is, what’s the code, let her know, teach her how to get into it and see it.” That’s a tiny little thing, it doesn’t really change the pattern, but when the woman is legitimized because someone has said these things out loud and legitimized her feelings and gives it a name, it puts her in a little bit of a different place. (G. V., Assistance Unit Director)

The commitment to challenging the dominant organizational practice, that is, acting against the economically abusive partner, takes the form of condemnation: “people act all innocent.” The speaker considers economic abuse to be a form of abuse and stands beside the woman, asking the partner to transfer the information granting access to the bank account. Alongside the institutional logic that is committed to neutrality emerges the commitment to the moral code of taking responsibility, which allows this act to take on the meaning of standing beside the survivor to some extent, by referring her to legal counselling and informing her about the legal proceedings.

The mediating institutional logic (1) draws its authority from the field of mediation/agreements, which emphasizes the importance of getting the couples’ signatures on the document stating that they understand that the abuse will be treated elsewhere. (2) The assistance unit social workers and lawyers’ occupational identity is organized around their neutral stance towards the relationship between the partners. The occupational identity is particularly salient in the gender-neutral language they use when talking about the person inflicting the abuse and the person suffering it. This reflects their professional approach according to which neither side is generally disadvantaged and which allows them to stand behind a sweeping commitment to the process of inquiry and mediation. (3) The source of legitimacy for the acts the social workers describe is their commitment to relaying information regarding the formal possibility of treating abuse, if abuse is in fact present in the relationship. (4) Informing and raising awareness also relate to the normative base of compartmentalization, referral, and transferring the responsibility for treating economic abuse to the violence prevention centers. The four aspects of the mediating institutional logic allow employees to respond to economic abuse survivors by diminishing the significance of information regarding economic abuse by stating that it is not possible to address the abuse, while transferring the treatment to the violence prevention centers.

**THREE PATHS TO RESPONDING TO SURVIVORS OF ECONOMIC ABUSE**

The women’s movement in Israel and around the world has been working to promote the state’s commitment to protecting survivors of economic abuse. This has found expression in legislative changes that have already been made in various countries, including the United States, Canada, England, New Zealand, and India. In Israel, academic discourse, civil society organizations and particularly Ruach Nashit, and all the women who were involved in promoting the bill dealing with the issue, have raised public awareness and understanding of economic abuse. This public discourse has given rise to the possibility that welfare organization employees might be able to distance themselves from the patriarchal institutional logic that silences the phenomenon of economic abuse and the ease with which hegemonic masculinity allows monetary control to be converted into economic abuse (Renan Barzilay & Youseri 2016). Thus, a unique opportunity has been created to investigate the commitment of welfare organization employees to survivors seeking solutions to support their economic rehabilitation. The increased awareness regarding economic abuse has strengthened the possibility of including economic abuse survivors within the category of “domestic violence” survivors by challenging the routing acts of the welfare organizations. At the same time, the possibility of reproducing routine acts that do not acknowledge economic abuse survivors as living in a state of emergency and therefore as being entitled to solutions that would enable their economic rehabilitation has continued to gain strength. The institutional logics perspective allows us to deepen our understanding regarding the development of these two options. A primary limitation of the current study is that it did not investigate the employees’ occupational identity as shaping their influence in the organization as ones who can or cannot establish an autonomous space for action that diverges from the organization’s guidelines. Future research could investigate this potential and the implications of the occupational position on the possibility of challenging organizational routines. Here we have employed the institutional logics approach to extract three social processes that can explain the commitment of welfare organization employees to survivors of economic abuse when this takes the form of challenging the institutional logic in each of the welfare organizations, each of which corresponds to the patriarchal institutional logic in its own way.

The Domestic Violence Prevention Act of 1991 instructs the welfare organizations examined in the current study to allocate minimal material resources to mitigating the dependence of economic abuse survivors on their partners. Thus, the patriarchal institutional logic gives rise to a simultaneity: on the one hand, employees are instructed to act in a way that is committed to survivors of intimate partner abuse, while on the other hand the state bears no responsibility for making it possible for survivors to live apart from their abusive partners. In the encounter with economic abuse survivors, the preservation of organizational practices guided by the patriarchal logic means this simultaneity is activated in relation to them. Challenging the institutional practices in such an encounter means allocating resources that will allow the economic rehabilitation process to begin in the face of loans, debts, complicated living situations, and an inability to withdraw funds. The three social processes we have extracted by analyzing the four aspects of institutional logic in each of the welfare organizations – sources of authority, occupational identity, sources of legitimacy, and the normative base – indicate that the institutional logics operating in all three organizations act to reproduce a patriarchal institutional logic. Consequently, their employees’ commitment to preserving organizational routines has emerged as dominant. Each of the institutional logics that have emerged, the bureaucratic, therapeutic, and mediating, feeds the process that allows employees to experience themselves as doing the right thing and being committed to economic abuse survivors, even when their actions effectively deny the survivors recognition as requiring a unique type of rehabilitation. When they are recognized as survivors of domestic abuse, the customary minimal therapeutic resources are made accessible to them. In regards to understanding this practice of denial, which sometimes means it takes longer for a case of economic abuse to be defined “domestic violence,” institutional logic and the understanding of embedded agency as proposed by Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury (2012) are critical to distinguishing between the specific actions that are possible in each of the welfare organizations we examined. We observed that in the encounter between economic abuse survivors and welfare services employees the latter exercise discretion based on loyalty to the welfare organizations’ ethos of support, as expressed in their acceptance of the legitimacy of forms of support that do not address the state of emergency inherent in economic abuse. This reproduction of institutional logics emerged as being based on three pathways to denying the commitment to protecting survivors of economic abuse, which were found to exist alongside the employees’ commitment to the women as well as acts that challenged the institutional logic.

In the National Insurance Institute, we found that in the context of the bureaucratic institutional logic the significance of information regarding economic violence is reduced to a dichotomous approach that focuses on two documents: confirmation of the existence of a separate bank account and confirmation from a social worker that the woman is a victim of domestic violence. Without these documents, the employees are not able to take action. We found that alongside the reproducing act of relying solely on these documents for determining eligibility, the employees’ commitment to providing support, in certain cases, created the ability to challenge the organizational routine by acting to have these documents issued more quickly.

In the social services division and domestic violence prevention centers, we encountered organizational complexity and the therapeutic institutional logic was found to reduce the significance of economic abuse. We found that although social workers have the critical authority to issue a document that validates the economic abuse survivor’s status as relevant under the Domestic Violence Prevention Act, their commitment to the therapeutic institutional logic makes them cautious and they refrain from the critical challenging act of issuing the document to support the survivor. Their commitment to preservation allows them to offer long-term treatment alongside security in the basket of resources provided to women in poverty. Challenging, in the form of relying on extra-organizational resources, emerged along with the commitment to protecting the women: employees searched for extra-organizational solutions specific to economic abuse, such as the bank pilot.

In the assistance units near the family courts, the status of information regarding economic abuse was found to be diminished to the greatest extent. This type of information coming from the women, while being relevant to conducting the mediation processes between the partners, serves only for the purpose of informing the couple of the address of the violence prevention center in the relevant area and making the referral. The reproduction of patriarchal logic is expressed in the routine of providing gender-neutral treatment, as well as by disconnecting the information about economic abuse from the mediation process for which the assistance units are responsible, in a way that makes no support available to the economic abuse survivor during the rehabilitation process. At the same time, challenging acts emerged when assistance unit employees brought the partner into the conversation by using intimidating instructions that emphasized the women’s rights.

While the field of institutional logics tends to discuss challenging processes in the context of an emerging oppositional institutional logic, our analysis presents a typology of challenging processes that echo the change in public discourse, without the emergence of such an institutional logic. These include challenging processes as a commitment to the exhaustion of rights and making an effort to create the conditions for eligibility; challenging processes as a commitment to making informal support available through extra-organizational projects; challenging processes as a commitment to verbally highlighting rights; and finally, critical challenging processes that deny the institutional logic and express commitment in ways that make coping resources available, such as issuing a validating document. This typology is important as it highlights the need to conceptualize the conditions that enable challenging processes within organizations, and this includes assessing the extent to which the employees’ agency is embedded within the dominant institutional logic. The typology that emerged indicates for example, that critical challenging processes that are greatly distanced from the local institutional logic are only made possible when a rare commitment emerges among those whose social identity is particularly attuned to extra-organizational activism.

The institutional logics perspective through which we extracted the three pathways of denial has allowed us to understand the content of preserving and challenging acts performed by the employees in the three welfare organizations we examined. Hence, the contribution of the current study is dual. First, it contributes to the institutional logics perspective itself by illuminating the typology of challenging processes. Second, it contributes to the research dealing with welfare organizations’ response to economic abuse. The contribution of the institutional logics perspective is related to the importance and force of influence of feminist activism, which has been raising awareness regarding the implications of economic abuse on the lives of women for years. In regards to the feasibility of survivors of economic abuse receiving support, we found that while the awareness promoted by this activism has had some influence on the welfare organizations and the employees whose social identity exposes them to its content, it has not been able to undermine the status of the patriarchal institutional logic. The patriarchy’s influence is still stronger than feminist awareness in the context of the institutional logics that characterize the welfare organizations, which are the bureaucratic, the therapeutic, and the mediating institutional logics.

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