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

**An Institutional Logics Analysis**

**Abstract**

Economic abuse (EA), referring to intimate partners’ efforts to control women’s economic resources, still suffers from ambivalent legal recognition: even in countries with legal recognition, state allocation of resources for support remains meagre. Social workers, who work in welfare organizations, develop their professional response to EA along two distinct value sets. The dominant institutional logic in their respective organizations, and, a feminist institutional logic encountered in their collaborations with feminist NGOs. Consequently, a field is created for studying a path of feminist impact that is significant in enabling committed responses while no institutional change is achieved. In order to underscore the indirect covert feminist impact, we raise the question of how social workers see the benefit of following the feminist institutional logic. The article reports an investigation of institutional logic within welfare organizations. Conducting 48 interviews with employees of three Israeli state welfare organizations, we shed light on the work of feminist NGOs in introducing a feminist logic.

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

**INTRODUCTION**

Over the past decade, several bills have been proposed in Israel to name and acknowledge economic abuse (EA), a distinct form of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). EA deprives women of their financial agency (Sharp-Jeffs, 2021) and is inflicted with or without physical abuse, often post-separation (co-author1 et al., 2021). These bills were lobbied by the feminist NGO *Women’s Spirit*. Responding to these efforts, since 2016, the Ministry of Justice in conjunction with the Ministry of Social Equality proposed to legally name EA and include it in Israel’s major legislation concerning domestic violence and to amend the 1991 Prevention of Domestic Violence Law, to enable family courts to issue civil protection orders in cases of EA and to order banks to provide relevant information to spouses. However, the bills were rejected and the suggested add-on to the civil law raised considerable reservations in parliament, primarily among representatives collaborating with conservative family organizations. Opponents often spoke of the unclear and “amorphous” nature of EA threatening the privacy of family life. The legislative initiatives have not yet succeeded, and at the time of this study, no legislation specifically addressing the phenomenon had been enacted. However, the feminist NGO *Women’s Spirit,* persisted with its campaigns (Women’s Spirit, 2023) and diverse cooperation with feminists in the academia, other feminist organizations, and with the welfare ministry, promoting awareness for EA. Consequently, institutional multiplicity and ambivalence were generated allowing us to apply Cloutier and Langley’s (2013) multiple institutional logics approach, introduced below. It helped us investigate how a feminist institutional logic became part, even if marginalized, of state welfare organizations. Importantly, institutional change was not achieved. Nevertheless, the continuous persistent action of feminist NGOs cooperating with social workers employed by State agencies operating as State Welfare Organizations (hereafter SWOs) echoes a developing undercurrent of social policy named the Collaborative Governance approach, that corresponds with the study of such cooperation (Barandiarán, Jose Canel & Bouckaert, 2023). Collaborative Governance, examining formal and informal state-NGOs partnerships, that the components of such cooperation are primarily discursive and could advance an institutional logic. These components are data, shared concepts, tested causal assumptions, correct calculus of effects and costs, and evaluation. Our study presented hereafter does not report formal cooperation, but it suggests the possibility that when welfare organizations’ employees are asked about their work routines, their answers will inductively reflect such cooperation, indicating a minor feminist impact that deserves attention.

Applying collaborative governance in a partially formal way, Israeli feminist NGOs managed to take part in social services charged with the responsibility to respond to either IPV complaints or needs generated by IPV. Regardless of the legislative failure regarding economic abuse, we investigate whether a shared concept of EA as men’s controlling effort and the resulting material emergency, reflecting a feminist logic, permeated state practices. In other words, we focus on state welfare organizations’ employees asking about their responses to EA survivors.

When economic abuse is recognized as domestic abuse (“violence in the family”), treatment is offered by the routines of welfare organizations. Below, we explain economic abuse 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, also described below. We then turn to describe the Israeli scene.

**FEMINIST NGOs**

The language of managerialism and evidence-based policy, argue Kantola and Squires (2010), introduced by the European Institute for gender equality, have impacted feminist NGOs, so profoundly, that they have lost their ability to act as state feminists, a notion used to describe feminists aiming at transforming policy. Instead, determined to maintain their significance, feminist NGOs had to enter contracts and become providers of short-term projects the dependence on which prevented any radical social change endeavours. Financial survival following the 2008 crisis of fundraising, meant that feminist NGOs must enter competitive bidding where for-profit organizations often have a financial advantage to the extent that long years of expertise even on issues of domestic violence, is not recognized. This reality, sometimes named NGOizaion (e.g. Corolczuk, 2016), was seen by Kantola and Squires (2012) as indicating the emergence of a financialization of feminist organizations that they call *market feminism.* The emphasis on the market introduces an institutional account of the transformations which the international women’s movement had to succumb to trimming its capability to struggle for social change.

With similar funding dynamics and non-feminist NGOs gaining government contracts for operating shelters for survivors of domestic violence, the Israeli scene of feminist NGOs could almost perfectly fit into Kantola and Squires’ (2012) diagnosis. However, since these authors presented their critique, the Collaborative Governance approach (Barandiarán et al., 2023) opened up new possibilities in the assessment of feminist NGOs. For instance, Sharp-Jeffs (2022) reports a UK collaboration (2015-2018) succeeding in establishing a broad agreement on the appropriate response to economic abuse: “securing their health, social and economic wellbeing for the short and long term” (p. 115). It seems that the notion of *market feminism* skips such a collaborative governance project and that a more delicate account is required to better understand how feminist NGOs promote *Coordinating Feminism*, one that operates within existing policy constraints by generating collaboration and alternatives.Unable to form policy or achieve the embracement of a feminist policy, *Coordinating Feminism* may well introduce a discourse, a logic, guidelines for the prioritization of alternative practices that, for instance, refute policies that are based on blaming and fixing women. The definition of coordinating feminism that we use here relies on Barandiarán et al.’s notion of collaborative governance indicating continuous, partially formal, cooperating between state agencies, NGOs, business entities (e.g. banks), police, healthcare agencies and so on, in promoting support for populations suffering gender intersectional vulnerability, whose urgent needs are left underfunded under neo-liberal managerialism. EA survivors constitute such a population. Contrasting state feminism, coordinating feminism extends involvement beyond the project of policy change to the practical provision of support; contrasting market feminism, coordinating feminism maintains its impact beyond contracts formally gained; Instead, we see the leading of persistent campaigns and emerging forms to support women independently of state funding. Absent specific legislation, and therefore absent contracts, allows coordinating feminism to operate in the area of EA developing diverse forms of support unavailable to SWO.

ECONOMIC ABUSE

Economic abuse in intimate partner relationships is a gendered form of abuse, corresponding with the “good provider role” (Bernard, 1981) that (still) reflects men’s domestic authority as providers and economic leaders (Adams et al. 2008; Adams et al. 2020). The three main manifestations of economic abuse are: economic supervision and restrictions of partners’ ability to freely use family resources; economic exploitation via coerced debts, damaging partners’ credit rating; and, economically blocking the possibility of a partner’s economic independence by thwarting training, employment and promotion opportunities (Stylianou et al. 2013). Feminist activists have tackled employment sabotage establishing organizational responses protecting survivors through employment laws from discrimination or unfair dismissal among other things (Wilcox et al., 2020).

The literature on governmental responses to economic abuse indicates that professionals employed in SWOs and other service providers have been slow to develop an awareness of economic abuse (Christy et. al. 2022). Sharp-Jeffs (2021) explained the slow pace by pointing to the blurred definition of economic abuse even in emerging legislative initiatives. Proposing improved responses, she details eleven principles of a model (Coordinated Community Resources) that have been applied in the UK: applying expert knowledge, an emphasis on the intersectionality of economic abuse experiences, provision of safe spaces to unsilenced survivors’ experiences, bringing partners in and sanctioning them, are a few examples. The integration of support and policy actions in these principles, suggests that the project demonstrated a type of *coordinating feminism* that may be applicable in the analysis of feminist action in the context of neo-liberalism. Namely, a type of action that encounters barriers to legislation and formal policy by insisting on developing an alternative discourse and alternative practices. If the logic introduced by *coordinating feminism* is to be traced so that we see the relevance of collaborative governance, we need to turn to the study of institutional logics.

**INSTITUTIONAL LOGICS IN WELFARE ORGANIZATIONS**

Feminist scholars have engaged in recent years with institutional change (Campbell, 2010), namely, with 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 concerned the odds that feminist political activism would gain the power to replace exclusionary gendered assumptions with inclusionary equitable frameworks liberating women of historical constraints. However, as many have observed, the replacement hasn’t occurred and instead collaboration and ambivalence emerged in institutional arenas (Halley et al., 2018). Clearly, political struggles both indicated the potential for change and practically, left gender and intersectional power structure in place (MackKay, 2014). The salience of the interplay between formal and informal forces in struggles to dominate institutional storylines, encouraged scholars to turn to the notion of institutional logic, as a source impacting values, sense-making and even action, without necessarily gaining dominance. As was explained by MacKay (2014) “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 mobilise. Whilst there will be a dominant logic in any given institutional context, it is important to recognise 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 accounting for 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 derive their understanding of 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, 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 the multiplicity of institutional logics that may occur following cooperation with other organizations, maintaining a political gaze into potentially incompatible conflicting values that are encountered in the context of such multiplicity. They developed an approach in which among the many forms of relationships between institutional logics, the multiplicity goes unnoticed but nevertheless, creates possibilities for marginalized action.



Mapping institutional logics in a way that encompasses Cloutier and Langley’s synthesis with 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 can help us 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 the question of when an act is experienced as appropriate in relation to the individual’s professional status. Evaluating employees through the prism of these components of institutional logic 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 economic abuse as intimate partner abuse (co-author3, 2017:355), and makes no reference to coerced debt, a major form of economic abuse similar to theft (Adams et al., 2020). Nevertheless, there are instances in which economic abuse is informally recognized as domestic abuse, allowing the legislation to be applied either in the form of income support or a partial rent subsidy.

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

If employees of state SWOs were to develop an institutional logic echoing the values and proposed strategies embodied in feminist NGOs’ campaigns, they would need to find ways in which their actions would still seem consistent with formal guidelines (Webb 2017). The existence of such shifts in institutional logic may reveal the influence of logic promulgated by feminist NGOs in SWOs. But could an alternative institutional logic be introduced by employees? As explained by Christy et al. (2022), feminist campaigns historically have influenced SWOs and services providers to develop support for survivors of physical, emotional, and even sexual abuse. However, these authors (ibid.) show that powerful barriers, including non-physical abuse perceived as too vague and absent staff training on the topic, can limit recognition in the case of economic abuse. Here institutional logics can help in pinpointing the pace in which the feminist insistence that EA survivors deserve economic agency and are in need of immediate support, may enter welfare organizations.

Indeed, international feminist NGOs, particularly the Economic Abuse International Network, as well as the Israeli organization, *Women’s Spirit*, have been able to distribute valuable knowledge on diagnosing and treating economic abuse. Our study aims at mapping institutional logic drawn upon by social workers both reflecting dominant ways of thinking on economic abuse in welfare organizations, and oppositional logic recognizing the gendered nature of the phenomenon. Through the framework of multiple institutional logics, we ask how regardless of the legislative failure concerning economic abuse, elements of feminist understanding and practices on EA permeated into the practices of the state. In other words, we focus on SWOs’ employees to map the multiplicity of institutional logic 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 behaviour 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. ‘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’ enabled 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 welfare organization. While many IPV survivors, among the applicants of these organizations, live in poverty and may already be getting some allowances, IPV is known to occur in diverse social locations which would mean that among the applicants some have no experience in being supported by welfare organizations. This is particularly true for assistance units’ applicants who are women in all divorce proceedings (not necessarily living in poverty).

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

Interview questions mapped the information sources of each interviewee, including professional sources, those regarding gender violence in general, and those regarding economic abuse in particular. Those who demonstrated familiarity with economic abuse were asked whether they were aware of the activities of Feminist NGOs and the legislation efforts. In addition, the questions investigated employee’s work approach, image of their clients, and decision-making processes. The analysis of the resulting transcripts utilized Lazar’s method of feminist critical discourse analysis (Lazar 1995), which exposes rhetoric of positioning, uncovering the premises through which employees’ maneuver between available discourses. In this way it was possible to interpret the social construction of the employees’ role within the organization, as well as their perceived responsibility and commitment to the women seeking help.

**Three State Welfare Organizations**

The interviewees included 21 clerks and managers at the 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 providers of assistance to survivors of domestic violence and the likelihood that EA survivors will approach these ones. The two additional possibilities were the police and legal aid. However, we selected those SWOs who are in charge of actually responding to urgent needs. Each is described below followed by its employees’ responses to EA.

**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 growing selective need-based policy has meant that the NII’s eligibility testing reflects a sceptical approach toward those seeking support, while at the same time enhancing take-up of social assistance benefits rates. 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 mentioned the training they had for these. They associated these forms of abuse with trauma and described claims for prolonged income support on this ground. Indeed, when these clerks were asked about EA, a sharp transition was noted, from answers such as, “I have no idea what you’re talking about” to clear-cut responses once the interviewer explained its association with domestic violence. Apparently, they relied upon an administrative source of authority: they believed they were executing their organization’s policy as stipulated by law. Thus, largely remained silenced about signs of EA resembling the silence that is maintained at the NII about the relationship context. One interviewee justified this omission by invoking her respect for women’s privacy:

There was one woman who came to ask for income support, and I told her to fill in the forms, and then she said that she used to work for a short time because she had to, financially, but she stopped because she couldn’t take his behavior, and I felt very uncomfortable when she opened up about the situation with me. The truth is I said to her, “You don’t have to tell me anything; you don’t need to share any of this with me.” It’s also not something that affected anything (AT, claims clerk and receptionist).

In response to EA information, the interviewee shielded herself from discomfort by relying on the organizational procedures which define this information as irrelevant to possible NII support. Almost opposite to the principle of ‘voice’ recommended by Sharp-Jeffs (2022) emphasizing how important generating a safe space is for reporting economic abuse, the employee perceives her role as limited to approving eligibility for income support.

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 women 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, it is necessary to get hold of a “domestic violence” diagnosis before help can be provided. Since a social worker who is familiar with the case must approve, the interviewees repeatedly reported close collaboration with social workers:

One phone call is enough for me... [The social worker] generally confirms the woman has been in a violent marriage. She tells me she thinks the woman is still being threatened, and that’s partly why the woman doesn’t claim alimony; she believes, that the woman is afraid of her partner (AD, rehabilitation administrator).



Turning to the social worker for approving ‘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 under-staffing, employees reported intensified workload levels. The briefest course of action is dismissal and refusal of benefits. Thus, the procedure is organized so that a negative answer to a woman claiming support fits better employees’ time constraints. Underlining that “one phone call is enough” is also a manifestation of 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. I denied it … because if you have a lot, you don’t really need help. The total allowance is NIS 3,000 [about $1000]. And then the social worker called me and told me that [her partner]…took over her bank account and now she has nothing. Right, we’ll contact the head office, let’s see what we can do. It’s not something I can decide to do on my own (YK, 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, it depends on commitment and willingness to collaborate with the social worker. The interviewee was not able to certify that the woman needed support and, instead, she described her dependence on higher-level administrators at the head office for a decision. Nevertheless, a feminist logic is reflected in the additional work shouldered and by the following procedure saved for those entitled to allowances:

He doesn’t want to [pay]. He limits her shopping, takes the entire allowance. True, it’s not a very big one, but it still helps them get by. When she can’t even get one shekel, I can say to her, “No problem, if he doesn’t give you money, we can split things up.” I can…say to him, “From now on, starting next month, this is how it’s going to be: her part goes to her, your part goes to you” (HR, income support, department manager).



Splitting bank accounts repeatedly emerged as a ‘solution’. However, if information indicating EA were given more weight, the interviewee would have had 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. At the same time the separation of accounts is an intriguing response: we couldn’t find the source of this routinized practice and seniors at the NII couldn’t indicate 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, they constitute evidence of an emerging institutional logic that corresponds with messages conveyed by feminist NGOs by the mere seeking of solutions, however, limited. Some of the interviewees clearly sought to transcend the boundaries of organizational guidelines while not crossing the lines, perhaps signifying an institutional logic that distances itself from the assumption that any NII responsibility for responding to economic abuse is contingent upon external approval. This emerging 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* sources of knowledge, revealed along these four dimensions 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. This environment means that operating beyond typical procedures adds to workloads and risks a reactionary backlash, in the form of allocating no resources to the economically abused. This is a heavy burden to carry:

The price is the workload. Listen, when you collapse with your tongue hanging out because of the workload and you want to help everyone and you come home exhausted, it’s hard. Because the work is hard. It’s one of the difficult departments at the NII…(YK, income support, department manager).

This interviewee is someone who makes an effort to establish eligibility, who calls social workers (“you want to help everyone”). She does this despite the fact that, when it comes to allocating resources, there is little she can do beyond transferring responsibility to her superiors. 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 more generally through the rising public discourse on gender violence, is somewhat reinforced by the collaborations between NII employees and social workers both in the organization and outside it.

**The Welfare Services Division and DVPCs**

The Social Services Division applies Welfare Ministry policies and operates as part of city councils. The country’s 108 DVPCs were inspired by the 1991 Domestic Violence Prevention Act, and the constitutional Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty, stipulating that all persons are entitled to protection of their life, their body, and their dignity. The centres’ formal 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 clinical assumption and neo-liberal 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, at times they refrain from recognizing it as such:

Even if we do issue some kind of confirmation, let’s say, for example, that she asked for assistance with rent… because of our experience we’re careful with the terminology we use. We always say, “the woman says,” “the woman would attest,” and we never treat it as objective reality. In providing treatment we’re not supposed to get to the truth, we’re supposed to be with the clients in their experience, which is also subjective. That’s our job, that’s why we’re not part of … legal or criminal proceedings. We’re a place that offers treatment. We can only help her get stronger, get out of the cycle of violence, and accompany her afterwards… but no… written confirmations. And I truly believe that’s the way it should be (BA, centre director and a clinical social worker).

The employee’s words emphatically express the therapeutic approach, which focuses primarily on the woman and her ability to extricate herself from the emotional place in which she finds herself. Furthermore, the interviewee regards violence in this context as subjective. While social workers may help by issuing documents (“confirmations”) 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 of 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, “we’ve got no money” and he doesn’t spend it. So, you can see EA by women (NA, center director).

The argument made by Hodes and Mennicke (2019) on how social workers often disconnect the violent behaviour from the controlling context, can be applied to elicit the dominant institutional logic as following in the steps of men’s organizations indicating an understanding of EA as a couples’ conflict rather than being part of a 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?” 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 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 case of a woman who conveyed information about EA for several months. No material resources are described – apparently the organizational routine limits the possibility of making material resources accessible. The long period of time is attributed to the woman’s inability to acknowledge EA or identify her desire to break free from it. With regards to 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” and at times even shifts the responsibility for coping with economic abuse to the survivor:

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

Skills, knowledge, and experience emerge as the basis for legitimizing the social worker’s response. Her professionalism leads her to emphasize the relationship as abusive. The solution presented essentially involves imparting information to the survivor so that she develops a heightened awareness of her situation. However, no action is taken beyond the social worker’s role of introducing the language of abuse. In these social services, a “good” social worker uses the knowledge hierarchy in a way that does not necessarily extricate a woman in need from her abusive situation. Loyalty to organizational practices validates professionalism in line with the four institutional logic dimensions: the *Source of authority* is based on mediating the welfare policy as well as a commitment to providing clinical correcting treatment; *Occupational identity* is broad enough to allow for an emphasis on the therapeutic approach based on a clinical interaction which validates the employees’ ‘real’ role as neutral therapists; the s*ource 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 who seek 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 recipients of welfare support in cases of financial distress. The focus on resources reflects an occupational identity that attributes more respect to the woman. Rather than focusing on the ignorant position of the survivor’s, a societal responsibility is assumed; it is expressed through coordinating the required support by connecting applicants to NGOs that act in concrete ways in the face of economic abuse and the resulting unique needs by providing legal and financial counselling:

The financial aid we give is a joke. We’re allowed to give [for] clothing, that’s about 300 NIS a year. It depends, if you have many kids, you get 600 NIS. Amazing... If you buy a cupboard, [you need to] bring in three [price] quotes. Based on your income – we’ll see if we can help you. If there’s an after-school activity for your child, show us a quote. Some things we help with indirectly, clothing is something more direct. You asked me how we help when there’s economic abuse? The only thing we used to offer was [referral to] a nonprofit organization... They came to give a lecture here once on managing financial issues; I connected them to two cases (MD, violence referent social worker).

This social worker presents her commitment to providing financial assistance as rendered ridiculous in light of the small sums she can approve. Any material aid ultimately depends on coordinating her actions with that of NGOs. Essentially, the need for providing practical help is recognized but if it is left within the social service only very limited material resources can be offered. Thus, committed social workers must rely on NGOs. In the following quote they describe how they rely on the feminist NGO, *Women’s Spirit*:



We invest a lot in the connection with *Women’s Spirit*, *Women’s Spirit* 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 will be able to get them out of the cycle of poverty and the control of the husband, that's why this connection is very important to us (F.C. clinical social worker, north).

It seems that a contrasting act is produced in the quote: *Women’s Spirit* provides response contrasting what was described above as the lack of resources. Two typesof responses are mentioned and therapy is clearly not part of them: they are monetary aid and help with rent – two material resources, that respond to women’s precise needs. Managing their financial crisis is a third one mediated by *Women’s Spirit* even if here, the NGO’s mediation work is not mentioned:

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 to take in their name. What we actually do - if there is someone who is really in such a situation… we will contact the banks to see how it is possible to reach at least its part, to reach an agreement on freezing the interest part. At least there won't be foreclosures… her debt can be spread over many years. Whether it is possible for her to get a loan to cover it, I don't know, it's really a procedure with the bank. The whole issue of the referral to the bank, which we will begin to do in such cases (B.H. 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 Theraputic and alternative institutional logics

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Institutional logic | Source of authority | Occupational identity | A source of legitimacy | Normative base |
| Dominant | providing clinical correcting treatment | employees’ ‘real’ role as neutral therapists | professional knowledge, skills, and experience | empower those who seek help |
| Alternative | Precise response | Attributing knowledge to other professionals | Criticising 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 implying that even when social workers attempt to locate a source of material resources, the administrative procedure is very slow. Moreover, the Banks’ Availability Treaty appeared to validate the strength of coordinating feminism as infiltrating an institutional logic encouraging social workers to coordinate support outside their welfare organizations.



**The Assistance Units**

Assistance Units operate throughout the country alongside family, rabbinical, and Sharia family courts, supporting couples in divorce proceedings, providing urgent interventions aimed at easing the tension between the parties, and helping couples reach 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. Part of the mediation mechanism, according to interviewees, is the fact that it is anchored in this ‘neutral’ approach. As they explain it, such an approach is to ensure not only that both partners experience the process as balanced, but that couples are more likely to cooperate 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 have telephone numbers [and] give her this number. We provide the information to both the offending party and the injured party. We refer both the offending party and the injured party to the DVPCs… If we think there’s a problem, that the person is at some kind of risk, that they’re experiencing abuse and aren’t fully acknowledging it, we make them aware of how we see things (GZ, social worker).

By explaining that the assistance units use a form to refer a woman to a DVPC, the interviewee expresses the dominant mediating institutional logic that aims to preserve a ‘symmetrical’ balance between the partners. Apparently, ensuring that both partners signed the form validates the fact that information has been relayed to the injured party and, with the referral, so too is responsibility for dealing with the abuse transferred to the 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 in the Assistance Units, a focus on the risk of physical abuse emerged, with economic abuse 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, as the following quote demonstrates:

You come across [economic abuse] and you hear about it also unrelated to divorce proceedings – a history going back years of not being allowed to use credit cards or being limited in terms of going out to work or needing to report every expense, or being given an amount of money that’s supposed to be enough. I mean, that too, that’s a type of control. [In response to this information,] it’s the same treatment, more or less. We recommend legal representation, consulting someone about their rights. Because it’s a pattern of abuse, we always recommend contacting the 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. To me it makes no difference (GZ, social worker).

The mediating institutional logic allows the interviewee to experience her conduct as moral when she becomes aware of the existence of abuse and realizes that she must turn to another institution for help, that is, to transfer the matter to the DVPCs that offer 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, 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 DVPCs. These four aspects of the dominant mediating institutional logic allow employees to respond to economic abuse survivors by stating 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 told the story of 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. 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 offence – from my perspective as a professional, that’s abuse for all intents and purposes. I act the same way I would in any case of abuse, I inform… This could involve sitting in front of people [and saying to them], “This can’t be….” [When] people act all innocent…, I said, “Why don’t you say what the bank account number is, what’s the code? Let her know, teach her how to get into it and see it.” That’s a tiny little thing. It doesn’t really change the pattern, but when the woman is legitimized because someone has said these things out loud and legitimized her feelings and gives it a name, it puts her in a little bit of a different place (GV, Assistance Unit Director).

Coordinating support by assuming state responsibility, goes a long way towards introducing a rhetoric that wasn’t used in the other welfare organizations. Scolding the economically abusive partner takes the form of condemnation: “people act all innocent.” The interviewee considers economic abuse to be a form of abuse and stands beside the woman, asking the partner to transfer the information granting access to the bank account. 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 | A source of legitimacy | Normative base |
| Dominant | A Neutral Mediation of divorce = reducing couples’ tension | Insisting on the treatment of EA belonging elsewhere | commitment to relaying information regarding the formal possibility of treating abuse | compartmentalization, referral, and transferring the responsibility |
| Alternative | Mediating divorce by validating survivors’ experience | Applying authority in setting boundaries to abusive partners | Informing about EA and raising awareness for it | Effectively conducting mediation |

At the assistance units, interviewees do not speak of feminist NGOs but they are aware of the feminist commitment and their responsibility to ensure that EA survivors understand their situations in terms of EA. Moreover, in some cases, they extend their responsibility and shoulder the need to correct abusive partners explaining women’s rights to access their own bank accounts.

In sum, our findings enable us to show how for each of the SWOs, a multiplicity of institutional logics (Cloutier and Langley, 2013) can be found, a multiplicity composed of a dominant institutional logic, well established in the guidelines for the specific SWO, and an alternative one that represents feminist assumptions about EA and how its survivors should be supported. By presenting three systematic comparisons, we are able to follow our analytical argument of a concurrent multiplicity of institutional logics that goes unnoticed, is not discussed, but still opens up possibilities for action for those who are impacted by the alternative logic. We discuss this finding below.

**Discussion: Responding to EA survivors**

Although the women’s movement has not succeeded in passing specific legislation addressing EA, we reported here an investigation of whether some elements of feminist orientation and practices have permeated into the practices of the state in helping EA survivors. Our investigation focused on employees of three SWOs mapping institutional logics feeding their work routines. Clearly, in all three SWOs, the dominant institutional logics were characterized by a lack of recognition of the urgent needs of EA survivors. We, therefore, conclude that the impact of feminist NGOs has been minor. At the same time, it appears that some employees of these SWOs drew their actions from an alternative institutional logic which is feminist in assuming that EA survivors have precise material needs related to finances, banking, rent payment and debts (Adams et al., 2020). Going back to the above theoretical framework underscoring the importance of recognizing the feminist NGOs’ impact it should be maintained that even if it would be easy to assume neo-liberal elimination of such impact, such an assumption is not accurate. The process proposed by Kantola (2010) and Kantola and Squires (2012) through which neo-liberalism 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 initiative of the 2016 Banks’ Availability Treaty (known locally as the Banks Pilot) enlisting the banks to support economically abused women in managing their debts and other financial issues, manifests a form of collaborative governance that contrasts the bureaucratic, therapeutic and mediating dominant institutional logics.

Around the world feminist activists have manifested possibilities for a *coordinating* *feminism* in ways close to collaborative governance (Barandiarán et al., 2023) that rely 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) force committed social workers to turn to feminist NGOs for responses that may seem more significant than what the SWOs have to 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 import 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, representation and training, is still far. Nevertheless, we were able to identify a social process that begins with the persistence of feminist activism in its encounter with the scarcity of resources in SWOs that channels committed social workers to seek collaboration with feminist NGOs reinforcing the presence of their understanding and practices. Together they form preliminary signs of the impact of feminist NGOs to the extent that we can argue that it indicates that a *coordinating feminism* is more accurate than focusing on market feminism alone.

*Coordinating feminism* escapes common denunciations of liberal feminism and state feminism (Fraser et al., 2019) by insisting on a persistent call in the media and otherwise that continues to strengthen 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 interaction between employees’ holding on to the divergent institutional logic would have to be mapped in future research since a primary limitation of the current study is that it did not focus on workplace interactions.

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