

Presentation title:

No law no remedies? When street-level bureaucrats encounter economic abuse

Speaker: Dalit Yassour-Borochowitz (Emek Yezreel College, Israel)

Economic abuse is a form of intimate partner violence manifested in coercive control of one partner over another through economic means. Despite growing literature on economic abuse, its prevalence, manifestations and consequences, and the extent to which legislation and courts have responded or neglected to respond to it, little is known about what happens in action, when street-level bureaucrats encounter victims of economic abuse. My presentation offers a qualitative examination of the ways in which Israeli street-level bureaucrats understand and respond to economic abuse in their daily interactions with victims. The study is based on in-depth semi-structured interviews of 45 social workers and administrators in welfare and social services in Israel, where there is still no legislation regarding economic abuse. The study reveals that while naming and stating acts of economic abuse as domestic violence, state agencies fail to provide meaningful remedies, thus reinforcing economic abuse. In our study we found that the fact that there is still no specific legislation in Israel that is intended to the prevention of economic violence makes it difficult for the various service providers to assist women who are victims of economic abuse "only." We also found that in Israel 2021 there is still a lack of understanding and awareness of this type of violence by the public and even by social service providers. Theoretically, it provides a case study of how a formal legal void illuminates the everyday practices through which the state constructs and provides (or not) legal protection and remedies. Understanding the mechanisms by which street-level bureaucrats operate is essential to understanding how governance procedures are enacted, and how economic abuse is normalized in everyday practices by the state's representatives.