**Feminist NGOs, State Welfare Organizations, and Economic Abuse:**

**An Institutional Logics Analysis**

**Abstract**

Economic abuse (EA)—intimate partners’ efforts to control women’s economic resources—still suffers from ambiguous legal recognition. Even in countries with legal recognition, state allocation of resources for support remains meagre. We suggest that Israeli welfare organizations’ employees have developed their professional response to EA along two distinct value sets—a dominant institutional logic in their respective organizations, and a more covert, feminist institutional logic encountered in collaborations with feminist NGOs. Using a framework of multiple institutional logics, in interviews with 48 State Welfare Organization (SWO) employees, we map the multiple institutional logics that cultivate responses to EA survivors and show that elements of feminist understanding and practices on EA permeate SWOs’ practices. The existence of a feminist institutional logic creates a path for exploring whether the feminist impact is significant in enabling committed responses to EA even while no institutional change is achieved.

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

**INTRODUCTION**

Over the past decade, several bills have been proposed in Israel to recognize economic abuse (EA) as a distinct form of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). EA, inflicted with or without physical abuse, often post-separation (co-author1 et al., 2021) deprives women of their financial agency (Sharp-Jeffs, 2021). The feminist NGO Women’s Spirit lobbied to support these bills. In response, in 2016, the Ministry of Justice, together with the Ministry of Social Equality, proposed introducing EA as a legal term and including it in Israel’s 1991 Prevention of Domestic Violence Law. This proposal would have enabled family courts to issue civil protection orders in EA cases and to order banks to provide relevant information to spouses. However, the bills were rejected and suggested amendments to the 1991 law raised considerable reservations, with opponents claiming that EA’s purportedly unclear and “amorphous” nature of EA threatened the privacy of family life.

At the time of this study, no legislation specifically addressing the phenomenon has been enacted. However, Women’s Spiritpersisted with its campaigns to promote EA awareness in cooperation with feminists in academia and other feminist organizations, and with Israel’s welfare ministry (Women’s Spirit, 2023). This generated institutional multiplicity and ambivalence, allowing us to apply Cloutier and Langley’s (2013) multiple institutional logics approach. It helped us investigate how a feminist institutional logic became part of, even if marginally, state welfare organizations despite institutional change not having been achieved. Nevertheless, the continuous action of feminist NGOs cooperating with social workers employed by State Welfare Organizations (SWOs) echoes a developing undercurrent of social policy, the Collaborative Governance approach, which corresponds with the study of such cooperation (Barandiarán, Jose Canel & Bouckaert, 2023). In Collaborative Governance the components of formal and informal state-NGOs partnerships are primarily discursive and include data, shared concepts, tested causal assumptions, correct calculus of effects and costs, and evaluation. Our study does not report formal cooperation, but suggests that when welfare organizations’ employees are asked about their work routines, their answers reflect such cooperation, indicating a minor feminist impact warranting attention.

Applying Collaborative Governance in a partially formal way, Israeli feminist NGOs managed to participate in social services charged with responding either to IPV complaints or IPV-generated needs. Despite the lack of legislation addressing EA, other impacts are possible. In particular, we investigate whether a feminist logic viewing EA as arising from men’s controlling efforts, resulting in material emergency, permeate state practices. Thus, we focus on state welfare organizations’ employees, asking about their responses to EA survivors.

When EA is recognized as a form of IPV, treatment is routinely offered by welfare organizations. We explain EA and describe how an institutional logic perspective can provide a useful heuristic for understanding barriers to, and potentials for, integrating the logic introduced by feminist NGOs. We then describe how these approaches have unfolded in Israel.

**Feminist NGOs**

According to Kantola and Squires (2010), the language of managerialism and evidence-based policy have so profoundly affected feminist NGOs that they can no longer act as state feminists working to transform policy. Instead, feminist NGOs have tried to maintain their significance by entering into contracts and becoming providers in short-term projects. The dependence on such contracts, it is argued, prevented any radical social change endeavors. Organizational survival following the 2008 financial crisis that depressed fundraising meant that feminist NGOs had to compete with for-profit organizations, losing any advantage accrued from their long years of expertise, even on issues like domestic violence. This reality, sometimes named NGO-ization (e.g., Corolczuk, 2016), was seen by Kantola and Squires (2012) as indicating the emergence of what they call *market feminism* with its emphasis on operating within market constraints. The transformed the international women’s movement in ways that inhibited its capacity to struggle for social change.

Affected by similar funding dynamics, non-feminist NGOs in Israel won government contracts for operating shelters for domestic violence survivors, which appears to confirm Kantola and Squires’ (2012) diagnosis. However, more recently, the Collaborative Governance approach (Barandiarán et al., 2023) offered new possibilities for assessing feminist NGOs. For instance, Sharp-Jeffs (2022, 115) reports that a UK collaboration of ??? (2015–2018) succeeded in establishing a broad agreement on the appropriate response to economic abuse as “securing their health, social and economic wellbeing for the short and long term” (115).

The UK outcome suggests that the notion of *market feminism* as curtailing the power of feminist NGOs to influence social change may be too limiting. Instead, we suggest a more nuanced view—the notion of *coordinating feminism*. draws as on,, *Coordinating feminism* operates within existing policy constraints but helps generate alternatives via collaboration.Unable to enact social change embracing feminist policy on their own, NGOs participating in *coordinating feminism* may well introduce a discourse or a logic that helps prioritize feminist policy or practice alternatives , such as altering policies based on blaming and “repairing” women, as often happens with EA survivors.

The notion of *coordinating feminism* has other advantages. Unlike state feminism’s emphasis on policy change, for example, *coordinating feminism* extends involvement beyond policy change to the practical provision of support. And, contrary to *market feminism*, *coordinating feminism* maintains its impact beyond formal project contracts to lead efforts to support women independent of state funding. We suggest that, given the lack of specific legislation for the state to contract with feminist NGOs for service provision, the NGOs can participate in a *coordinating feminism* that may develop diverse forms of support unavailable to SWOs.

**Economic Abuse**

EA in intimate partner relationships is a gendered form of abuse, corresponding with the “good provider role” (Bernard, 1981) reflecting men’s domestic authority as providers and economic leaders (Adams et al. 2008; Adams et al. 2020). EA’s three main manifestations 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 a partner’s potential economic independence by thwarting training, employment and or promotion opportunities (Stylianou et al. 2013). Feminist NGOs have responded in multiple ways, including addressing employment sabotage by establishing organizational responses through employment laws protecting survivors from discrimination or unfair dismissal (Wilcox et al., 2020).

The literature on governmental responses to EA indicates that professionals employed in SWOs and other service providers have been slow to develop an awareness of EA (Christy et. al. 2022). Sharp-Jeffs (2021) attributes this slow pace to the blurred definition of EA, even in legislative initiatives. Proposing improved responses, Sharp-Jeffs details 11 *Coordinated Community Resources* principles that were applied in the UK, including applying expert knowledge, emphasizing the intersectionality of EA experiences, providing safe spaces to unsilenced survivors’ experiences, bringing partners in and sanctioning them. These principles’ integration of support and policy actions suggests that a type of *coordinating feminism* that, when encountering barriers to legislation and formal policy, insists on developing an alternative discourse and alternative practices, may be applicable for analyzing feminist action in the context of neo-liberalism. Institutional logics must then be examined to better understand the relevance of collaborative governance in the context of introducing *coordinating feminism*.

**Institutional Logics in Welfare Organizations**

Recently, feminist scholars have engaged institutional change (Campbell, 2010), exploring the possibility that a major value-laden assumption, producing guidelines for action within a specific social or political arena, would be replaced by an oppositional framework, introducing a set of alternative values, norms, and ways of sense-making (Waylen, 2014; Bacchi and Ronnblom, 2014). The question leading to the interest taken in the institutional approach concerns the possibility that feminist political activism would gain the power to replace exclusionary gendered assumptions with inclusionary equitable frameworks. However, as many have observed, instead of replacement, collaboration and ambivalence have emerged in institutional arenas (Halley et al., 2018). Clearly, political struggles both indicated the potential for change, and, in a practical sense, left gender and intersectional power structures in place (MackKay, 2014).

The salience of the interplay between formal and informal forces in struggles to dominate institutional narratives encouraged scholars to apply institutional logic to understand values, sense-making and even action, without necessarily implying that any gained dominance. As MacKay (2014) explained, “Institutional logics can operate at the level of ‘common sense’ and taken for granted-ness, as well as providing discursive or framing resources around which coalitions of actors can mobilize. Whilst there will be a dominant logic in any given institutional context, it is important to recognize this will co-exist with other alternative and subordinate logics, providing the opportunity for contestation, and, potentially, change over time” (2019: 13-14). Thus, the notion of institutional logic is particularly suitable for explaining minor but crucial impacts made by a feminist institutional logic within an otherwise neo-liberal, reactionary, and exclusionary institution of the welfare regime.

Institutional logics are the central organizing principles and “regimes of practice” (Friedland 2009, 906) from which the organization’s employees comprehend the rational order. 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, and 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. Further, these authors posit that institutional logics constitute resources providing the context from which organizational actors draw the guidelines, justifications, and sources of authority for action. Nevertheless, it cannot be assumed that these reflect a unifying institutional logic, especially during times of transition when activism occurring outside the organization may contribute to the emergence of a new institutional logic. Cloutier and Langley (2013) have observed multiple institutional logics, with potentially incompatible or conflicting values, that may occur following cooperation with other organizations. They developed an approach in which the multiplicity goes unnoticed among the many forms of relationships between institutional logics but creates possibilities for marginalized action.

Mapping institutional logics to encompass Cloutier and Langley’s synthesis with that of Boltanski and Thěvenot’s (2006) can be accomplished by addressing their 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. Each help better explain “how recursiveness between agency and structure in institutional contexts unfolds or how legitimacy struggles are resolved in practice” (Cloutier and Langley 2013, 376). *Sources of authority* refer to employees’ perceptions of the organization’s role. *Occupational identity* denotes how employees position themselves professionally. *Sources of legitimacy* indicate the types of justification employees give for their actions. Finally, the *normative base* focuses on whether an act is experienced as appropriate in relation to the individual’s professional status. Evaluating employees through the prism of these institutional logic components 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 and routine contact with NGOs promoting such campaigns.

**Coordinating Support For EA Survivors**

In Israel, the Domestic Violence Prevention Act of 1991 recognizes women’s right to protection from intimate partner abuse but does not recognize EA as a form of intimate partner abuse (co-author3, 2017,355). Further, it makes no reference to coerced debt, a major form of economic abuse, similar to theft (Adams et al., 2020). Nevertheless, at times, EA is informally recognized as domestic abuse, allowing the legislation to be applied to justify income support or partial rent subsidies.

Feminist NGOs in Israel and around the world actively promote states and professional support for survivors of EA via legislation (Sharp-Jeffs 2021). In Israel, academic discourse, Women’s Spirit, and parliamentary activists were involved in promoting bills addressing EA. While no legislation emerged, the accompanying campaign raised awareness of the issue. In addition, feminist NGOs in Israel initiated the 2016 Banks’ Availability Treaty (known locally as the Banks Pilot) which encouraged banks to support economically abused women in managing their debts and other financial issues. Finally, Women’s Spirit works with state welfare programs to enhance familiarity with the Banks Pilot among state SWOs and to promote their understanding of EA.

To develop an institutional logic echoing the values and proposed strategies embodied in feminist NGO campaigns, SWOs would need to find ways to create consistency between their actions and formal guidelines (Webb 2017). The existence of such shifts in institutional logic may reveal the influence of logic promulgated by feminist NGOs. But could employees introduce an alternative institutional logic? As Christy et al. (2022) explained, feminist campaigns historically have influenced SWOs and services providers to develop mechanisms to support for survivors of physical, emotional, and even sexual abuse. However, they also show that powerful barriers, including the perception that non-physical abuse is too vague and the lack of staff training on the topic, can limit recognition of EA. Here institutional logics can help determine the pace at which the feminist insistence that EA survivors deserve economic agency and are in need of immediate support is integrated into welfare organizations. International feminist NGOs, particularly the Economic Abuse International Network, as well as Women’s Spirit have been able to dispense valuable knowledge on diagnosing and treating EA.

Our study aims to (1) map the institutional logic social workers employed in SWOs, primarily as it reflects dominant ways of thinking about EA in welfare organizations, and (2) the oppositional, feminist, logic that recognizes the gendered nature of the approach to EA in neoliberal societies. Using a framework of multiple institutional logics, we ask how, regardless of the legislative failures, elements of feminist understanding and practices on EA permeated the practices of SWOs. Essentially, we focus on SWOs’ employees to map the multiplicity of institutional logics that cultivate responses to EA survivors.

**METHODOLOGY**

This qualitative study aimed to elicit the institutional logics across their four main dimensions (Toubiana and Zietsma, 2017), guiding the routine behavior of employees in three state SWOs of the type Cloutier and Langley (2013) identified as manifesting struggles between institutional logics. We worked with the four dimensions as sensitive membranes for enhanced awareness concerning a social problem. Specifically, *sources of authority* were used to identify the appropriate professional response; *sources of legitimacy* examined the type of justification for the action and for extending categories of entitlement; *occupational identity* allowed us to map indicators of loyalty to the organizational guidelines; and the *normative base* was assumed to reflect the association between occupational status and moral commitment.

Conducting face-to-face, 60-minute semi-structured interviews with 48 employees of state SWOs between 2019 and 2020, we compared the dominant and emerging institutional logics at each of three welfare organization. While many IPV survivors, among these organizations’ applicants, live in poverty and may already be getting some allowances, IPV is known to occur in diverse social strata. Consequently, some applicants have no experience receiving support from welfare organizations, particularly women in divorce proceedings (not necessarily living in poverty).

Interviewees were selected by their relevance to procedural treatment of those describing cases of EA, 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. Aged 25–55, they were diverse in terms of their seniority and position within the organizational hierarchy and included both the first professionals to meet women requiring assistance and those who work with women at later stages. The interviewees were all native Israelis, including Mizrahi and Ashkenazi Jewish women, and a minority of Arab women. They were employed by branches of the three organizations located in a Jewish town, a mixed Jewish-Arab town and an Arab town. Their education and training varied according to their professional roles, and their level of religiosity ranged 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 EA in particular. Those who demonstrated familiarity with EA were asked whether they were aware of the activities of feminist NGOs and the legislation efforts. In addition, the questions investigated each employee’s work approach, image of their clients, and typical decision-making processes. The analysis of the resulting transcripts utilized Lazar’s method (1995) of feminist critical discourse analysis, which exposes rhetoric of positioning, uncovering the premises whereby employees maneuver between available discourses. In this way it was possible to interpret the social construction of each employee’s 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 National Insurance Institute (NII), 21 social workers in the Social Services Division and Domestic Violence Prevention Centers (DVPCs), and six social workers, lawyers, and managers from Assistance Units. We chose these three types of SWOs because of their function as assistance providers to domestic violence survivors and the likelihood that EA survivors will be among their clients.

**The meaning of EA at the National Insurance Institute (NII)**

The NII is responsible for alleviating poverty by supplementing and guaranteeing income support and determining eligibility for welfare allowances (unemployment, disability, and healthcare). The NII is not legally responsible for preventing violence against women; nevertheless, our interviews indicated familiarity with physical abuse, emotional abuse, and sexual harassment, and interviewees mentioned the training they had received on these issues. They associated these forms of abuse with trauma and described making claims for prolonged income support on this ground.

When these NII clerks were asked about EA, a sharp transition was noted, from answers such as, “I have no idea what you’re talking about,” as well as clear-cut responses once the interviewer explained its association with domestic violence. Apparently, they relied upon an administrative source of authority, believing they were executing their organization’s policy as stipulated by law. Thus, they largely remained silent about signs of EA, as does the NII itself. One interviewee justified this omission by claiming her respect for women’s privacy:

There was one woman who came to ask for income support... she said that she used to work... 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.... I said to her, “You don’t have to tell me anything; you don’t need to share any of this with me.” (AT, claims clerk and receptionist).

In response to EA information, the interviewee shielded herself from discomfort by relying on organizational procedures which define this information as irrelevant to possible NII support. Her response constitutes almost the opposite of the principle of “voice” recommended by Sharp-Jeffs (2022) emphasizing how important generating a safe space is for reporting EA.

NII as a SWO limits employees’ actions: they cannot help with debts generated by abusive partners. Such debts are not part of the dialogue between the employee and the women seeking support, even if potentially significant. If a woman cannot access their bank account because it has been seized by writ of execution, the information is seen as relevant only for the question of how the allowance can be transferred. The routine NII practice is revealed in the interviewees’ description of their limited interest in EA stories. They derive s*ources of legitimacy* from their loyalty to the organization and the responsibility to ensure that eligibility is clearly validated. Finally, the *normative base* is revealed in the form of a mission to ensure the take-up of assistance benefits.

Alternative institutional logic

At the NII, a “domestic violence” diagnosis must be confirmed before help can be provided. Since a social worker familiar with the case must provide this, the interviewees repeatedly reported close collaboration with social workers:

One phone call is enough for me... [The social worker] generally confirms the woman has been in a violent marriage. She tells me she thinks the woman is still being threatened... She believes that the woman is afraid of her partner (AD, rehabilitation administrator).

Turning to the social worker to confirm “domestic violence” is an active action that some employees described as demanding an effort on their part. Because the neoliberal context is responsible for continuous understaffing, employees reported intensified workload levels. The briefest course of action is dismissal of the client and refusal of benefits. Thus, the procedure is organized so that a negative answer to a woman claiming support better fits employees’ time constraints. Underlining that “one phone call is enough” is also reflects the willingness to provide support. Once eligibility is established, the applicant is treated according to domestic violence legislation. From the employee’s perspective, ensuring eligibility involves a higher level of commitment and hard work:

For example, in a recent case where the woman had many assets, her claim was denied... because if you have a lot, you don’t really need help... 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. (YK, income support, department manager).

The social worker is legally authorized to address the context of the relationship and therefore can instruct the interviewee to reopen the claim. While the possibility of addressing EA exists within the NII, it depends on commitment and willingness to collaborate with the social worker. However, the interviewee was not able to certify that the woman needed support on her own; instead, she described her dependence on higher-level administrators for a decision. Nevertheless, a feminist logic is reflected in the willingness to shoulder additional work and implement the following procedure for those entitled to allowances:

He doesn’t want to [pay]. He limits her shopping, takes the entire allowance... 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, income support, department manager).

Splitting bank accounts repeatedly emerged as a “solution.” However, if information indicating EA was given more weight, the interviewee would need to consider the distinct possibility that, even if the survivors’ part of the allowance goes into a separate bank account, these funds would likely be appropriated in other ways by the abusive partner. Still, the separation of accounts is an intriguing response: we couldn’t find the source of this routinized practice and senior employees at the NII did not know how it was developed, giving rise to the possibility of permeating feminist logic.

Crucial as they are for some EA survivors, separating accounts, and the willingness to recognize exceptionality, are marginalized by the dominant bureaucratic logic at the NII. Nonetheless, by the mere seeking of solutions, however limited, they constitute evidence of an emerging institutional logic that corresponds with 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 EA is contingent upon external approval. This emerging alternative institutional logic can be compared with the dominant bureaucratic logic on four indicative dimensions:

Table 1: Comparing the dominant bureaucratic and alternative institutional logics

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Institutional logic | Source of authority | Occupational identity | A source of legitimacy | Normative base |
| Dominant | Administrative establishment of eligibility for support | Suspicion and lack of interest in EA stories | Loyalty to the organization and the responsibility to ensure that eligibility is clearly validated  | Ensuring legal rights take-up |
| Alternative | Consultation and bureaucratic possibilities | Trusting applicants’ stories of EA | Investing in recognizing exceptional cases  | Rehabilitating economic agency |

The emerging institutional logic, one of *coordinating feminism* revealed along these four dimensions*,* here engaged in a dispensing sources of knowledge, allows employees to respond to EA survivors by helping them fit into the organization’s existing definitions, particularly that of “domestic violence.” Importantly, the two elicited institutional logics—the dominant and the alternative—are not symmetrical in their power. In fact, characteristics of the work environment serve the dominant bureaucratic logic. For example, heavy workloads and a sense that needs cannot be met with existing resources means that employees are more likely to operate within the bureaucratic logic, avoiding tasks that add to workloads and risk 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. It’s one of the difficult departments at the NII… (YK, income support, department manager).

This interviewee makes an effort to establish eligibility, calls social workers, saying “you want to help everyone,” despite the fact that, with regard to allocating resources, she can do little beyond transferring responsibility to her superiors. Within this constraint, coordinating resources appears to be both necessary—and absent. The institutional logic that may have been introduced by feminist NGOs during training meetings and through stimulating public discourse on gender violence is somewhat reinforced by the collaborations between NII employees and social workers both within and outside the organization.

**The Welfare Services Division and DVPCs**

The Social Services Division applies Welfare Ministry policies and operates as part of municipal councils. The country’s 108 Domestic Violence Prevention Centers (DVPCs) were inspired by the 1991 Domestic Violence Prevention Act, and Israel’s Basic Law, Human Dignity and Liberty, establishing that all persons are entitled to protection of their life, body, and dignity. DVPCs’ objective is to diagnose, assess threat levels, allocate protective measures, and treat and rehabilitate families—survivors and perpetrators—caught in the cycle of abuse. In Social Services Divisions and DVPCs, the predominant institutional logic is therapeutic, representing both clinical assumptions and neoliberal suspicion. Even when social workers are aware that they hold the exclusive legal authority to identify a survivor as eligible for the Domestic Violence Prevention Act, they sometimes refrain from recognizing it as such:

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 clients in their experience, which is also subjective. We’re a place that offers treatment. We can only help her get stronger, get out of the cycle of violence, and accompany her afterwards…. And I truly believe that’s the way it should be (BA, Center director and a clinical social worker).

These words emphatically express the therapeutic approach, focusing primarily on the woman and her ability to extricate herself from the emotional place in which she finds herself. Furthermore, the interviewee regards violence as subjective in this context. While social workers may help by issuing documents that are crucial to securing rent assistance, they do not stand beside EA survivors. Instead, they make sure to avoid validating their reports of abuse, justifying this as “not taking sides.” The dominant clinical therapeutic logic sometimes becomes reactionary to the extent that social workers struggle to prove that it is a gender symmetrical matter:

She’s a senior at the bank, he’s in marketing. Each with a nice income… They were about to divorce but are trying to go back to living together now but he is still very much in the victim position. She buys cosmetics worth thousands of shekels, but when he wants a ticket for a football game, [she says] “We’ve got no money”... So, you can see EA by women (NA, center director).

Hodes and Mennicke’s (2019) argument on how social workers often disconnect the violent behavior from the controlling context can be applied to elicit the dominant institutional logic as in line with men’s organizations that promulgate an understanding of EA as part of a couples’ conflict, rather part of power relations based on coercive control. Within this dominant logic, social workers express their beliefs that therapy for women and teaching them how to behave is the main response.

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 abuse 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?” … the solution I can offer her is first to 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 woman who conveyed information about EA for several months. No material resources are described—apparently the organizational routine limits making material resources accessible. The long period of time is attributed to the woman’s inability to acknowledge EA or her desire to break free from it. Regarding protecting survivors from further abuse, the dominant therapeutic logic creates a hierarchal relationship between the social worker who “knows” and the EA survivor who “does not know,” sometimes even shifting the responsibility for coping with EA 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…. 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 identify the relationship as abusive. The solution involves imparting information to the survivor so she develops a heightened awareness of her situation. However, the social worker takes no action beyond 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 from her abusive situation. Loyalty to organizational practices validates professionalism consistent with the four institutional logic dimensions: the *Source of authority* is based on mediating the welfare policy along with a commitment to providing clinically correct treatment; *Occupational identity* is broad enough to allow for an emphasis on the therapeutic approach based on a clinical interaction validating employees’ “real” role as neutral therapists; the *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 those seeking help.

An Alternative Institutional Logic

Other social worker interviewees described how, alongside therapeutic treatment, resources can also be offered that are customarily made available to welfare support recipients facing financial distress. The focus on resources reflects an occupational identity offering more respect to the woman. Rather than focusing on the survivor’s informational deficiency, a societal responsibility is assumed. It is expressed when the social worker coordinates the required support by connecting applicants to NGOs that act in concrete ways, providing legal and financial counselling in the face of the unique needs associated with EA:

The financial aid we give is a joke... Based on your income – we’ll see if we can help you. 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] a nonprofit organization.... (MD, violence referent social worker).

This social worker presents her commitment to providing financial assistance as ludicrous given the small sums she can approve. Any material aid ultimately depends on coordinating her actions with those of NGOs. Essentially, the need to provide practical help is recognized but, if left within the social service, only very limited material resources can be offered. Thus, committed social workers must rely on NGOs:

We invest a lot in the connection with Women’s Spirit[which] really provides some response. We understand that no matter what kind of help there is when they receive a sum of money or help with rent, these women have a chance to go on to financial independence. This is the only way that, in the long run, you [can] get them out of the cycle of poverty and their husband’s control. (FC clinical social worker).

Women’s Spirit compensates for the lack of resource with two types of responses—monetary aid and help with rent, as mentioned—but clearly not therapy, These two material resource respond to women’s precise practical needs. Managing their financial crisis is a third response mediated by Women’s Spirit (not explicitly mentioned here):

It is something that we just introduced into the intake—to ask the women a specific question about having debts in banks, loans that they were made in their name. What we actually do ... [is] contact the banks to ... reach, at least in part, … an agreement on freezing the interest part. At least there won’t be foreclosures…. (BH Center director, north).

The emerging oppositional institutional logic can be compared to the dominant logic on the same four dimensions of institutional logic:

Table 2: Comparing the dominant therapeutic and alternative institutional logics

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Institutional logic | Source of authority | Occupational identity | Source of legitimacy | Normative base |
| Dominant | Providing clinical correcting treatment | Employees’ “real” role as neutral therapists | Professional knowledge, skills, and experience | Empower those seeking help |
| Alternative | Precise response | Attributing knowledge to other professionals | Criticizing lack of sufficient material resources  | Rehabilitating economic agency |

Mapping the coexistence of the dominant and alternative institutional logics, we found a scarcity of material resources, suggesting that the administrative procedure for locating material resources is very slow. Moreover, the Banks Pilot appeared to validate the strength of coordinating feminism as infiltrating an institutional logic encouraging social workers to coordinate support with NGOs outside their welfare organizations.

**The Assistance Units**

Assistance Units operate throughout the country alongside family and religious (Jewish and Muslim)courts, supporting couples in divorce proceedings, providing urgent interventions aimed at easing the tension between the parties, and helping couples reach an agreement. In high-risk situations, abused partners are referred immediately to DVPCs. Assistance Units are charged with providing “neutral” mediation to help couples manage disputes in divorce proceedings, neutrality being central to the mediation mechanism. As interviewees explain, neutrality not only ensures that both partners experience the process as balanced, but increases the likelihood of cooperation with the staff:

We fill out this form, we get the injured party to sign it—the party who suffered the abuse. And of course, we also have relevant information regarding the DVPCs in each city. 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 DVPCs… (GZ, social worker).

Here, the interviewee expresses the dominant mediating institutional logic that aims to preserve a “symmetrical” balance between the partners. Apparently, ensuring that both partners sign the DVPC referral form validates that the information has been relayed to the injured party while also transferring responsibility for dealing with the abuse to the DVPCs.

The social worker ensures 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. In the interviews conducted with Assistance Units social workers , a focus on the risk of physical abuse emerged, while EA was not perceived as being a 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:

You come across [EA] 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. We recommend legal representation, consulting someone about their rights. Because it’s a pattern of abuse, we always recommend contacting the DVPC…. 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. (GZ, social worker).

Through the mediating institutional logic, the interviewee experiences her conduct as moral upon becoming aware of the existence of abuse and realizing that she must turn to another institution for help by transferring the matter to the DVPCs for a therapeutic response. 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 that favors neither side, thus enabling them to make a comprehensive commitment to the process of inquiry and mediation. The *source of legitimacy* for the social workers is their commitment to relaying information about the formal possibility of treating abuse, if it is present. Informing and raising awareness also relate to the *normative basis* of compartmentalization, referral, and transferring responsibility for treating economic abuse to the DVPCs. These four aspects of the dominant mediating institutional logic allow employees to respond to EA survivors by informing them that it is not possible to address the abuse, while transferring the treatment to the DVPCs.

An Alternative Institutional Logic

Nevertheless, reflecting a sense of commitment, interviewees relate an alternative institutional logic where the supportive response is defined as instructing the economically abusive partner to change his ways. However, the alternative institutional logic that promotes the coordination of support by assuming state responsibility allows the social worker to recognize her own responsibility:

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... intimidation, ... threatening, ... definitely abuse... I inform… 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.” ... [W]hen the woman is legitimized because someone has said these things out loud and legitimized her feelings ... it puts her in a ... different place (GV, Assistance Unit Director).

Coordinating support by assuming state responsibility introduces a rhetoric not used in the other welfare organizations. Reprimanding the economically abusive partner takes the form of condemnation: “people act all innocent.” The interviewee considers EA a form of abuse and supports the woman, asking the partner for access information for the bank account. Coordinating support here goes beyond collaboration with other SWOs to insist on partners’ support. The emerging oppositional institutional logic can be compared to the dominant logic on the same four dimensions of institutional logic:

Table 3: Comparing the dominant mediating and alternative institutional logics

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Institutional logic | Source of authority | Occupational identity | Source of legitimacy | Normative base |
| Dominant | A Neutral Mediation of divorce = reducing couples’ tension | Insisting on EA treatment belonging elsewhere | Commitment to relaying information regarding the formal possibility of treating abuse  | Compartmentali-zation, referral, and transferring responsibility |
| Alternative | Mediating divorce by validating survivors’ experience | Applying authority in setting boundaries to abusive partners | Informing about EA and raising awareness about it | Effectively conducting mediation |

At the Assistance Units, interviewees do not mention feminist NGOs but are aware of the feminist commitment—and their responsibility—for ensuring that EA survivors understand their situations in terms of EA. Moreover, in some cases, they extend their responsibility by countering abusive partners and explaining women’s rights to access their own bank accounts.

In sum, these findings enable us to show how, for each of the SWOs, a multiplicity of institutional logics (Cloutier and Langley, 2013) can be found, composed of a dominant institutional logic, well established in the guidelines for the specific SWO, and an alternative logic representing feminist assumptions about EA and how its survivors should be supported. These three systematic comparisons conform with our analytical argument that a concurrent multiplicity of institutional logics may go unnoticed, may not be discussed, but nevertheless still opens up possibilities for action among staff who are impacted by the alternative logic.

**DISCUSSION**

Although the women’s movement in Israel has not succeeded in passing specific legislation responding to EA survivors, we investigated whether some elements of feminist orientation and practices have permeated into state practices helping EA survivors. Following hour-long interviews with 48 employees of three state welfare organizations, we mapped the institutional logics driving their work routines. In all three SWOs, the dominant institutional logics could clearly be characterized by a lack of recognition of the urgent needs of EA survivors. There, we conclude that the impact of feminist NGOs has been minor. At the same time, it appears that the actions of some employees drew on an alternative, feminist, institutional logic which assumed that EA survivors have precise material needs related to finances, banking, rent payment and debts (Adams et al., 2020). Returning to the theoretical framework underscoring the importance of recognizing the feminist NGOs’ impact, any assumption that neoliberalism eliminated their impact is not accurate.

These findings suggest that the process proposed by Kantola (2010) and Kantola and Squires (2012) whereby neoliberalism eliminated the impact of the women’s movement requires reevaluation. Without undermining the notion of *market feminism* and how it had replaced *state feminism*, implicit forms of feminist impact should still be investigated. In Israel, the 2016 Banks’ Availability Treaty manifests a form of collaborative governance that contrasts with the bureaucratic, therapeutic, and mediating dominant institutional logics.

Globably, feminist activists have manifested possibilities for a *coordinating* *feminism* in ways resembling collaborative governance (Barandiarán et al., 2023) in relying on diverse forms of working in collaboration. What we report here is the possibility that, absent resources (eliminated by neo-liberal managerialist social policy shaping IPV-related social services), committed social workers turned to feminist NGOs for responses potentially more helpful than those that the SWOs offer.

As our analysis suggests, increased awareness regarding economic abuse has created conditions for an alternative institutional logic to develop in SWOs, enabling staff to integrate new responses into their existing operational routines. Indeed, the Coordinated Community Model applied in the UK (Sharp-Jeffs, 2021) with its principles of voice, intersectionality, policy and governance orientation, specialist knowledge and services, as well as representation and training, is still far from the reality in Israel. Nevertheless, we identified a social process that begins with the persistence of feminist activism in its encounter with the scarcity of resources in SWOs that appears to channel committed social workers to seek collaboration with feminist NGOs, reinforcing the presence of their understanding and practices. Together, they constitute at least preliminary signs of the impact of feminist NGOs—particularly a *coordinating feminism* that more accurately describes their impact than does *market feminism* alone.

*Coordinating feminism* escapes denunciations commonly directed at liberal feminism and state feminism (Fraser et al., 2019). By insisting on a persistent call in the media and elsewhere, such *coordinating feminism* strengthens the likelihood that economically abused women will be found eligible for support, either by challenging the referral actions of the SWOs or by coordinating support made accessible by NGOs and various projects outside SWOs. The precise workplace interaction between employees holding divergent institutional logics should be mapped in future research to address the primary limitation of the current study’s focus on individual employees.

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