**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 scattered and basically depends on feminist NGOs who promote the understanding of the required set of material and administrative responses. During transitional times, where formal policy guidelines on the matter, do not exist, the heuristic device of institutional logics may assist expose barriers to suitable treatment and reveal emerging alternative institutional logic, developed by employees seeking to enhance the significance of their support. Up until recently, the power of institutional logics to expose such developments within welfare organizations, was not examined missing on the potential of institutional logics in indicating possible future influences for feminist NGOs. To shed light on operational possibilities during transitional times we asked which institutional logics are implicated in welfare organizations’ employees’ commitment to meet the needs of the economically abused? 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 the behavior of controlling one’s partner preventing victim-survivor from using and managing her own as well as the joint financial resources, including preventing her from pursuing education or employment (Adams et al. 2008). While awareness regarding the phenomenon has risen in Israel and around the world, economic abuse is not included in the Domestic Violence Prevention Act of 1991. Thus, Israel can be identified with 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, having not been utilized; moreover, the programs do not rescue the economically abused from financial dependence (Oxenberg, 2020). Third, state priorities effectively reproduce the hegemonic masculine norms, which includes “the good provider role” (Bernard, 1981) constituting men’s domestic authority as providers and economic leaders (Co-author et al., 2016). This complexity was recently accompanied by a feminist campaign about the nature of economic abuse and its long-term implications on women’s lives. Further, a recent partnership with banks, a feminist NGO and the welfare ministry promotes victims-survivors rehabilitation. A transitional condition began to characterize state’s welfare organizations’ activities: the described complexity has continued to convey gendered assumptions while welfare organizations’ employees became gradually aware of economic abuse as a phenomenon distinct from physical abuse. Thus, the transition permeated three welfare organizations: the National Insurance Institute (NII), social services, including their annexed violence prevention canters, and family court assistance units involved in divorce proceedings. The transition could potentially allow the encounters between these organizations’ employees and victims-survivors to yield committed responses including access to material and administrative resources aiming at rehabilitating the abused economic agency. At the same time such encounters could succumb to formal organizational guidelines which do not include economic abuse. Our objective here is to apply the heuristic device of institutional logics in order to expose any barriers for the former and ways to destabilize the latter, and the potential for feminist NGOs to weaken barriers and reinforce the transition so that their work is not left half done.

According to Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury (2012), institutional logic is the aggregate of sources from which social actors in organizations draw guidelines for action. It informs 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 so that the totality of principles, practices, and symbols become beneficial to the social actors, differentially shaping how conclusions, thinking processes, considerations, and deliberations unfold.

For individual employees to develop an institutional logic that echoes feminist NGOs’ campaigns, they must find ways in which their actions would still seem consistent with formal guidelines (Webb, 2017). Up until recently, the power of institutional logics to expose the critical contribution of feminist NGOs, was not examined leaving the development of informal support within formal organizations, under explored. To shed light on operational possibilities during transitional times we asked which institutional logics are implicated in welfare organizations’ employees’ commitment to meet the needs of the economically abused? Below, we introduce the notion of economic abuse, we introduce the institutional logics perspective as conducive for understanding barriers and potentials to the action of feminist NGOs, and finally we discuss the 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) constitutes men’s domestic authority as providers and economic leaders (Adams et al., 2008; Adams et al., 2020; Co-author, 2017). 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; economically blocking partners by thwarting training, employment and promotion opportunities (Stylianou et al., 2013).

The literature on the state’s response to economic abuse indicates that professionals employed in welfare organizations and other service providers are slow to develop their awareness to economic abuse (Christy et. al., 2022) with Sharp-Jeffs (2021) explaining that definitions 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). Furthermore, the law makes no reference to coerced debt (Adams et al., 2020) despite similarity to theft.

**INSTITUTIONAL LOGICS IN WELFARE ORGANIZATIONS**

Both practices and identities of organizational actors, are shaped by institutional logics. Thornton et al. (2012) claim that institutional logics operate as resources providing the context from which social actors in an organization draw the rational, justifications, and sources of authority for action. Nevertheless, it cannot be assumed that actions reflect a dogmatic institutional logic, and during transitional times, actions may even contribute to the emergence of a new institutional logic. Mapping institutional logics can accomplished by addressing four dimensions of institutional logic: sources of authority, occupational identity, sources of legitimacy, and the normative base (Toubiana & Zietsma 2017). Each component draws from the 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 they position themselves professionally in relation to clashes between occupational approaches and their professional status. Sources of legitimacy indicates the types of justification employees give for their actions, and finally, the normative base focuses on the questions of when an act is experienced as appropriate in relation to the individual’s professional status.

Relying on these components, institutional logics help identify organizational routines both as formally guiding employees’ language and action and as developing when employees turn an ideological campaign, external to the organization, into an emerging 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 had an important influence on welfare organizations and services providers in developing suitable support practices victims-survivors of physical abuse and even emotional and sexual abuse. However, the authors show that powerful barriers hold back a similar impact in the case of economic abuse. That is where the strength of the heuristic device of institutional logics can be demonstrated pinpointing barriers to the rise and strength of an institutional logic that would import the knowledge held by feminist NGOs into welfare organizations.

Feminist scholars have tended to criticize feminist NGOs with Kantola’s (2010) explicit suggestion that they comply with the institutional language and practices. Her critique was adopted and the phenomenon got to be called NGOization suggesting that feminist NGOs are now dependent on gaining government projects and therefore, can no longer maintain their radical spirit. However, in the area of economic abuse, feminist NGOs have had to lead an independent course of action as few government projects presented interest to enter partnerships on the topic. In this way, 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 operational possibilities during transitional times created by campaigns led by feminist NGOs, we asked which institutional logics are implicated in welfare organizations’ employees’ commitment to meet the needs of the economically abused?

**METHODOLOGY**

A qualitative study was conducted to elicit the institutional logics guiding employees’ routines operations in welfare organizations (Cloutier and langley, 2013). Because we wanted to compare the way the dominant institutional logic at each organization shaped the emerging institutional logic and how it was treated, we Toubiana and Zietsma (2017) in focusing on the four main dimensions of institutional logics. We used structured interviews to interview 48 employees in three welfare organizations, described below.

**The three welfare organizations:**

*The National Insurance Institute*

The National Insurance Institute (NII) determines eligibility for welfare allowances (unemployment, disability, and healthcare). It is responsible alleviating poverty by supplementing and guaranteeing income support. The demand for selectivity, which has grown since the Budget Arrangements Law of 2003, means that the NII conducts eligibility tests in a way that reflects a skeptical stance towards those seeking support, assuming that they are not eligible to receive the assistance they are asking for, while at the same time enhancing take-up rights rates.

*The Social Services Division and Violence Prevention Centers*

The social services division operates as part of city councils applying the Welfare Ministry policies. The violence prevention centers (108 throughout the country) were established to apply two laws: The 1991, Domestic Violence Prevention Act and the Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty, stipulating that “All persons are entitled to protection of their life, their body, and their dignity.” The centers are in charge of diagnosis, assessing danger level, allocating protection measures creation, and treatment and rehabilitation of families caught in the cycle of abuse, offering support to both victims and perpetrators.

**The Family courts Assistance Units**

In Israel, assistance units are currently operating throughout the country alongside family, rabbinical, and sharia family courts. Assistance units, support couples in divorce proceedings responding to the need in of urgent and immediate intervention involving special treatment that might ease the tension between the parties and help them reach an agreement. In high-risk situations, the speed of response is highly important and abused partners are referred to violence prevention centers.

**Participants**

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 mangers from the assistance units. The interviewees ranged from 25–55 years of age and were diverse in terms of their seniority and position within the organizational hierarchy. We examined the perspectives of the employees who first meet the women requiring assistance and the seniors approached in 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. Their level of religiosity was diverse, ranging from secular through traditional to religious, although most were secular, and none were from the ultra-Orthodox sector.

**Procedure**

We approached our interviewees after obtaining approval from the appropriate authorities and based on the recommendations of their supervisors or others we had already interviewed. The interviews were conducted prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis and were presented to the interviewees as being conducted as part of a study on their work with survivors of intimate partner abuse. We promised anonymity and didn’t use names or towns in the analysis presented below. The interviews dealt with mapping the information sources: the professional sources, those regarding gender violence in general, and those regarding economic abuse in particular. We investigated the working approach, the image of the customer, and the decision-making processes.

**Analysis**

The analysis was conducted based on Silverman’s proposed method of discourse analysis (Silverman 1993), which exposes the positioning of the speakers’ identity in order to uncover the premises through which the structuring of the employees’ responsibility and commitment to the organization, their role within it and to the women seeking help can be interpreted.

**THE ENCOUNTER WITH 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. This has found expression in minor legislative changes that have already been made in various countries (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, a failed attempt that had the effect of raised public awareness and understanding of economic abuse. Beyond public awareness, feminist NGOs initiated a support project which enlisted the banks: *the 2016 banks availability treaty* (known as the banks pilot) is a project that supports economically abused women in managing their debts and other financial issues. *The women’s spirit* works with centers for preventing domestic abuse to specifically enhance familiarity with the project and generally, promote the understanding of economic abuse. We introduce our findings for each of the welfare organizations.

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

The NII is not legally responsible for preventing violence against women, and therefore it is possible that its clerks are unfamiliar with the term “economic abuse.” They 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 cases of trauma who claimed 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 based on the category stipulated by the law. Without applying the category of “domestic violence,” these employees are unable to help. For the category to be applied, they depend on the approval of a social worker who is familiar with the case. So, they repeatedly report close collaboration with social workers:

One phone call is enough for me, without issuing a report or anything like that. She [the social worker familiar with the case] 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, and that’s, for example, something I wasn’t aware of, of course. (A. D., rehabilitation social worker)



From the perspective of employees at the NII, the category of “domestic violence” as defined under the law is the single criterion for eligibility. Once eligibility was established, the question is what would the abused be eligible of? A manager explains:

He doesn’t want to [pay]. He limits her shopping. He 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 invite him, say to him “From now on, starting next month, this is how it’s going to be: her part goes to her, your part goes to you.” That’s actually the solution. (H. R., social worker, income support department manager)

If information on economic abused would be given more weight, the interviewee would have had to consider the possibility that even if the victim-survivor’s part of the allowance goes into a separate bank account, these funds could be appropriated in other ways. In the context of the known restriction, it is difficult to imagine the partner allowing the woman to manage her own account. Nevertheless, we hear that “that’s actually the solution”. The other form of support found at the NII for the economically abused is even more strongly associated with the being found to suffer of physical abuse: income support. Thus, information about economic abuse has no place in the routine procedure. The employees justify limiting the focus to the woman’s relationship with the NII by invoking the value of respecting 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 so on, and then she said that she used to work for a short time because she had to, financially, but then she stopped because she couldn’t take his behavior, and I felt very uncomfortable when she opened up about the situation with me. The truth is I said to her, “You don’t have to tell me anything, you don’t need to share any of this with me.” It’s also not something that affected anything.

The employee’s response is focused on shielding herself from the discomfort of learning private information, which the organizational procedures define as irrelevant and which, from her perspective, cannot influence her action (“It’s also not something that affected anything”). She perceives herself as handling an administrative procedure to approve eligibility to income support. Once the economically abused is recognized as suffering “domestic violence”, she’s eligible to guaranteeing or supplementing her income in a way that establishes her status as a recipient of welfare support, which grants her additional discounts, such as on rent, electricity bills, municipal property taxes, and medication. It emerges then that eligibility is a serious matter over which NII employees can be very strict and stick to the formal procedure and they can shift their position towards making the 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 and closed the claim, because if you have a lot, you don’t really need help. The total allowance is 3,000 NIS. And then the social worker called me and told me that he pulled some maneuver and 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. (Y. K., income support department manager).

The interviewee describes how she closed a typical case of economic abuse not able to identify the case as in need of support. She describes her dependence on the social worker who has the information regarding economic abuse and hence the power to demand a change in the decision. The social worker is organizationally authorized to address the context of the relationship and therefore can encourage the speaker reopen the claim. The possibility of addressing economic abuse depends on cooperation with the social worker; however, the path to ensuring assistance is blocked: she cannot herself decide on support (“let’s see what we can do”) but rather has to contact the head office. The organizational procedures do not grant her the authority to consider information on economic abuse (“it’s not something I can decide to do on my own”). Here we have an occupational identity that is morally committed to providing help and is even willing to challenge the routine organizational activity and be the catalysator of her senior acting on behalf of the case. The significance of the information pertaining to violence and abuse is expanded, and, consequently, so is the employee’s treatment of the case, from being the administrative source of authority to focusing on pooling resources; and talking to the social worker to gain a better understanding of cases that require special treatment. Challenging the response that embodies formal guidelines, demand that employees focus solely on the relationship between those seeking support and the NII and on providing concrete solutions. This is illustrated by how debts incurred by abusive partners in the women’s name are addressed:

Q: And do you have any solutions for debts?

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

Thus, NII as a welfare organization limits the employee to examining the woman’s relationship with the NII but not with her family members, and therefore does not allow for information regarding economic abuse in the form of coerced debts (Adams et al., 2020) to be presented. The debts suffered by economic abuse survivors are not included in the practice of deducting a minimum, which refers to deducting debts to the NII from the allowance it provides. The practice is limited to cases where, according to its calculations, a woman receiving income support has received more than she is entitled to receive. Other debts are not part of the dialogue between the employee and the women seeking support, even if they might be significant, for example, if the woman cannot access her bank account because it has been seized by writ of execution. The routine practice once again limits the clerks’ ability to focus on the couple relationship as the relevant context. They must focus on the relationship the woman has with the NII while disconnecting her from the relationships in her environment. In fact, addressing information regarding economic abuse is experienced as being beyond the scope of the job, that is, beyond the boundaries of the organizational guidelines. In this context, it is possible to understand the lack of interest taken in the woman’s state of emergency.

The analysis we presented of interviews with employees of the NII allows us to identify two institutional logics. The first reflects the following components of a bureaucratic institutional logic: administrative source of authority, namely the absence of economic abuse legislation next to an administrative application of the social policy that is based on establishing eligibility for support; an occupational identity of clerks whose authority to act is limited by their dependency on social workers’ approval of domestic violence; and their seniors’ approval of any exceptional considerations of cases. The sources of legitimation emerged as loyalty to the organization and the responsibility to ensure that eligibility is clearly validated, and the normative base of the action in the form of the take-up of rights. Holding on to the bureaucratic institutional logic, the organization’s established definition of 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. As long as a case has not been classified under this category, for example, if there is no validating document from a social worker, the significance of information regarding economic abuse is diminished in a way that prevents national insurance clerks from making appropriate solutions accessible to women in need of support.

In contradistinction, clerks and managers who take it upon themselves to provide a devoted service seem to develop an institutional logic in which information on economic abuse receives weight. By their challenging acts that transcends the boundaries of the organizational guidelines while not crossing the lines, they could signify an institutional logic that distances away from the assumption that their responsibility over economic abuse is contingent upon an external approval. The emerging institutional logic seems to correspond with messages conveyed by feminist NGOs even if its sources are not mentioned. It is composed of (1) a source of authority, which is the commitment to extend the possibilities made available by the bureaucratic procedure so that they made efforts to separate accounts and sometimes to get involved in soothing the shift for the husband; (2) the clerks’ occupational identity, developed by listening to publicly available knowledge of economic abuse and hence trusting victims-survivors unfolding their situation. Their identity facilitated the search for breaking with organizational routines, positioning their challenging acts of actively ensuring eligibility, as if obeying the bureaucratic guidelines; (3) the source of legitimacy, arose when they sometimes mentioned the stories of economic abuse indicating their attention to women’s suffering; and, finally, (4) the normative base of being the clerk that operates on behalf of citizens as grounding their devotion to rights take-up. Such an institutional logic allows employees to respond to economic abuse survivors by helping them fit into the organization’s existing definitions, particularly that of “domestic violence.”

Importantly, the two elicited institutional logics are not symmetrical in their power positions but rather maintain a huge power gap. Employees operating from within the bureaucratic institutional logic, gendering economic abuse by leaving women to manage its costs on their own, would benefit of a manageable workload and a sense of compatibility between needs and resources. In contrast, a reactionary backlash, in the form of allocating no resources to the economically abused, is heavy 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 help and help, and you come home exhausted, it’s hard. Because the work is hard. It’s one of the difficult departments at the NII… (Y. K., income support department manager).

The speaker here is the one who calls social workers, who makes an effort to establish eligibility. At the same time, when it comes to allocating resources, other than transferring the responsibility onward to her senior, there is little she can do.

We come to realize two barriers to the assimilation of information conveyed by feminist NGOs at the NII. The first concerns the weight of information regarding economic abuse which tends to be minimized as long as the bureaucratic institutional logic is dominant. The second, is the gap between employees realizing the difficulties of economic abuse and trying to somewhat orient themselves towards their rehabilitation and the bureaucratic institutional logic that ignores it formally. These two barriers are reinforced by the neo-liberal policy that allocates only minimal resources for supporting victims-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 to the rights of victims-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 will enhance the recognition that is entailed by the alternative one.

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

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

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

The employee’s words emphatically express the therapeutic approach, which focuses primarily on the woman and her ability to extricate herself from the emotional place she is in. According to the speaker, information regarding violence is subjective. While social workers help by writing letters to secure rent assistance, they do not stand beside the women; they make sure to avoid validating their reports of abuse, justifying this by “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 ability as family social workers to get to know the families’ needs and refer them to appropriate projects in the community, including women’s empowerment groups, employment groups, and possibilities of pursuing education, 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 and all that, then maybe, 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 (D. B., family social worker).

The interviewee describes a case of a woman who conveys informational 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 take action based on acknowledgment of the economic abuse or identifying 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 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, these kinds of situations. 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. (M. S., family social worker)

Skills, knowledge, and experience emerge as the basis for legitimizing the response, with professionalism referring to emphasizing the nature of the relationship as abusive. The solution presented essentially involves explaining and developing awareness. However, no action is presented regarding the specific case beyond the social worker’s role of introducing the language of abuse. In the social services, a “good” social worker is required to use the knowledge hierarchy in a way that does not necessarily extricate a woman in need from her abusive situation.

Other social workers described how, alongside treatment and awareness, resources are also 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 de-gendering 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 unique needs it creates 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 quotes, based on your income – we’ll see if we can help you. If there’s an after-school activity for your child, show us a quote. Some things we help with indirectly, clothing is something more direct. You asked me how we help when there’s economic abuse?

Q: Is there anything you do?

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

The social worker presents her commitment to providing financial assistance as rendered ridiculous in light of the small sums she can approve, and any financial aid being given, ultimately depends on civil society organizations such as an NGO called 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:

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 can even be frozen for a certain period, until she gets back on her feet. There are all kinds of steps that can be taken.

Q: Is this personalized treatment provided by the bank?

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

The social worker ascribes extra-organizational meaning to the information on economic abuse and creates a continuum between the therapeutic focus and providing relevant aid, such as legal counselling or help with dealing with the bank. What worth attention in the banks pilot described here is that an alternative professional knowledge develops: one which recognizes that perhaps a social worker cannot help with economic abuse as much a finance professional. Rather than insisting on the value of therapy, the responsibility is transferred onward, to those who have the relevant understanding of rehabilitating economic agency.

While “therapy” is the dominant organizational practice, whether economic abuse 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. The heavy workload at the citizen counselling service for example, means that many remain with no solutions. Similarly, the treatment of seized bank accounts or debts is extra-organizational. It is important to note that these initiatives are not universal and the solutions they offer are not accessible to all the social services divisions, not even to all the violence prevention centers. For example, a lawyer working on behalf of a nonprofit organization was available at a certain center until the partnership with the nonprofit ended, with no replacement. Thus, locating relevant initiatives becomes a challenging act.

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 the organizational practices validates professionalism in line with four components of the therapeutic institutional logic: (1) a source of authority based on mediating the welfare policy as well as a commitment to providing long-term treatment; (2) an occupational identity that is broad enough to allow for a combination between a therapeutic approach while concurrently seeking more suitable resources; (3) a source of legitimacy for the social workers’ action, which stems from the professional knowledge, skills, and experience they bring to their encounters with women in need of help; and (4) a normative base, derived from the belief that the task is primarily empowerment. In light of these four aspects of the therapeutic institutional logic, the possible response involves maintaining a commitment to caution, underlining that, basically, stories of economic abuse, are subjective. Given that the commitment to caution stems from the perception that the appropriate response should be therapeutic rather than legal, the significance of information regarding economic abuse is diminished in a way that highlights the lack of understanding regarding the woman’s state of emergency. This causes the provision of long-term therapeutic treatment to remain a dominant commitment that can only be challenged in extra-organizational ways.



Next to the therapeutic institutional logic, assuming a gendering stance which transfer responsibility to women themselves and their ability to develop awareness, several voices of social workers seemed to assume responsibility echoing knowledge conveyed by feminist NGOs, which can be seen as their effort to turn an ideological stance into an institutional logic: (1) a source of authority based on observing women’s needs more precisely; (2) an occupational identity that takes pride in recognizing others’ professionals’ capacity to help; (3) a source of legitimacy for the social workers’ action, which stems from criticizing the lack of resources (as was highlighted by the social worker who ridiculed the available material assistance); and (4) a normative base, derived from the belief that the task is primarily rehabilitating economic agency. Mapping the co-existence of the two institutional logics and the tension between them, we are able to underscore the reactionary role of lack of material resources available of support. Even when social workers attempt to locate a source of material resources, the approval 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**

Mediation mechanisms are offered to couples through a mediation terminology that adopt a “neutral” approach, introduced as an effective means of dealing with disputes between parties in divorce proceedings. Part of the mediation mechanism, according to these employees, emerges as being anchored in this “neutral” approach, and they explain that this is in order for both partners to experience the process as balanced and in order for them to be interested in cooperating with the staff. This is illustrated in the words of a social worker in an assistance unit:

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

The speaker explains that the assistance units respond by using a form to refer the woman to a violence prevention center. This expresses the mediating institutional logic aiming to preserve the “symmetric” situation between the partners without expanding upon the significance of information regarding economic abuse during the sessions. Apparently, the signature validates that the information has been relayed. With it, the referral, along with the responsibility for dealing with the abuse is transferred to the violence prevention centers. The social worker makes sure to maintain neutrality as she speaks, implying that the man may be the victim suffering the abuse. Interestingly, the employee actions remain unaffected by the type of abuse as guided mediating institutional logic, which does not allow her to expand upon the significance of information regarding economic abuse nor the significance of the measures that can be taken in light of it. Thus, this institutional logic’s source of legitimacy is the responsibility of conducting the mediation process; therefore, 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 responding by informing and raising awareness, the social worker is being responsible and following the organization’s guidelines. All the interviews we conducted in the assistance units indicate that when social workers address risk, they focus on physical abuse, while victims of economic abuse are not perceived as being at risk. The mediating institutional logic directs employees to use referrals as an expression of their commitment to inform and raise awareness and to recommend seeking legal counselling, as the following quote demonstrates:

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

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

A: It’s the same treatment, more or less. We recommend legal representation, consulting someone about their rights. Because it’s a pattern of abuse, we always recommend contacting the violence prevention centers… If she’s not being treated, we’ll see to it that that connection is made, whether it’s economic abuse or any other type of abuse. To me it makes no difference. (G. Z., social worker)

The mediating institutional logic allows the speaker to experience her conduct as moral when she becomes aware of the existence of abuse and realizes that she must turn to another institution for help, that is, transfer the matter to the violence prevention centers that offer a therapeutic solution. The 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 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.

A similar approach that makes no distinction between various types of abuse is echoed in the quote below. However, deviation from the mediating institutional logic tells 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 de-gendering institutional logic that allows the social worker to recognize her own responsibility basically hides behind transferring information and informing.

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

The de-gendering assumption, that of state responsibility, goes a long way in 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 speaker considers economic abuse to be a form of abuse and stands beside the woman, asking the partner to transfer the information granting access to the bank account.

Relying on the alternative institutional logic that we mapped in the assistance unit, which definitely echoes feminist messages, feminist NGOs might be interested in promoting a requirement that lawyers at the assistance unit, would issue a document indicating the economic abused which they observed so that, courts can take the information on economic abuse into account, so that it does not disappear. Calling for this type of action has the chances of having a great impact on employees who attempt to translate their feminist awareness into an institutional logic: a document of the described type can be issued as part of the case evaluation even without a shift in formal guidelines. In other words, a document issued does not contradict continuing to transfer responsibility onward, legitimized as a professional matter – as if economic abuse is a clinical psychotherapy matter.

**RESPONDING TO SURVIVORS OF ECONOMIC ABUSE**

Attempts at legislating the 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 could feminist NGOs who attempted at legislation can do on behalf of the economically abused under the transitional circumstances that were generated by the legislating campaign. The increased awareness regarding economic abuse has created conditions for alternative institutional logics to develop in welfare organization, echoing feminist NGOs’ knowledge on economic abuse, importing it into operational routines. Further, the persistent voice of feminist NGOs in the media strengthened the possibility that economically abused women would be found eligible for support by challenging the referral actions of the welfare organizations. At the same time, the possibility of loyalty to routine acts that do not acknowledge economic abuse as a state of emergency and therefore as being entitled to solutions that would enable their economic rehabilitation, has continued to gain strength.

The institutional logics perspective allows us to deepen our understanding regarding the development of these two options. A primary limitation of the current study is that it did not investigate the employees’ occupational identity as shaping their influence in the organization as 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 rising alternative institutional logic that challenge organizational routines. Here we have employed the institutional logics approach to identify barriers to the impact of feminist NGOs on welfare organizations’ employees. We managed to identify specific barriers to each of the organizations and more important, elicit possible next steps that are characterized by staying consistent with the dominant institutional logic in each of the welfare organizations. Our approach questions earlier doubts over feminist NGOs and NGOization (Kantola, 2010; Krizsan and Roggeband, 2021). We reject the somewhat dichotomous approach of feminist NGOs as being either radical and truly feminist or weak collaborators losing their feminist nature. We propose to replace it with a more dynamic temporal approach which recognizes both the barriers to their impact given the neo-liberal refusal to extend resources for women in need and the importance of their continuous projects. Their work mustn’t be left half done and the next steps we pinpointed, surely, require feminist solidarity and 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 give 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, their 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 itself 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 while 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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