Gender employment contradictions in Israeli nonprofit organizations providing social care

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Abstract
Purpose – This article asks how gender, ethnicity and other identities intersect and shape the employment experiences of social workers. During recent decades, governments have contracted social care to for-profit and nonprofit organizations (NPOs) globally as a part of the adaption of the neoliberal approach. Most employees in these organizations are women. However, there is a lack of knowledge about women working in social service NPOs and their unique working environments.

Design/methodology/approach – This article explores the experiences of women employed as social workers in social care NPOs in Israel regarding intersectionality. 27 in-depth interviews were conducted with women social workers working in social service NPOs. Participants reflected diversity in ethnicity, religion and full-time and part-time jobs. Thematic analysis was used.

Findings – The findings shed light on: (1) the contradiction social workers experienced between the stated values of the social care NPO and those values' conduct, (2) intersectional discrimination among social workers from vulnerable populations and (3) the lack of gender-aware policies.

Social implications – The need to raise awareness of the social care sector and governments to those contradictions and to promote diversity through gender-aware policies and practices.

Originality/value – The article suggests a conceptualization describing gender employment contradictions in social care NPOs, discusses how the angle of intersectionality expands the understanding of the complexities and pressures exerted on social workers from minority groups and emphasizes the need for social care NPOs to acknowledge and deal with these contradictions.

Keywords Nonprofit organizations, Contracting out, Social work, Gender policies, Intersectionality, Ethics, Discrimination

Paper type Original article

Introduction
Although social workers take care of the most vulnerable parts of society via social services provision, they are prone to vulnerabilities, and their experience is characterized by precarious employment, low compensation and benefits and poor career development options (Rubery et al., 2015). Gender is a key category in analyzing history and society (Scott, 1988). Although the social care workforce is greatly feminized, gender aspects in the nonprofit sector have not been sufficiently researched: scholars such as Addicott (2017) and Kosny and McEachen (2010), contended that there is insufficient knowledge about women who have postsecondary education in the care and helping professions employed in social service

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nonprofit organizations (NPOs) and their unique environment. Limited research has analyzed the experiences or characteristics of these women regarding the gender policies of NPOs (Addicott, 2017). Durbin et al. (2017) argued that research on work and gender can and should analyze the intersection of identities to deep the understanding of the challenges that austerity poses on those groups that are not homogenous. This article asks how gender, ethnicity and other identities intersect and shape the employment experiences of social workers. The article sheds light on women with post-secondary education employed as social workers in social care NPOs. The article presents and discusses those women’s perceptions of employment contradictions.

Many factors can be examined to explain the pay gaps between genders, such as education, sociodemographic status and economic status. These factors account for about one-third of the gap, but between half and two-thirds of the difference remains unexplained and tends to be explained as gender discrimination (Berniell and Sánchez-Páramo, 2011). Rizavi and Sofer (2010) reported that women of all statuses invest more than 60% of their time in care work, regardless of education and economic status. Care work is paid or unpaid work that aims to help and care for others (England, 2005). Care and work at home are traditionally seen as women’s roles, whereas activities outside the home are still seen as men’s roles. Glenn (1992) included the entire work process around care as consisting of laundry and cooking, for example. She noted that throughout history, the separation between paid and unpaid work among women had involved class, race and ethnicity, with middle- and lower-class women working for upper-class families. These distinctions are also important when considering work outside the home, particularly in the nonprofit sector. According to Baines (2011), invisible work begins in the private sphere, at home and then drips and dribbles into women’s employment in NPOs.

This article addresses social workers’ experiences of working in contracted social care in the context of the conflict between the stated values of NPOs and their application, along with the question of diversity and gender policies in social care NPOs. The article explores how gender, ethnicity and other identities intersect and shape the employment experiences of social care workers. The theoretical framework first covers ethics and values in NPOs and professional expectations in social work; second, it reviews gender and employment in social care and last, it focuses on gender policies and intersectionality in social service NPOs.

Ethics and values and professional expectations in social work and in nonprofit organizations

Research on the moral goodness of the nonprofit sector is growing (Chapman et al., 2022; de Bruin et al., 2021; Kanter and Summers, 1994). Ethics and values are critical components of NPOs because they promote social change and equality and create value for the public and their members (Rothschild and Milofsky, 2006). However, in many NPOs, unethical behavior can be found (Beaton et al., 2021; de Bruin Cardoso et al., 2021; Greenlee et al., 2007; Holtfreter, 2008; Martin, 2014). The growing literature on unethical behavior in NPOs touches on sexual harassment (Beaton et al., 2021), fraud and corruption (Greenlee et al., 2007; Holtfreter, 2008) and labor exploitation (Chum et al., 2013; Martin, 2014). According to Burt (2014), when an organization is in the category of NPO, it is seen as a “good organization” thanks to this categorization. Handy and Russell (2018) contended that the consideration of NPOs as good generates an assumption about NPOs as ethical. de Bruin Cardoso et al. (2021) suggested that NPOs and their stakeholders might mistakenly glorify their NPOs because they are considered morally and ethically good. They suggest three justifications for unethical behavior: (1) moral justification (glorifying the mission), (2) moral superiority (knowing what a good mission is) and (3) moral naivety (considering the workforce to “naturally” practice ethical behavior). However, their explanation is theoretical only and lacks empirical grounding.
In social work, shared values by social workers are a core issue; the reason is that despite different cultures and contexts, universal values constitute the ethical code(s) in social work—such as dignity, service to humanity and social justice (Hugman, 2008). Boehm (2013) compared social workers’ and clients’ expectations of social work in the Israeli context and found differences in the way they both perceive the “ideal type” of a social worker; to our matter, social workers in Israel expected more incorporation of universal values (such as diversity, dignity and equality) in their work. However, the perceptions and expectations in Boehm’s (2013) study are focused on the social worker’s ideal role and not on the professional expectations of the organizations. Itzick and Kagan (2017) researched in the Israeli context factors involved in social workers’ intentions to leave the profession and found multiple factors involved, such as autonomy and role ambiguity. Livnat et al. (2023) also sheds light on perceptions and future aspirations for care work professionals NPOs, suggesting that instead of leaving the profession or the nonprofit sector, another solution for their alarming working conditions was being able to initiate their own clinics. The term “an ethically difficult situation” was coined by Banks and Williams (2005) to cover ethical dilemmas, issues and problems. McAuliffe and Sudbery (2005) researched ethical dilemmas experienced by social workers in Australia and noted that those dilemmas arose from conflicts between their responsibilities to the workplace, versus their responsibilities to their clients. Within the Greek context, Papadaki and Papadaki (2008), shed light on inadequately resourced services and organizational regulations that resulted in ethically difficult situations for social workers, situations which are related to the social workers’ “inability to meet clients’ needs” (Papadaki and Papadaki, 2008, p. 165). Following Papadaki and Papadaki (2008) and other research that looks at ethical contradictions and dilemmas of NPOs employees (De Bruin Cardoso et al., 2021) this article presents social service NPO gender employment contradictions, derived from the “mismatches” between social workers employees’ expectations of social service NPOs’ based on the NPOs’ declared values and their actual conduct.

**Gender, employment and social care**

During the last few decades, Israel’s social policy has changed, as in many Western countries across the globe. The change was seen in the adaptation of the neoliberal approach in the welfare state and, accordingly, a move toward the new public management approach and, more recently, the new public governance approach (Almog-Bar and Young, 2016). Management patterns from the business sector inspired those new paradigms. According to the new public governance paradigm, the nonprofit sector, the private sector and the public are jointly responsible for producing public services. One central principle of new public governance is the perception of the citizen as a central partner in policy-making processes; other principles include emphasizing trust as a central value and the use of innovative, contemporary technology (Osborne et al., 2013). Therefore, the roles played by NPOs range from service provision to providing conduits for civic participation (Osborne et al., 2013). According to Phillips and Smith (2011), new public management and new public governance encourage contracting out government services to NPOs.

The overrepresentation of women as NPO workers is a global phenomenon (Katz and Yogev-Keren, 2015; Lee, 2014; Mirvis and Hackett, 1983; Themudo, 2009). Despite the central role of women as workers, volunteers and service recipients in NPOs, the gender perspective of work in NPOs is mainly overlooked (Ishkanian and Lewis, 2007). Addicott (2017) concluded that there needs to be more knowledge about the status of women working in NPOs and their unique working environment. This article aims to address this gap.

The characteristics of women’s employment in NPOs, as presented in the literature, are that the work is invisible and taken for granted (Kosny and MacEachen, 2010); it is part-time, temporary and sometimes in shifts (Charlesworth et al., 2015); it requires a significant
investment of hours, much more than is defined in the official role definition, and uncompensated overtime (Almog-Bar and Livnat, 2019; Baines, 2004); and it is highly gendered (Charlesworth et al., 2015).

According to Ferrant et al. (2014), responsibility for care work goes hand in hand with job insecurity or part-time work. In countries where unpaid housework is done more by women than men, women have worked more part-time or vulnerable jobs. Unpaid care jobs require a significant investment of time and energy that restricts women’s access to the labor market, limiting them to low incomes and poor job insecurity (Ferrant et al., 2014). Women’s struggle to balance home care responsibilities and paid work can lead to “occupational downgrading,” a term coined by Hegewisch and Gornick (2013) to describe choosing a profession below their capabilities and accepting worse conditions accordingly.

Following the increase in privatization and contracting out of social services, the work environment in social care (in public and NPOs) has changed (Breitenbach et al., 2002). Vosko (2006) stresses that contracting social services degrades many women to abusive work, job insecurity outside the home and more work at home. The prevalent and growing privatization and contracting out of social care in Israel and elsewhere have raised concerns regarding the consequences for both clients and employees of the social service NPOs who provide social care services (Benjamin, 2015; Mandelkern and Sherman, 2015).

According to Walby (2015), neoliberal policies of privatization and austerity cuts have deepened inequality between genders and classes. Pearson and Sweetman (2011) and Leschke and Jepsen (2012) gave examples of how vulnerable groups bear the burden of privatization results: it appears that the most vulnerable groups involve the intersection of being women and belonging to groups suffering from inequality due to origin, nationality, citizenship and immigration status. Additionally, cuts in social services and reduced regulation of these services have violated gender equality and organizational diversity (Conley and Page, 2010, 2014).

Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) is a dimension that casts another layer of complexity over the social care sector and NPOs operating in it. According to the intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989), intersected identities (ethnicity, nationality, age, religion, class, sexual orientation and disability) tend to be muted and overlooked in the mainstream discourse. Weisinger et al. (2016) acknowledged the traditional diversity research discourse as highlighting social identity groups’ representation (such as race and ethnicity) and the developing importance of inclusion, but over time included gender and other characteristics, visible and invisible. In Israel, 68% of NPO employees are women (Katz and Yogev-Keren, 2015). The Israeli nonprofit workforce comprises various groups of women from different geographical backgrounds, cultural contexts, ethnic groups, religions and family compositions. As Weisinger et al. (2016) argued, intersectionality is a critical lens that researchers must methodologically apply to enrich the diversity discourse. Intersectionality in the social care workforce appears to be seldom explored. Some scholars wrote of meeting the intersectional needs of clients (Kapur et al., 2017). Nickels and Leach (2021) contended that a critical perspective grounded in the critical race theory, feminist theory and intersectionality is needed to understand NPOs.

The romantic, naïve approach highlights the nonprofit sector as inherently good (Nickels and Leach, 2021). Moreover, researchers have emphasized the NPOs’ role as an alternative activity sphere for women and minority groups’ employment and participation (Almog-Bar and Ajzenstadt, 2010). Fredman (2016) recognized intersectional discrimination as two or more identities that work and act on each other, generating a unique form of discrimination. While considering NPOs as inherently good and inclusive, we suggest using the prism of intersectionality to illuminate intersectional discrimination in the social care sectors.

Gender-aware or gender-sensitive policies incorporate gender issues into the organization’s work and are a part of gender mainstreaming (Rees, 2001). First, it is important to differentiate
between practices and policies. Whereas practices may be informal, policies are formal, designed and implemented. For example, flexible hours are standard practices in NPOs, yet formal work–life balance policies rarely exist there. Practitioners and scholars have identified the lack of written policies and procedures in NPOs (Barbeito, 2004; Kearns, 1994). Despite the increased pressure from funders on NPOs, in recent years to be more ethical and accountable, implementing ethical and accountability measures is slow (Rey-Garcia et al., 2017).

In conclusion, as Glenn (2000) pointed out, as long as care is undervalued and underpaid, it is likely to be performed by people without resources and of lower social and economic status (women, minorities and immigrants), and if care work is performed disproportionately by those groups, their work is even less valued. Research in the field of care work and gender has evolved from case studies in individual countries to a comparison between countries and, from there, to global comparisons (Sainsbury, 2013). Durbin et al. (2017) pointed to the lack of studies that analyze the intersection of identities in employment. This paper aims to fill this gap by exploring women social workers’ employment experiences in social service NPOs from an intersectional perspective, adding an angle of values and ethics in these organizations.

Method
This article explores the experiences of women who work as social workers in social care NPOs. For this purpose, the qualitative approach was employed (Chamberlian et al., 1997), designed to focus on, unfold and uncover the interviewees’ work experiences (Krumner-Nevo et al., 2014). The methodological starting point was feminism. The feminist methodology has shifted the research focus to gender and women – particularly women from different social locations and groups. This research was encouraged by the idea that the mundane can be a valuable information tool that liberates women from being classified as “others” and centralizes knowledge on the overlooked, muted experiences of women (Harding, 1987).

Research context
Women constitute most of the professional care workers in social services NPOs in Israel and 90% of Israel’s care professions; contracting out is the main form of privatization of social services in Israel (Mandelkern and Sherman, 2015), and 80% of public expenditures on social services in Israel go to contracted out services (Madhala-Brik and Gal, 2016). However, research on social service care professionals in contracted out social services is limited (Paz-Fuchs and Shlosberg, 2012; Skhosana, 2020).

This article is a product of a broad study researching women in the nonprofit sector, which focused on gender, care work and professionalization among women employed in Israeli NPOs. The study’s findings revealed a process of responsibilization and the blurred boundaries between the private and the public, home and work (Livnat et al., 2023); those women’s experiences of their work environment in an era of welfare state retrenchment and contracting out of social services, (Livnat et al., 2023) and the discontent regarding their work conditions (Livnat and Almog-Bar, 2023). This article focuses on women social workers, presenting the dilemmas and contradictions they experience in their employment in NPOs under the current Israeli welfare regime.

Sample and participant characteristics
27 women, all social workers in social care NPOs, were interviewed. A convenience sample was collected according to the following inclusion criteria: (1) women who have a postsecondary education, (2) are employed as social workers and (3) are employed in a social care NPOs in Israel that maintain contractual relations with the government and delivers
contracted-out social care services. The women interviewed ranged from 23 to 45 years old; 13 were mothers. They had 1–15 years of work experience in the profession. 18 worked part-time and nine worked full-time. They all had postsecondary education (17 had master’s degrees and ten had bachelor’s degrees). The social care NPOs were in one of four primary areas of social care in Israel (serving children, older adults, people with disabilities and women). The women came from diverse ethnic backgrounds, including Jewish women, ultra-orthodox Jewish women, Christian Palestinian women and Muslim Palestinian women. Table 1 describes the sample’s key characteristics.

Data collection
27 in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted between 2020 and 2021 through a convenience sample. All participants were recruited via snowball sampling and social media. To reach a diverse sample, opinion leaders in the religious groups previously

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Table 1. Description of the sample
Note(s): NIS = Israeli new shekel
Source(s): Authors’ own creation
mentioned were contacted and asked for help recruiting interviewees for the study. Before data collection, women interested in being interviewed received an explanation regarding the project. After receiving their consent, in written form and orally before each interview, the interview began. Except for a few in-person interviews, most interviews took place online, in a video format (Murthy, 2008), due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. A semi-structured interview protocol developed for this study was used. The in-depth interviews concentrated on three key topics: working in contracted-out social care organizations, work experience as a woman and work environment. The average interview was 75 min long. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed, and data were anonymized after transcription.

Data analysis
The data were analyzed via reflexive thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested a six-step model to uncover themes: (1) familiarization and immersion with the text, (2) coding, (3) generating preliminary themes, (4) revising themes, (5) naming and refining themes and (6) writing. MAXQDA analysis software was used. After reading, re-reading and immersing in the text, the text segments were coded. Coding cycles were split into three levels. Descriptive coding was used to identify broad interview topics in each interview transcript. In-vivo coding level used the direct excerpts of the interviewees as the code itself to depict a specific experience (Birks and Mills, 2015). A third coding level was an iterative one to refine the previous phases. This open-coding method relied on a reflexive approach to assure the trustworthiness of the process. The decoded data were reviewed in parallel to refining and naming themes. The last phase involved writing the final themes and findings.

Translating, reporting, ethics and trustworthiness
The study involved a translation phase. Firstly, the call for participation was composed in Hebrew and then translated into Arabic by a third party. Later, the call was published in those two languages. For reporting, the first author translated themes and quotations into English, with particular attention to details, professional jargon and the text’s melody. Pseudonyms are used throughout the article when those pseudonyms reflect Israel’s diverse backgrounds.

The trustworthiness of this qualitative research was ensured by the iterative process of analysis, triangulation and discussion of the materials in all stages of the study (interviewing, analyzing, quoting and writing) by the research team (Korstjens and Moser, 2018).

Institutional review board approval was obtained in July 2018 from the ethics committee at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Findings
The main findings indicate inconsistencies between the social care NPOs’ declared stated missions and values and their actual conduct:

1. The social workers found contradictions between social care NPOs’ core values and actual implementation.
2. Social workers from marginalized populations (such as Palestinian and ultra-Orthodox Jewish women) reported experiencing intersectional discrimination.
3. The social workers reported that their organizations do not have gender-aware or family-friendly policies.
Contradiction between stated values and implementation

The social workers interviewed uncovered a contradiction between the social care NPOs’ stated values and their implementation. Almost every interviewee described this contradiction, primarily from the perspective of gender and ethical conduct.

Our terms of employment were harmed, and then you say – a nonprofit that deals with workers’ rights, this is how it behaves? There was a huge dissonance; in this sense, the organization did not live up to the principles it aspired to promote.

These social workers perceived feminist social care NPOs as anti-feminist; women who worked in anti-violence NPOs reported violent and destructive behavior by those organizations, and an NPO that treated traumatized patients was viewed as causing trauma to the employees.

Miriam, a social worker who worked with domestic violence survivors in a social care NPO, identified a “chauvinistic manner” in a well-known feminist social care NPO. She was disappointed, even sometimes surprised:

Many social NPOs call themselves this and that, but in reality, they are not really like that. Even nonprofits that promote women’s rights operate in very chauvinistic ways. There are some organizations where you feel equal. Some don’t have an ego; some do have one. . . . There is a gap between the fact that a nonprofit is run and it contradicts what it claims to represent.

More examples touch on employment conditions – such as a social care NPO whose mission was protecting workers’ rights. However, it did not pay salaries to its employees on time and another social care NPO that worked against racism was engaging in racist behavior. Timna, a social worker for at-risk youth, recognized in her social care NPO what she called a pattern of aggressive behavior:

I’ll begin with the staff and say that there is something in places of social work that they often recreate the patterns of the girls and the vulnerability of the girls. In these NPOs, I meet many women who are violent themselves, aggressive themselves, and behaviorally and emotionally complex. Working there is not easy because you come to work; you come to deal with the patients and not with the team that also reproduces these patterns. So, for me, it is something that is not simple.

For Timna, the contradiction is embedded also in social work. Where violence should be treated and prevented, she faces violence daily – from the staff in the organization. She attributed this behavior to the profession, considering that the context was working in an NPO.

Tomer, a social worker in a rape crisis center, uses scathing words to describe the contradiction she experienced:

My professional experience with the organization was not positive – a place that unfortunately made me realize that exactly feminist organizations are bad for women . . . a cover for abusive and victim behaviors. It was very difficult.

• “Do you have an example?”

At one of the big fundraising events, the manager said thank you to everyone and introduced them by their first name, then said, these are my workers. I’m not “your” worker and it’s not your father’s place. The least was to introduce each one by full name. Like a small thing, but it’s big. Is this place yours? Am I “your worker”?! This body is funded half by the welfare ministry, and half by private donations. Why, are you the one who raised this money?! (Tomer, social worker)

Here again, the feminist approach was not implemented by the feminist organization. On the contrary, Tomer, the social worker, interpreted the behavior as aggressive and anti-feminist.

In summary, this theme encompasses the contradiction between the social care NPO’s mission – namely, its stated values – and the reality in these organizations based on the
experiences of women workers: unethical, aggressive, anti-feminist, intolerant, discriminating or excluding.

The common perception among the employees was that “it is like that in all nonprofits,” so what did not work out in one organization would not necessarily improve in another organization. The employee remains with the feeling that, in terms of the organizations’ policies regarding workers’ rights, there are no better alternatives in other NPOs.

**Intersectional discrimination**

Although women constitute a 51% majority in Israel, they are considered a disadvantaged group, and their status is low. Women from minority groups in Israeli society are especially vulnerable. These groups include Arab Palestinian citizens, women who immigrated from Ethiopia and the former USSR, ultra-Orthodox Jewish women and women with disabilities. According to an idea known as the “matrix of domination” (Collins, 1990), every affiliation to a minority group adds up and generates a unique experience.

Findings about intersectional discrimination in this study highlight two primary forms of discrimination: harassment and discrimination that causes alienation:

In a job interview, this workplace already told me, “We are not a religious place, do not bring pictures of Rabbis to the office.” All kinds of things like that. Moreover, the manager made a big deal when I prayed Birchat HaMazon (“Grace”). I told her, “Listen, this prayer takes three minutes. I did not stand here for a two-hour prayer.” She was so afraid I would try to convert other workers to being religious. She would talk badly many times about the ultra-Orthodox Jewish society. She and a large part of the team were very anti-ultra-Orthodox Jews. I felt alienated there. (Nechama, social worker)

Nechama, a social worker identified as an ultra-Orthodox Jewish woman, worked in an elderly care NPO. She described her experience as “alienating,” distancing her from colleagues and managers.

Women employees from minority groups described harassment as reoccurring events in their work in social care NPOs.

I was a mentors’ coordinator. So, the men mentors would hit on me sometimes. Moreover, you know, they are sometimes older than I am. “Don’t you realize I am religious?” [laughs] And it was like a difficult part. You cannot miss it. Moreover, it was difficult for me because I am so soft and gentle, and I do not know how to say, “Hey, calm down,” like, I do not know. So, I tried to show that it was not pleasant for me. (Shulamit, social worker for at-risk youth)

Another testimonial demonstrated the intersectionality of multidimensional identities:

I was harassed. We had intrigues inside the work. I think the very fact that I am Ethiopian anyway, I am weak anyway, and I am a social worker – it was not easy. And that is how I felt. Most of my instructors harassed me. (Ravit, social worker in contracted social care NPO)

Intersectional discrimination affected these women in their workplace through alienation and harassment. Women who did not belong to the hegemonic group of society and were not Jewish reported a sense of alienation based on disability, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation or religious and ethnic identity. They felt out of place, excluded and diminished in value.

Interviewee: When the supervisor told my manager about me, “This one, she is going to make demonstrations, fire her.” That is what she said, in other words.

Interviewer: That is horrible.

Interviewee: Does that surprise you? (Randa, social worker)

Randa, a Palestinian social worker working in contracted-out social care NPO, reported she was discriminated against because of her ethnicity and political views, which differed from
the management approach. The interview with Randa made it clear that many experiences are hidden from view and difficult to trace, track and monitor, although they exist. Randa mentioned the limited structure of opportunities for women with intersecting identities, which differs from those for women from hegemonic groups. As an example, she described the hidden discrimination of Palestinian women in the job market and the understanding that her name and ethnicity might determine if she will be invited for a job interview. Randa presented her mundane reality and uncovered the barriers she faced in the social care sector, which is believed to be a more “accepting” alternative for women than the business and public sectors.

To summarize this theme, intersectional discrimination in the workplace was identified as prevailing among the women interviewed, particularly women from minority groups.

Lack of gender-aware policies in social care NPOs

One question leading this research was to what extent the notion of gender is institutionalized in social care NPOs. All participants were asked whether their social care NPO had clear gender-aware policies, such as work–life balance policies and flexible jobs. The answer was negative among all the women interviewed.

No, in the last place where I worked, there was nothing clear about gender policy. Where I currently work, nothing is explicit nor covert [policy]. However, the outward image was – as if there is one. (Marwa, social worker working with marginalized populations)

A distinction must be made between organizational policies and practices. The practices adopted in these organizations generally took the approach of working part-time and the possibility of flexibility at work. However, these practices were not codified in written or clear policies.

Interviewer: Is there, in your organization, a policy in a gender context in the organization such as a policy regarding gender equality or a family-friendly policy? My question is if there is a policy, and if it is clear or implicit?

Interviewee: Policy on what? let’s try to think specifically for my organization.

Interviewer: I mean oral or written policy regarding gender equality. For example - breastfeeding times, or a declaration on gender equality?

Interviewee: No.

The women interviewed reported the lack of gender-aware policies in their social care NPOs. This finding about the absence of gender-aware policies is another manifestation of the contradiction between social care NPOs’ values of diversity and equity and their lack of implementation. In the case of social workers, women compose the majority of employees in those social care organizations. The lack of a declared gender policy made women working in these social care NPOs feel as if they were doing something wrong when they sought to exercise their rights or more easily integrate work with their personal responsibilities. Gender mainstreaming in the form of gender-sensitive budgets and policies was far from implementation, according to the women interviewed. Based on these findings, even when gender-aware practices (such as flexible work opportunities) existed in those organizations, clear and declared policies did not exist to protect women or at least were not brought to the employees’ attention.

To summarize, the inclusion of social workers in social care NPOs – in a way that helps them feel they belong and can express themselves freely, not get hurt or disappointed, and not be discriminated against – is currently far from realized in these organizations.
Discussion
We conceptualize the gender employment contradiction in social care NPOs: against the will (of both social care NPOs and their employees) to do “good”, comes the clash, as social workers experience this inherent contradiction of the social care NPOs’ rhetoric and declared mission and the NPOs’ actual conduct. Addicott (2017) contended that there is insufficient knowledge about the status of women working in NPOs and their unique working environment. This study contributes to filling this gap by illuminating the organizational and gender policy environment in social care NPOs.

The discontent lies in the emerging contradiction between the stated values of the social care NPOs and their implementation (Theme 1). Rothschild and Milofsky (2006) stated that ethics and values are central and critical to the nonprofit sector; they express their members’ perceptions of a better, caring and just world. This article contributes to current knowledge by uncovering how women employed by social care NPOs experience those values. In other words, the employment sphere of social care NPOs operates as the place where social care NPOs glorification seems to diminish or even fall apart. The findings reveal that women experience social care NPOs that demonstrate unethical behavior in those NPOs’ expertise areas. This phenomenon is a powerful human resource management and labor relations contradiction in social care NPOs.

Theme 2 addresses intersectional discrimination, as defined by Fredman (2016). This study found substantial intersectional discrimination among NPO employees, especially women who are part of minority groups. This could be seen as another form of value contradiction or clash, undermining diversity’s value in NPOs. Applying the intersectional perspective revealed the intersectional discrimination among minority groups. In this way, the study answers one of the research directions posed by Weisinger et al. (2016). The contribution of the intersectional perspective includes deepening the understanding of the link between intersectional identities and discrimination and how the employment experience is shaped among minority groups in NPOs that deliver social care.

Findings on the absence of gender-aware policies (Theme 3) in social care NPOs corroborate the lack of written policies and procedures in NPOs (Barbeito, 2004; Kearns, 1994). Whereas the central diversity discourse in organizations, according to Weisinger et al. (2016), revolves around representation and inclusion, current findings emphasize the need to include gender-aware policies too. These findings coincide with Rey-Garcia et al. (2017), who presented the slow-paced implementation of accountability measures in NPOs.

This study found differences between the stated values and their application in social care NPOs. The findings demonstrate that NPOs do not see women as equal and worthy of inclusive policies should also be considered when contracting out social care. Considering this rift, one should ask: What is the state’s responsibility in protecting employees and clients in contracted-out social care?

The social workers interviewed in our study uncovered contradictions in social care NPOs. This disparity is conceptualized as the NPOs’ gender employment contradiction in social care. According to the findings, employees identified misconduct in the core values of social care NPOs, a central contradiction for workers and the social care NPOs’ missions. Unethical behavior in organizations is a well-known phenomenon (Beaton et al., 2021; Chapman et al., 2022; Chum et al., 2013; Greenlee et al., 2007; Holtfreter, 2008; Martin, 2014). Burt (2014) notes that the glorification of NPOs may be misleading. Although the findings may not be surprising for scholars, they were indeed surprising for the employees interviewed, who were overwhelmed and even outraged by the events they described. Workers reported being upset, disappointed, and discontent with the social care NPO where they worked. de Bruin Cardoso et al. (2021) contended that such cases could be a matter of moral naivety. However, in this study, it seems that it is not necessarily naivety as much as hope and goodwill – the values that social care NPO workers are equipped with and rely on
are the same values that explain why they keep working in complex, nonrewarding and inadequate conditions (Almog-Bar and Livnat, 2019). It also might not be naivety as much as the lack of other employment possibilities. Compared to Papadaki and Papadaki (2008), when the ethical dilemmas revolved around inadequate resources, here, this situation of “mismatch” between values and their implementation may be understood in the gender aspect. Considering that the women interviewed are mostly part-time employees with less power in their organization, this article’s contribution to the literature is conceptualizing social care NPOs’ Achilles heel regarding gender and employment experiences: their core values could also serve as the site of unethical behavior. A better understanding of this phenomenon and awareness of a possible contradiction between values and their execution, may improve employee retention rates of social workers in NPOs.

Conclusion and implications
The employment sphere in contacted-out social care NPOs is an arena in which ideals are prone to be broken down at the same place they try to heal society. Although academic knowledge is explicit regarding the possibility of misconduct and unethical behavior in organizations (in various forms), the literature on social workers’ experiences of such behavior in social care NPO is limited.

Implications for practice are shedding light on these problems, raising the awareness of the social care sector – government, NPOs and social workers – to those contradictions, encouraging the elimination of any violence in social care NPO workplaces and promoting diversity and equity through implementing gender-aware policies and practices. Those are needed steps toward more equal, sensitive, diverse and inclusive employment in the care sector. Further research could initiate a comparison between contracted-out services delivered by businesses and NPOs and thus, controlling the organizations’ mission component. This research would be useful for different contexts, in welfare regimens where work – certainly for social work – was done in public sectors and contracted out to NPOs.

References


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Living in NPOs: Gender Employment Contradictions


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