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**JOB HALF DONE? CONTINUITY IN FEMINIST NGOs’ ROLE IN**

**WELFARE ORGANIZATIONS’ TREATMENT OF ECONOMIC ABUSE**

**Abstract**

Economic abuse, a gendered abuse, corresponding with the “good provider role”, is rarely recognized as state responsibility. Welfare organizations’ familiarity with economic abuse is erratic, basically depending on feminist NGOs that promote understanding of the required set of material and administrative responses. During transitional times, when there formal policy guidelines on the matter are still lacking, the heuristic device of institutional logics may help expose barriers to suitable treatment and reveal emerging alternative institutional logic developed by employees seeking to enhance their support’s significance. Until recently, institutional logics’ power to expose such developments within welfare organizations was not examined, thereby overlooking the potential of institutional logics for indicating possible future influences for feminist NGOs. To shed light on operational possibilities during transitional periods, we asked which institutional logics are implicated in welfare organizations’ employees’ commitment to meet the economically abused’s needs. We conducted 48 structured interviews designed to identify the institutional logic guiding employees. Our analysis elicited the dominant institutional logic for each welfare organization examined and the alternative that was developed. The emerging alternatives allow us to conceptualize continuity in the work of feminist NGOs in the area of economic abuse.

**Keywords: institutional logics, economic abuse, welfare organizations, feminist NGOs**

**INTRODUCTION**

Economic abuse is defined as behavior where one’s intimate partner controls access to economic resources, forcing the victim-survivor into financial dependence on the perpetrator. Examples include blocking access to her own or joint financial resources, or preventing her from pursuing education or employment (Adams et al. 2008). While awareness regarding the phenomenon has risen in Israel and worldwide, economic abuse is not included in Israel’s Domestic Violence Prevention Act of 1991, resulting in a complex gendered approach.

While the state has formally adopted a commitment to protecting women, on the practical level, this commitment is limited in three ways. First, the extent to which the rights of victims-survivors are exercised remains limited (Authors 2021). Second, budgets allocated to the Ministry of Welfare earmarked for intimate partner abuse programs are sometimes returned to the Treasury unutilized and the programs do not rescue the economically abused from financial dependence (Oxenberg 2020). Third, state priorities effectively reproduce hegemonic masculine norms, which include “the good provider role” (Bernard 1981) reinforcing men’s domestic authority as providers and economic leaders (Co-author et al. 2016).

Responses to this complexity include a recent feminist public education campaign about the nature of economic abuse and its long-term implications on women’s lives. Furthermore, a recently established partnership among banks, a feminist NGO, and the Welfare Ministry promotes victims-survivors’ rehabilitation. Increasingly, such activities reveal that employees of state welfare organizations are beginning to shift from gendered assumptions to a gradual awareness of economic abuse as a phenomenon distinct from physical abuse, despite the fact that formal organizational guidelines do not refer to economic abuse. As this study documents, this transition has begun to permeate employee behavior and thinking at three national welfare organizations: the National Insurance Institute (NII); Social Services, including their Violence Prevention Centers; and family court Assistance Units involved in divorce proceedings. The extent of this transition potentially means that encounters between employees and victims-survivors may yield committed responses to addressing economic abuse.

Our objective in this study is to explore the extent to which employees at these three state welfare organizations have begun to integrate economic abuse as grounds for supporting victim-survivors. Employing the heuristic device of institutional logics, we aim to expose evidence of the barriers to and support for such integration – both of which would indicate the potential for feminist NGOs to weaken barriers and reinforce the current transition in state thinking about gendered abuse.

According to Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury (2012), institutional logic is the aggregate of sources from which social actors in organizations draw guidelines for action, informing their ability to endow a situation with meaning and their action as rational. Their vocabulary, justifications, identity, or self-perception are embedded in institutional logics; thus the totality of principles, practices, and symbols become beneficial to the social actors, differentially shaping how conclusions, thinking processes, considerations, and deliberations unfold.

If employees of state welfare organizations were to develop an institutional logic echoing the values and proposed strategies embodied in feminist NGOs campaigns, they would need to find ways in which their actions would still seem consistent with formal guidelines (Webb 2017). The existence of such shifts in institutional logic may reveal the influence of the ideal promulgated by feminist NGOs on societal conceptions of victims-survivors. Despite its potential, until recently, the power of institutional logics as an approach for exposing the critical contribution of feminist NGOs has been under appreciated. This study asks which institutional logics are implicated in employees’ commitment to meet the needs of the economically abused and introduces three broad categories of institutional logic, as exemplified in three different kinds of state welfare organizations.

We introduce the notion of economic abuse and describe how an institutional logics perspective can provide a useful heuristic for understanding barriers to and potentials for integrating the views of economic abuse as advocated by feminist NGOs, particularly during periods of transition. After describing the qualitative methods employed to explore the extent to which notions of economic abuse as explicated by feminist NGOs have infiltrated the thinking of the employees in three categories of state welfare organizations, we present the results from interviews with 48 employees of three state welfare organizations. We conclude with a discussion about how to move support for victims-survivors of economic abuse, particularly within the context of a common tendency to criticize feminist NGOs while missing on their potential effect on welfare organizations.

**ECONOMIC ABUSE**

Economic abuse in intimate partner relationships is a gendered form of abuse, corresponding with the “good provider role” that (still) reflects men’s domestic authority as providers and economic leaders (Adams et al. 2008; Adams et al. 2020; Co-author 2017). The three main manifestations of economic abuse are: economic supervision and restrictions of partners’ ability to freely use family resources; economic exploitation via coerced debts damaging partners’ credit rating; and, economically blocking the possibility of a partner’s economic independence by thwarting training, employment and promotion opportunities (Stylianou et al. 2013).

The literature on governmental responses to economic abuse indicates that professionals employed in welfare organizations and other service providers have been slow to develop an awareness of economic abuse (Christy et. al. 2022), with Sharp-Jeffs (2021) explaining that definitions of economic abuse remain blurred even in emerging legislative initiatives. In Israel, 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 (Co-author et.al. 2016), and makes no reference to coerced debt, a major form of economic abuse similar to theft (Adams et al. 2020).

**INSTITUTIONAL LOGICS IN WELFARE ORGANIZATIONS**

Institutional logics are the central organizing beliefs and practices of an institution or a group of institutions (Reference) shaping the behaviors, practices, and identities of organizational actors. Thornton et al. (2012) posit that institutional logics operate as resources providing the context from which organizational actors draw the rational, justifications, and sources of authority for action. Nevertheless, it cannot be assumed that these reflect a dogmatic institutional logic, especially during times of transition when actions may even contribute to the emergence of a new institutional logic.

Mapping institutional logics can be accomplished by addressing its four dimensions: sources of authority, occupational identity, sources of legitimacy, and its normative base (Toubiana & Zietsma 2017). Each of these components draws both from an organization’s cultural-social context and from developments in the specific occupational space. Sources of authority refer to the employees’ perceptions of the organization’s role. Occupational identity denotes how employees position themselves professionally in relation to conflicts between occupational approaches and their professional status. Sources of legitimacy indicates the types of justification employees give for their actions. Finally, the normative base focuses on the questions of when an act is experienced as appropriate in relation to the individual’s professional status. Evaluating employees through the prism of these components of institutional logics can help identify the organizational routines that formally guide employees’ language and action, as well as emerging changes that may reveal the impact of ideas from external ideological campaigns in an evolving institutional logic.

As the actions taken by those working within the same organization are not uniform, the institutional logics approach often assists in investigating clashes (Cloutier and Langley 2013). What makes the comparison of distinct institutional logics analytically fruitful is the possibility of comparing how actors in specific organizations understand daily situations and the meaning they ascribe to their routine actions. When the routine act is perceived as rational, distancing from the loyalty to replicate it to the point of performing a challenging act is no simple matter.

Can an alternative institutional logic be introduced by employees? As explained by Christy et al. (2022), feminist campaigns historically have influenced welfare organizations and services providers to develop supports for victim-survivors of physical, emotional, and even sexual abuse. However, the authors show that powerful barriers can limit a similar positive impact in the case of economic abuse. Here institutional logics can help in pinpointing barriers to the rise and strength of an institutional logic that would integrate the knowledge and values held by feminist NGOs into welfare organizations.

Feminist scholars have tended to criticize feminist NGOs for complying with institutional language and practices. Kantola’s critique (2010) of this phenomenon led to the adoption of the term ”NGOization,” suggesting that feminist NGOs are now dependent on gaining government projects and can therefore no longer maintain their radical spirit. However, this critique is not applicable to NGO work on economic abuse, as few governments actually promote policies to address such abuse. With their resulting independence, the international feminist NGO Economic Abuse International Network, as well as the Israeli organization, The Feminine Spirit, have been able to act as policy entrepreneurs and to distribute valuable knowledge on diagnosing and treating economic abuse.

To shed light on the range of possible employee responses to economic abuse during transitional periods produced by feminist NGO campaigns, this study asked which institutional logics are implicated in welfare organizations’ employees’ commitment to meet the needs of the economically abused.

**METHODOLOGY**

This qualitative study aimed to elicit the institutional logics, across its four main dimensions, guiding the routine behavior of employees in three state welfare organizations (Cloutier and Langley 2013). Conducting face-to-face, XX-minute structured interviews with 48 employees in three state welfare organizations between DATE and DATE, we compared the dominant and emerging institutional logics at each welfare organization Toubiana and Zietsma (2017).

Interviewees were selected by \_\_\_\_ after obtaining approval from the appropriate authorities and based on the recommendations of their supervisors or others we had already interviewed. Interviewees, promised anonymity, were invited to participate in a study about their work with survivors of intimate partner abuse. Ranging from 25- to 55-years-old, they were diverse in terms of their seniority and position within the organizational hierarchy and included employees who are the first professionals to meet women requiring assistance and those who work with women at later stages. The interviewees were all native Israelis, Mizrahi and Ashkenazi Jewish women and a minority of Arab women. Their education and training varied according to their professional roles, and their level of religiosity was diverse, ranging from secular to religious, although most were secular and none were from the ultra-Orthodox sector.

Interview questions mapped the information sources of each interviewee, including professional sources, those regarding gender violence in general, and those regarding economic abuse in particular. In addition, the questions investigated employee’s work approach, image of their clients, and decision-making processes. The analysis of the resulting transcripts utilized Silverman’s method of discourse analysis (Silverman 1993), which exposes the positioning of the speakers’ identity to uncover the premises through which it is possible to interpret the structuring of the employees’ role within the organization, as well as their perceived responsibility and commitment to the women seeking help.

**Three State Welfare Organizations**

The interviewees included 21 clerks and managers at the NII, 21 social workers in the Social Services Division and Violence Prevention Centers, and six social workers, lawyers, and managers from Assistance Units. Each is described below.

*The National Insurance Institute (NII)*

The NII is responsible for alleviating poverty by supplementing and guaranteeing income support and determines eligibility for welfare allowances (unemployment, disability, and healthcare). The growing demand for selectivity has meant that the NII’s eligibility testing reflects a skeptical approach toward those seeking support, while at the same time enhancing take-up rights rates.

*The Social Services Division and Violence Prevention Centers*

The Social Services Division applies Welfare Ministry policies and operates as part of city councils. The country’s 108 Violence Prevention Centers were established by the 1991 Domestic Violence Prevention Act, and the quasi-constitutional Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty, stipulating that “All persons are entitled to protection of their life, their body, and their dignity.” The centers diagnose, assess threat level, allocate protective measures, and treat and rehabilitate families –victims and perpetrators – caught in the cycle of abuse.

*The Family Courts Assistance Units*

Assistance Units operate throughout the country alongside family, rabbinical, and sharia family courts, supporting couples in divorce proceedings, providing urgent interventions aimed at easing the tension between the parties, and helping couples reach agreement. In high-risk situations, abused partners are referred immediately to Violence Prevention Centers.

**RESULTS: ENCOUNTERING VICTIMS-SURVIVORS OF ECONOMIC ABUSE**

Feminist NGOs in Israel and around the world are working to promote states’ and professionals’ support for victims-survivors of economic abuse via legislation (Sharp-Jeffs 2021). In Israel, academic discourse, the feminist NGO Women’s Spirit, and parliamentary activists were involved in promoting a bill addressing the issue. While the attempt failed, it raised public awareness of economic abuse. In addition, feminist NGOs in Israel initiated the 2016 Banks Available Treaty (known locally as the Banks Pilot) which enlisted the banks to support economically abused women in managing their debts and other financial issues. Finally, the NGO Women’s Spirt, works with state welfare programs to enhance familiarity with the Banks Pilot among state welfare organizations and to promote their understanding of economic abuse.

We introduce the findings from the interviews for each state welfare organizations.

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

The NII is not legally responsible for preventing violence against women; therefore it is possible that its clerks are unfamiliar with the term “economic abuse.” Our interviews indicated that most were far more familiar with physical abuse, emotional abuse, and sexual harassment, and mentioned the training they had for these. They associated these forms of abuse with trauma and women who made claims for prolonged income support. Indeed, when these clerks were asked about economic abuse, a sharp transition was noted, from answers such as, “I have no idea what you’re talking about” to clear-cut responses when realizing the association with domestic violence. Apparently, they relied upon an administrative source of authority: they believed they were executing their organization’s policy as stipulated by law, which requires applying the category of “domestic violence” before help can be provided. As a social worker who is familiar with the case must approve, the interviewees repeatedly reported close collaboration with social workers:

One phone call is enough for me, without issuing a report …. [The social worker] generally confirms the woman has been in a violent marriage. She tells me she thinks the woman is still being threatened, and that’s partly why the woman doesn’t claim alimony; she believes, that the woman is afraid of her partner (AD, rehabilitation social worker).



Once eligibility is established, employees turned to service eligibility, as a manager explained:

He doesn’t want to [pay]. He limits her shopping, takes the entire allowance. 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…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” (HR, social worker, department manager).

If information indicating economic abuse were given more weight, the interviewee would have had to consider the distinct possibility that, even if the victim-survivor’s part of the allowance goes into a separate bank account, these funds would likely be appropriated in other ways. Despite this, the interviewee concludes, “That’s actually the solution.” Income support, the form of support available from the NII for the economically abused, is strongly associated with physical abuse.

Clearly, queries about or responses to economic abuse are not part of the NII’s routine procedures. The interviewee justifies this omission by invoking her respect for the women’s privacy:

There was one woman who came to ask for income support, and I told her to fill in the forms, and then she said that she used to work for a short time because she had to, financially, but 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 [WHO].

In response to information about economic abuse, the interviewee shielded herself from discomfort by relying on the organizational procedures which define this information as irrelevant to possible NII support. She perceives her role as limited to approving eligibility for income support. Only when a woman who has been economically abused is recognized as a victim of ‘domestic violence’ is she eligible for various forms of income support. It emerges that eligibility is a serious matter over which NII employees can be very strict and stick to the formal procedure, or they can shift their position toward making an effort to establish eligibility. From the employee’s perspective, ensuring eligibility involves a higher level of commitment and intense and hard work:

For example, in a recent case where the woman had many assets, her claim was denied. I denied it … because if you have a lot, you don’t really need help. The total allowance is NIS 3,000 [about $1000]. And then the social worker called me and told me that [her partner]… took over her bank account and now she has nothing. Right, 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 (YK, department manager).

In this typical case of economic abuse, the interviewee was not able to certify that the woman needed support and, instead, described her dependence on the social worker for a decision. The social worker is organizationally authorized to address the context of the relationship and therefore can instruct the interviewee to reopen the claim. While there exists the possibility of addressing economic abuse, it depends on cooperation with the social worker. The interviewee who is in direct contact with the woman seeking help cannot make a decision; rather, she has to contact the head office. Here we have an employee with an occupational identity that is morally committed to providing help, even willing to challenge organizational routine procedures by being a catalyst prompting those with organizational authority to act on behalf of the woman seeking help. She is, however, blocked by NII procedures. The organization’s narrow perspective on abuse is further illustrated by how it addresses debts incurred by abusive partners in the women’s name. When asked whether the NII has solutions for such debts, the interviewee responded, “Not too many, only for national insurance income support cases, then the debt goes down with the minimum deduction (HR, social worker, income support department manager).

Thus, NII as a welfare organization limits the employee to examining the woman’s relationship with the NII, but not with her family members; therefore, debts suffered by economic abuse survivors can be deducted from the allowance the NII provides. Other debts are not part of the dialogue between the employee and the women seeking support, even if potentially significant, for example, if the woman cannot access her bank account because it has been seized by writ of execution. The routine NII practice once again limits the clerks’ ability to focus on the couple relationship as the relevant context. Instead, they must focus only on the relationship the woman has with the NII. Any attention to economic abuse is considered 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.

An analysis of the interviews with employees of the NII allows us to identify the presence of two institutional logics, reflecting components of a bureaucratic institutional logic, along the four dimensions:

* *Administrative source of authority* is revealed in the absence of economic abuse legislation, as well as an administrative application of the social policy that is based on establishing eligibility for support;
* *Occupational identity* is revealed in the interviewees’ description of their limited authority to act on behalf of their clients, their dependency on social workers’ approval to classify a woman as a victim of domestic violence, and in a superior’s required approval of any exceptional considerations;
* *Sources of legitimacy* emerged as loyalty to the organization and the responsibility to ensure that eligibility is clearly validated; and
* The *normative base* is revealed in the form of a mission to ensure the take-up of rights. From the perspective of a bureaucratic institutional logic, normative action does not obligate the clerk to take an interest in the victim-survivor seeking support, to make calls on her behalf, or to connect her to formal or informal sources of social support – a normative position that diminishes the significance of information regarding economic abuse in a way that prevents the interviewees from making available solutions appropriate to economic abuse victim-survivors.

Yet, despite the clear bureaucratic institutional logic revealed in the NII interviews, there is also evidence of an emerging institutional logic that corresponds to messages conveyed by feminist NGOs. Some of the interviewees clearly sought to transcend the boundaries of organizational guidelines while not crossing the lines, perhaps signifying an institutional logic that distances itself from the assumption that any NII responsibility for responding to economic abuse is contingent upon external approval. This emerging institutional logic is revealed along the four dimensions:

* *Source of authority* is revealed in a commitment to service that extends the possibilities made available by bureaucratic procedure in order to, for example, separate partners’ bank accounts;
* *Occupational identity* shifts are revealed in some interviewees’ willingness to trust victims-survivors to relate their situation – an identity that comports with the strong possibility that their thinking has been influenced by publicly available knowledge on economic abuse. Such an emerging identity facilitated their willingness to search for solutions to ensure victim-survivors’ eligibility for services, as if obeying the bureaucratic guidelines;
* *Source of legitimacy* arose when interviewees mentioned clients who were clearly experiencing economic abuse and indicated their attention to women’s suffering; and,
* The *normative base* is revealed in the interviewees who see their jobs as operating on behalf of citizens, particularly in their devotion to rights take-up.

The emerging institutional logic revealed along these four dimensions allows employees to respond to economic abuse victim-survivors by helping them fit into the organization’s existing definitions, particularly that of “domestic violence.”

Importantly, the two elicited institutional logics – the existing and the emerging – are not symmetrical in their power. In fact, characteristics of the work environment serve the existing bureaucratic logic. For example, heavy workloads, and a sense that needs cannot be met with existing resources mean that employees are more likely to operate within the bureaucratic logic, gendering economic abuse by leaving women to manage its costs on their own. This environment means that operating beyond typical procedures adds to workloads and risks a reactionary backlash, in the form of allocating no resources to the economically abused. This is a heavy burden to carry:

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 you come home exhausted, it’s hard. Because the work is hard. It’s one of the difficult departments at the NII… (YK, income support department manager).

This interviewee is the one who makes an effort to establish eligibility, who calls social workers. She does this despite the fact that, when it comes to allocating resources, there is little she can do beyond transferring responsibility to her superiors.

Two barriers to the assimilation of information on economic abuse conveyed by feminist NGOs seem to operate at the NII. The first is that information regarding economic abuse tends to be minimized as long as the bureaucratic institutional logic is dominant. The second is the paradoxical challenge of employees’ awareness of the reality economic abuse together with their inability to help victim-survivors, given the bureaucratic institutional logic that formally ignores it. These barriers are reinforced by the neo-liberal policy that allocates only minimal resources for supporting victim-survivors. Within this constraint, it can be derived from our analysis, that for feminist NGOs to support the emerging institutional logic, further validation of committed employees is necessary. Namely, negotiating a specific requirement from the NII to recognize all victims-survivors of economic abuse as eligible for the rights of victim-survivors who leave battered women’s shelters. Because it is an existing and familiar category, such a step forward would be both consistent with the bureaucratic institutional logic, and would enhance the recognition that is entailed by the alternative one.

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

In Social Services Division and its Domestic Violence Prevention Centers, the predominant discourse is therapeutic and focuses on discussing problems with clients. 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, 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. In providing treatment we’re not supposed to get to the truth, we’re supposed to be with the patients in their experience, which is also subjective. That’s our job, that’s why we’re not part of … legal 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 (BA, 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 extricate herself from the emotional place in which she finds herself. Furthermore, the interviewee regards violence in this context as subjective. While social workers help by writing letters to secure rent assistance, they do not stand beside the women. Instead, they make sure to avoid validating their reports of abuse, justifying this as “not taking sides.”

Thus, the prevailing organizational practice encourages employees to hold a professional identity as social workers committed to the therapeutic process, drawing on the normative base of empowering the women seeking support and strengthening their assertiveness. Social workers emphasized their skills in getting to know families’ needs and referring them to appropriate community supports, including women’s empowerment groups, employment groups, and possibilities of pursuing education, 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… 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 …. Then maybe [I’d ask], “What could 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 (DB, family social worker).

The interviewee describes a case of a woman who conveyed information about economic abuse for several months. No material or social support resources are described. The long period of time is attributed to the woman’s inability to acknowledge the economic abuse or identify her desire to break free from it. With regard to protecting survivors from further abuse, the therapeutic logic creates a hierarchal relationship between the social worker who “knows” and the economic abuse victim-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, leaving herself with practically no money, sometimes not even for the bus…. 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… she still doesn’t quite see it that way (MS, family social worker).

Skills, knowledge, and experience emerge as the basis for legitimizing the social worker’s response. Her professionalism leads her to emphasize the relationship as abusive. The solution presented essentially involves imparting information to the victim-survivor so that she develops a heightened awareness of her situation. However, no action is taken beyond the social worker’s role of introducing the language of abuse. In these social services, a “good” social worker uses the knowledge hierarchy in a way that does not necessarily extricate a woman in need from her abusive situation.

Other social worker interviewees described how, alongside therapeutic treatment, resources can also be offered that are customarily made accessible to recipients of welfare support in cases of financial distress. The focus on resources reflects an occupational identity that attributes more respect to the woman degendering economic abuse by assuming societal responsibility. However, the responsibility is transferred onward by connecting the women to civil society organizations that act in concrete ways in the face of economic abuse and the resulting unique needs by providing legal and financial counselling:

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 [price] 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? 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 [so] I didn’t associate it with economic abuse (MD, violence referent social worker).

This social worker presents her commitment to providing financial assistance as rendered ridiculous in light of the small sums she can approve. Any financial aid ultimately depends on civil society organizations, such as Pa’amonim. Essentially, the possibility of providing practical help is transferred to other, nonpublic institutions.

Another social worker associated the therapeutic support and the material resources. She is notinghere is that mentioning BP(above)indicates the development of – as alonefor rehabilitating economic agency

When the woman leaves, it’s easier, she has her own bank account. In the Banks 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 [payments] 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. [There is also the possibility of support that is] 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 [can] appoint contact people and we transfer the cases to them (KG, center director and treating social worker).

While “therapy” is the dominant organizational practice, whether economic abuse victim-survivors are referred to “legal counselling” or to “assistance from the bank” depends on the social worker’s commitment, even if the social worker has no control over the accessibility of such external resources. As with the NII, the heavy staff workload here means that many victim-survivors remain with no solutions; and, to the extent that solutions *are* available, they are either not universal or are provided outside of the organization, making even locating relevant external initiatives and services a challenge to staff.

The basket of therapeutic and practical responses which we found imply the dominance of a therapeutic institutional logic cultivating operational routines that create situations in which no action is taken, and this is explained by a lack of resources. Loyalty to organizational practices validates professionalism in line with the four institutional logic dimensions:

* *Source of authority* is based on mediating the welfare policy as well as a commitment to providing long-term treatment,
* *Occupational identity* is broad enough to allow for an emphasis on the therapeutic approach while concurrently seeking additional, suitable resources,
* *Source of legitimacy* for the social workers’ action stems from the professional knowledge, skills, and experience they bring to their encounters with women in need of help, and
* The *normative base* derives from the belief that the task is primarily to empower clients.

In summary, these four aspects of institutional logic as revealed in the therapeutic organization mean that possible staff responses involve maintaining a commitment to caution, emphasizing that stories of economic abuse are subjective, diminishing their importance in a way that simultaneously diminishes a sense of urgency in response to the woman’s state of emergency. This stance means that the provision of long-term therapeutic treatment remains the dominant commitment and can only be challenged in extra-organizational ways.



As with the NII, however, some interviews revealed the echoes of the knowledge and ideological stance conveyed by feminist NGOs. The resulting, emerging institutional logic can be seen along the same four dimensions of institutional logic:

* *Source of authority* revealed were more likely to be based on observing women’s needs more precisely,
* *Occupational identity* begins to take pride in recognizing the capacity of other professionals (e.g., finance professionals) to help,
* *Source of legitimacy* for the social workers’ action stems from criticizing the lack of resources for attending to practical needs,
* The *normative base* was more likely to be influenced by the belief that the task is primarily rehabilitating economic agency.

Mapping the co-existence of the dominant and emerging institutional logics, and the tension between them helps to underscore the role that limited material resources plays in offers of support. Moreover, even when social workers attempt to locate a source of material resources, the approval process is very slow. In this context, a major barrier to a stronger impact of feminist NGOs seems to take the form of beliefs taking after men’s organizations that convince social workers that women’s complaints of abuse are generally false and that they mustn’t act on their power and legal duty to validate them.

Another major barrier is the disappearance of NGOs which in the past provided legal support but are no longer able to provide such a service. Thus, reinforcing the alternative institutional logic which is currently growing due to the project of the *Banks’ Availability Treaty*, depends on demanding legal aid to be in-sourced in the social services division, a step forward that can support the idea that the therapeutic treatment must be accompanied by additional forms of support and at the same time, could support state effort to act against divorced fathers who won’t stand their financial duties.

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

Assistance Units are charged with providing ‘neutral’ mediation to help couples manage disputes divorce proceedings. Part of the mediation mechanism, according to interviewees, is the fact that it is anchored in this ‘neutral’ approach. As they explain it, such an approach is to ensure not only that both partners experience the process as balanced, but also to increase couples’ interest in 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 [and] 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 (GZ, social worker).

By explaining that the assistance units use a form to refer a woman to a Violence Prevention Center, the interviewee expresses the mediating institutional logic that aims to preserve a ‘symmetrical’ balance between the partners without expanding upon the significance of information regarding economic abuse during the sessions. Apparently, the signature validates the fact that information has been relayed to the injured party and, with the referral, so too is responsibility for dealing with the abuse transferred to the Violence Prevention Centers.

The interviewee makes sure to maintain neutrality as she speaks, implying that either of the partners may be the victim of abuse. Interestingly, guided by the mediating institutional logic, the employee’s actions remain unaffected by the type of abuse, which does not allow her to assess the significance of information regarding economic abuse nor to consider what measures may be taken in response. Since this institutional logic’s *source of legitimacy* is the responsibility for conducting mediations, referral is necessary and perpetuates 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, the social worker uses referrals as the appropriate response when information about economic abuse arises during sessions. In fact, in providing information and raising awareness, the social worker sees herself as being responsible and following the organization’s guidelines.

In fact, in all the interviews conducted in the Assistance Units, interviewees focus on the risk of 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 that clients seek legal counselling, as the following quote demonstrates:

You come across [economic abuse] 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. [In response to this information,] 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… 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 (GZ, social worker).

The mediating institutional logic allows the interviewee 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, to transfer the matter to the Violence Prevention Centers that offer a therapeutic solution. The Assistance Unit social workers and lawyers’ *occupational identity* is organized around their neutral stance towards the relationship between the partners. 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. 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.

Informing and raising awareness also relate to the *normative basis* of compartmentalization, referral, and transferring the responsibility for treating economic abuse to the violence prevention centers. These four aspects of the mediating institutional logic allow employees to respond to economic abuse victim-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.

Again, despite the dominance of a mediating institutional logic, as with the NII and the Welfare Services Division, interviewees told the story of an emerging institutional logic where the type of supported response is instructing the economically abusive partner to change his ways. However, the degendering institutional logic that allows the social worker to recognize her own responsibility basically hides behind transferring information and informing.

The minute you have one party … 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….” [When] people act all innocent…, 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 (GV, Assistance Unit Director).

The degendering assumption, that of state responsibility, goes a long way towards introducing a rhetoric that wasn’t used in the other welfare organizations. Scolding the economically abusive partner takes the form of condemnation: “people act all innocent.” The interviewee 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.

Relying on the emerging institutional logic that we mapped in the Assistance Units, which definitely echoes feminist messages, feminist NGOs may consider promoting a requirement that lawyers at the Assistance Unit issue a document indicating the economic abuse which they observed so that courts can take this information into account, ensuring that it does not disappear in legal proceedings. Calling for this type of action would be supportive of employees who attempt to translate their feminist awareness into an emerging institutional logic, especially because such a transfer of information can be achieved as part of the case evaluation, even without a shift in formal guidelines. Essentially, this approach does not contradict the organization’s primary institutional logic – in which employees can continue to transfer responsibility onward – legitimizing economic abuse as if it were a clinical psychotherapeutic matter.

**RESPONDING TO SURVIVORS OF ECONOMIC ABUSE**

Attempts at legislating the eligibility rights of economic abuse victims-survivors for a set of material and administrative resources failed in the Israeli context in a way that leaves little hope for different results in the foreseeable future. In this context, it is important to ask what can feminist NGOs now do on behalf of the economically abused under the transitional circumstances that were generated by the legislation campaign. As our interviews suggest, increased awareness regarding economic abuse has created conditions for emerging institutional logics to develop in welfare organizations, enabling staff to import new responses into their existing operational routines. Further, the persistent voice of feminist NGOs in the media continue to strengthen the likelihood that economically abused women will be found eligible for support by challenging the referral actions of the welfare organizations. At the same time, the dominant institutional logics has increased in strength. This has meant that many employees, loyal to existing procedures, need not acknowledge economic abuse as a state of emergency, nor consider victim-survivors as being entitled to solutions.

The institutional logics perspective allows us to deepen our understanding regarding the development of these two alternative directions for the institutional logic of state welfare organizations. 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 actors 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 strengthening an emerging, alternative institutional logic. The institutional logics approach has enabled us to identify barriers to the impact on welfare organizations employees of the messages around economic abuse advocated by feminist NGOs. Moreover, despite critiques that take a dichotomous approach to feminist NGOs as being either radical and truly feminist or weak collaborators losing their feminist nature (Kantola 2010; Krizsán and Roggeband 2021), we establish that there is a third way that advances the interests – and safety – of the victim-survivors of economic abuse. In particular, we show that steps are possible that can advance the need to address economic abuse while remaining staying consistent with the dominant institutional logic in each of the welfare organizations. This more dynamic, temporal approach acknowledges both the barrier to a more just provision of services derived from the neo-liberal refusal to extend resources to women in need while, at the same time, gives meaning to the ongoing projects of feminist NGOs. Their work mustn’t be left unfinished. The next steps surely require feminist solidarity and concerted efforts to materialize.

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 dominant institutional logic in welfare organizations 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, concurrently, the state bears no responsibility for making it possible for survivors to live independently from their abusive partners. In the encounter with economic abuse victims-survivors, the preservation of organizational practices guided by dominant institutional logics means this simultaneity is applied to them. Nevertheless, employees whose identities embrace a feminist stance, we found, were able to develop preliminary alternative institutional logics. These enable challenging formal practices in such encounters and, at times, even allocating resources that allow the economic rehabilitation process to begin in the face of loans, debts, complicated living situations, and an inability to withdraw funds. 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 – indicated that the dominant institutional logics operating in all three welfare organizations act to minimize the weight of the information on economic abuse. Consequently, employees’ commitment to preserving organizational routines has emerged as dominant. Each of the institutional logics that have emerged, the bureaucratic, therapeutic, and mediating, perpetuates 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 resources are made accessible to them.

The institutional logics perspective through which we extracted the alternative institutional logics that arose in each of the welfare organizations enabled 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 by illuminating the importance of focusing on the emergence of alternative institutional logic (Cloutier et al. 2013) and seeking to identify its sources for the sake of generating continuity in its ability to thrive. Second, our study contributes to the research dealing with welfare organizations’ response to economic abuse. Using the institutional logic perspective, we shed light on the importance and force of work done by feminist NGOs, which have been raising awareness regarding the implications of economic abuse on the lives of women for years. Regarding the feasibility of survivors of economic abuse receiving support, we found that the awareness promoted by feminist NGOs has had some influence on the welfare organizations and the employees whose social identity exposes them to feminist campaigns.

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