

Article

Who Provides Resilience to the Community Resilience Providers?

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Abstract: The article focuses on employees of nonprofit organizations (NPOs) as an essential component of community resilience. Forty women, professionals in the helping professions, were interviewed about their work experiences as employees in social service NPOs. The interviews were conducted from 2019 to 2020, mostly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to understand those employees' perceptions of work conditions, contracting-out of social services, professional community and relationships with co-workers, work-life balance, job satisfaction, and their future plans. The findings present loneliness at work and lacking of a sense of community and a strong sense of mission while facing a challenging environment and work conditions in NPOs. In the discussion, we offer a complementary understanding of solidarity and resilience in NPOs—and we elaborate on the lack of professional “communitiness” and its possible harmful effect on the resilience of wider communities in times of crisis—when resilience is mostly needed. The paper presents NPOs employees as critical actors in producing resilience, hence there exists a need to examine their work environment, job perceptions, and the latter's contribution to their own resilience.

Keywords: community resilience; community; women; nonprofit organizations



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1. Introduction

Resilience, often understood as individual resilience, is widely understood as the ability to recover and re-operate after harmful events [1–3]. Resilience is a positive coping process and strategy for adaptation against adverse events [4] and retaining the capacity amid intense change [5]. Smith [6] claims that the voluntary sector represents a tremendous reservoir of potential energy that can be mobilized under appropriate circumstances, such as disasters, for broad societal goals. This paper presents a study on the role of nonprofit organizations (NPOs) in resilience from the perspective of workers in the helping professions employed by NPOs. We differentiate between several levels of resilience within the context of the nonprofit sector: resilience at the individual level, resilience at the organizational level (the staff's community resilience), resilience at the professional community level (social care workers), and community resilience, which is the wider level that includes the service recipients. The main research questions are: what is the role of nonprofit organizations' professional employees as “resilience providers”, and how is it affected by social policies, work conditions, and organizational climate and culture? What does the sense, or degree, of belonging to a community (“Communitiness”)—in this case, a community of employees—have to do with resilience? In this paper, we look at the NPOs' employees during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is an ongoing crisis. We claim that NPOs' employees are a critical component in the community's ability to manage crisis and create resilience, and therefore, their wellbeing and welfare are crucial factors that need to be examined and understood in the scholarly discourse about community resilience.

NPOs have structural advantages that characterize them as flexible, autonomous, and characterized by a social mission that allows them to promote social values and the fact

that they encourage civic engagement [7–10]. These advantages help them to facilitate community resilience in times of crisis. However, as Kim et al. [11] stress, emergencies, such as natural disasters, can leave those actors (NPOs and their employees) as vulnerable as the populations they serve. According to Baum [12] and Lambert and Lawson [13], while NPOs support people in need, the nonprofits also face challenges that threaten community healing and resilience-building efforts, as the NPOs and their personnel are working in adverse conditions.

While the literature has addressed community resilience and organizational resilience in times of crisis, there is limited research on the connection between the two, specifically on the relationship between the resilience of NPO workers and the efforts to build community resilience and recovery.

In this article, we explore the ability of NPOs' employees to function under severe conditions during an ongoing emergency and how these working conditions are related to their work. We also ask if helping to create resilience from the employee's point of view is related to her sense of her community belonging to the community she serves and to the community of employees she is a part of—and what are the consequences of employees who do not see themselves as part of a community anymore, namely, lacking “communityness”. After locating the community, social capital, social support, and cohesion as critical aspects of community resilience, we ask what the role of NPOs' care professionals in building and enabling community resilience, inwards (as an occupational community) and outwards (the community in general), is.

The article aims to contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between individual resilience and community resilience and to add the NPOs' employees' wellbeing and welfare (namely, resilience) as a crucial component for the resilience of the community they serve.

Following the introduction, we present a review of the literature about NPOs' roles in building community resilience in the Neoliberal era and on employment in NPOs under contracting out during routine and emergencies, with an emphasis on the role of gender in these organizations. Later, we present the method of the study and its findings regarding two main themes: loneliness at work and lacking a sense of community and a strong sense of mission while challenging with the environment and work conditions in NPOs. We conclude with a discussion on the consequences and the implications of the findings for workers employed by NPOs, NPOs who work towards building community resilience, and for vulnerable communities.

1.1. NPOs' Roles in Building Community Resilience in the Neoliberal Era

Over the last four decades, many Western countries, including Israel, have adopted a neoliberal approach. This approach is characterized by reducing taxes and government expenditures, contracting out social services, deteriorating employee protections, and reducing capital market restraints. Illouz [14] contended that the neoliberal era deconstructs the power of the community while leaving the social context fragile and fragmented. While Illouz's work is primarily theoretical, this article demonstrates the “deconstructed community power” as an outcome deeply entangled with community resilience. Norris et al. [15] draws four capacities that shape community resilience: social capital, community competence, information and communication, and economic development. Inside the component of social capital, there are three elements: (a) social support, (b) social participation, and (c) community bonds. In Bourdieu's perspective, social capital is a network resource that can be accumulated to improve one's social position [16]. Putnam [17] had an outstanding contribution to conceptualizing the social element of “capital.” According to Putnam, groups and communities play a crucial role in social capital and serve as a meso-level component compared to Bourdieu's approach, which focuses on the micro level. Nonprofit associations, then, are the site where social capital is generated, and social capital is formed via engagement in voluntary associations [18]. NPOs' role in social capital is evident in research as mediation roles [19]. Social support and social cohesion are also essential

components of social capital provided by NPOs, from which community members can develop resilience [15,20,21].

During times of crisis and harmful events, NPOs may be a source of help to vulnerable populations [22,23]. Roberts et al. [24] highlight that the potential roles of NPOs in community resilience in disaster settings include: NPOs' support for impacted communities and helping those communities to respond more effectively; NPOs were also recognized for their community connections, their access to vulnerable communities, local knowledge, their motivated volunteer base, and the flexible solutions they offer [24]. However, compassion fatigue, shared trauma from the adverse event, and lack of organizational flexibility challenge NPOs' recovery potential [12,25,26]. According to Kim et al. [11], in their case study from Hurricane Harvey, natural disasters can threaten the recovery of NPOs, too, leaving them as vulnerable as the communities they serve.

Past research has shown NPOs' roles in creating social capital and community resilience [12,24–26]. However, while NPOs' roles have been addressed in the literature, fewer studies have explored the NPOs' employees' roles, perspectives, and their sense of community in the sense of how they build community resilience during an ongoing crisis. This paper connects 'individual' employee resilience to community resilience and presents the welfare of NPOs employees as a crucial factor in enabling community resilience. A recent study on managing a hurricane and COVID-19 as simultaneous threats demonstrates that NPOs' capacity can be damaged as personnel power decreases [27]. They present conditions nonprofits depend on to become more ready for crises: human and financial resources, embedded networks within the community for staying close to the community's needs, leadership and board involved in the vision and decision-making, and community participation in the nonprofit activity. When those conditions are not met, nonprofits' resilience becomes weaker.

NPOs have played essential roles in dealing with crises in Israel, too. Katz et al. [28] examined NPOs' activities in Israel during the Second Lebanon War in 2006. They suggest a great response from citizens and nonprofit organizations to the plight of the residents from the north of Israel while demonstrating flexibility and speed of response considering the (almost complete) absence of the government and local authorities in helping the citizens' plight from the north and to those who stayed. Among the activities of NPOs during the Lebanon war were food delivery, informal education activities, advocacy, and social services to vulnerable populations [28]. Other characteristics were those that reduced the nonprofit sector's effectiveness, limited financial capacity, and dependence on external funding; the government's failure to assist during the war is presented as related to the trends of the welfare state taking a more neoliberal direction.

As with many other countries, Israel was severely hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. An amount of 39% of human service nonprofits reported an increase in the demand for their services, as levels of stress and worrying about personal health (among 56% of the population) and financial status (46%) have increased dramatically [29]. Higher levels of stress and anxiety and worsened economic status were reported among vulnerable populations, such as the Arab-Palestinian and Ultra-Orthodox populations. In response to the social problems induced by the pandemic, there has been a surge in civic engagement and activity by social service NPOs. This has included high volunteering rates in NPOs for marginalized populations and more than 100 new social initiatives developed by nonprofits and social entrepreneurs to help excluded populations and vulnerable communities [30].

1.2. NPOs' Employees under Contracting out during Routine and Emergency

One of the definitions of contracting out is the delivery of services by for-profit and nonprofit organizations while being contracted by the State [31]. In Israel, those processes are increasingly dominant, contributing to the growth of the nonprofit sector [32,33]. Contracting out of social services has occurred since the 1980s [34–36] and has been seen correspondingly in various Western countries [37,38]. Research has shown that contracting

out of social services has alarming outcomes for the service users and those employed in NPOs [31,39–41].

Working conditions in Israeli NPOs are problematic, to say the least, as demonstrated by the low salaries, low social benefits, and the presence of many part-time positions [40,42,43]. The employee retention rate in Israeli NPOs is two years [42].

The employment profile in NPOs in different countries is characterized by a demanding work environment, long working hours, and low wages [44,45]. Several scholars have criticized the way NPOs have adopted the new public management approach and tools used by that methodology and the way that this adoption has led to the deterioration of working conditions in these organizations [44,46–48]. Paz-Fuchs and Shlosberg [49] contended that the terms of employment for social workers in outsourced social services in Israel had been significantly worsened, preventing them from raising warning signs when required and forcing them to cooperate with actions that, in many cases, violate their professional standards and ethics. A study by Rapisarda et al. [50] demonstrated that NPOs' staff experienced difficulties during COVID-19. In an online survey of professionals working with people with mental disabilities, they found an impact of the COVID-19 emergency on the overall distress level of workers, with a significant number of workers experiencing severe levels of depersonalization and anxiety. In their survey conducted in the U.S., Hayes et al. [51] found, that among employees who already were working from home and continued to do so during the pandemic, the pandemic has worsened burnout and stress. The division of unpaid labor, such as childcare and household chores, was affected during COVID-19 when women's share of household tasks increased compared to men's [52–54].

The deterioration of employment conditions in NPOs is also connected to the overrepresentation of women as employees in these organizations [44,46,55]. Numerous studies have documented the overrepresentation of women as employees in the nonprofit sector globally [42,56–59].

Mirvis and Hackett [58] explained the phenomenon of the overrepresentation of women in NPOs by suggesting that women are attracted to services and organizations with a social mission and the attractiveness of NPOs to working mothers. Preston [60] suggested that the overrepresentation of women in the nonprofit sector is related to “the compensation effect”: NPOs give the employee an emotional reward (as a contributor to society), but pay a lower wage, thus creating a mechanism of compensation. Care work theorists, such as Zelizer [61,62] and Nelson [63], undermined this concept of compensation, arguing that, according to the “love and money” perspective, there is no contradiction between having a sense of value at work and earning a decent salary. Nevertheless, in reality, one of the manifestations of the overrepresentation of women in NPOs is their low pay.

Research shows that women's employment in NPOs is characterized by flexibility and the possibility of combining it with family life. Because of this, since the 1980s, working in NPOs has been considered particularly attractive employment for women [58]. Women's employment in NPOs tends to be part-time, temporary, and sometimes in shifts [44]. Moreover, working in NPOs requires investing more time than officially defined, and overtime is usually not rewarded [40,64]. Charlesworth et al. [44] claimed that the care work in NPOs is related to the social expectation from women to provide unlimited and flexible care, regardless of their low wages and poor working conditions. A recent study by [41] demonstrates how care professionals in NPOs are more vulnerable because of their working conditions and how they internalize the blurred boundaries between work and nonwork, a notion that endangers employees' wellbeing.

2. Method

2.1. Logic of Inquiry

A qualitative approach was used to explore women's work experiences and perceptions as professional-level employees in NPOs, concerning community and community

resilience. We chose this approach because it can encompass the interviewees' subjective perceptions and personal experiences [65,66].

2.2. Sample and Participant Characteristics

A convenience sample of 40 women, all professional workers with an academic education working in the helping professions and employed by social service NPOs, was used. The women interviewed were aged 23 to 56 and had 1 to 15 years of work experience. Twenty-nine had part-time jobs, and 11 had full-time ones. They all worked in social service NPOs—from homes for the elderly to serving at-risk children, foster homes, and rape crisis centers. Table 1 elaborates on the main characteristics of the sample.

Table 1. Description of the sample.

Characteristic	<i>n</i>
Age	
20–30	6
31–40	28
41–50	5
>51	1
Education	
Bachelor's	14
Master's	26
Ethnicity	
Arab	7
Ethiopian	1
Mizrahi or Ashkenazi	26
Russian	6
Religion	
Jewish	33
Christian	1
Muslim	5
Druze	1
Profession	
Social worker	27
Occupational therapist	5
Art therapist	1
Dance therapist	2
Drama therapist	2
Educational counselor	1
Bibliotherapist	2
Job status	
Part-time	29
Full time	11
Organization yearly budget	
Small (<2 million NIS *)	21
Medium (2 million to 10 million NIS)	15
Large (>10 million NIS)	4

* NIS = Israeli new shekel.

2.3. Data Collection and Data Management

We recruited participants via social media and emails. We published a call to participate on professional websites written in Hebrew and Arabic. As noted, we recruited participants by emailing opinion leaders—renowned people and care professionals—in social service NPOs, and we asked for their assistance in finding interviewees. We included

women with postsecondary education in social care NPOs that deliver contracted-out social services.

The interview process was as follows: all women who agreed to participate in the research were informed of the study's aims telephonically or by email before the interview date scheduling. Then, they signed a consent form and sent it to the research team before the interview. The forms were secured later. We began every interview with oral informed consent, and the recording began only after receiving this informed consent.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted between 2019 and 2020, beginning before the COVID-19 pandemic spread globally and during it. The in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted in Hebrew, in person, and later via Skype and Zoom.

The interview protocol was developed for this study by the research team after consultation with experts. It included questions on work experiences, and work–life balance, according to three main subjects (gender relations, contracting social services, and care work). We asked about their major conflicts and the significant work perks.

The average interview time was 75 minutes, ranging from 60 to 105. A third party audiotaped and transcribed interviews blind to the research aims. The interviewer transcribed interviews that included sensitive material.

2.4. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed through reflexive thematic analysis (TA), revealing the professionals' experiences in social service NPOs. Braun and Clarke's [67] model was used to explore new themes through our (1) familiarization and immersion with the content, (2) coding, (3) generating preliminary themes, (4) revising themes, (5) naming and refining themes, and eventually (6) writing. Following the first step in the model, text segments were coded with MAXQDA analysis software. Three coding cycles were used: descriptive coding was used for each interview transcript for identified broad interview topics (for example, "Work environment"). In vivo coding—using idioms and explicit saying by the interviewees to depict a particular experience [68]—was used. Open coding was used to refine the first and second phases and to assure trustworthiness. Then, we named the themes and wrote them.

2.5. Rigor

The research team followed the principles of profound planning to ensure rigor [69]. We also ensured the study's validity through an attentive description of the method—including sampling, data collection and management, and later data analysis. As the research context consists of NPOs in Israel, the transferability to another country may apply to countries with similar characteristics, such as contracting out social services under neoliberal settings.

2.6. Translation Phase, Reporting and Ethics

We included a twofold translation phase in the research: the call, originally in Hebrew, was also translated into Arabic by a third party. For reporting, the first author translated quotes and theme names into English. With proficiency in translation, translations were performed with specific attention to details, nuances, melody, jargon, and idioms. However, this translation phase might threaten validity [70]. Ethics measures were taken—we kept audio recordings password-protected, while the signed informed consent forms were kept in a separate location. Quotes that might lead to identifying a particular interviewee are not used. The study received IRB approval from the ethics committee at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 2018.

3. Findings

NPOs' employees who were interviewed depicted an experience of loneliness, lacking the feeling of belonging to a group of workers who share the same characteristics and challenges, belonging to a union, or having a feeling of solid collegiality. Despite that, they have a strong sense of mission in their work; they are motivated by social causes

and find meaning in their jobs. Findings are presented according to the following themes: (a). loneliness at work and lacking a sense of community, and (b). they were working for a significant social cause while struggling with the challenging environment and work conditions in NPOs. Although we interviewed women from different groups of Israeli society, the findings in regard to their employment experiences are quite similar.

3.1. *Who Are My Colleagues? Loneliness at Work and Lacking a Sense of a Community*

Many employees reported that much of the work is lonely or without colleagues; therefore, according to their experiences, it leaves them alone. A social worker who works in NPOs serving foster families explained:

“In the end, our work is lonely in the sense that I am responsible for ‘my families.’ And not, say, like we (NPO’s employees) are together responsible for a group of children and we work together; in the end, what happens in my area is mine alone. Of course, I have professional training days, but it is not as if someone tells me to ‘do this and that’”.

Except for working under much pressure, this social worker who works with at-risk youth feels she works mostly alone when there are no staff members around her, no guidance or support, and no colleagues. She talks about taking responsibility in her area of work only by herself.

“Basically, the employer cannot give you a place to work from physically, because I, like, it is a team of workers who are scattered all over the country and has an office in the center of the country, and I work independently in my area. Sometimes I am alone, alone [. . .] teamwork is very limited there”.

(a social worker with at-risk youth)

This testimonial reveals the geographical distance of the employee from the NPO, which requires her to work independently. As the office is distant from where she lives, working in the office is not a real option for her. The outcome, for her, is that she lacks the advantages of working with colleagues.

The following dance therapist shares her concept of the NPO she works at. She said she does not “feel it,” For her, it serves as a shell only, a place to obtain a salary from and receive a weekly visit.

“The nonprofit organization itself? I do not feel it that much. Ultimately, I am part of the kindergarten; the nonprofit is just a shell. They (NPO representatives) come to visit me once a week. Besides that—I am part of the kindergarten”.

(a dance therapist in an NPO working with kids)

Many women professional workers employed by NPOs we interviewed described feeling alone at work and not “feeling the NPO much”, even though they work for medium- to large-size NPOs employing tens of workers. This feeling was found before the COVID-19 crisis, and it intensified during the pandemic. It seems that the collegiality component is missing in these employees’ jobs.

A bibliotherapist working in an NPO serving children at-risk described her feelings:

“Look, all in all, in day-to-day life, there are hardly any hallway conversations; most of the time, you are quite alone. You do not have time; you are not in the office, you are in the field, you are between houses all day, you do not . . . you don’t have much”.

(A bibliotherapist)

To summarize this theme—distances, geographical, and mental issues are part of those women’s experiences in NPOs. Some of them do not feel a part of the NPO they work in, some of them are not exposed to the NPO’s activity except for their own, and many use the words “on my own,” “alone,” “by myself,” and “loneliness.” During the interviews, we asked about relationships at work, collegiality, and the role of the NPO

they work in as a supportive community. Various answers were given; some emphasized one to two colleagues who became closer, and they mentioned the depth of the training they obtain. However, they have not spoken about the NPO as being supportive or about a supportive community in the NPO. It seemed that those employees working in contracted-out social service nonprofits lacked a sense of community and collegiality and were in desperate need of more sense of “communitiness”. Working in contracted-out social services had left those employees feeling responsible for their own work, wellbeing, and work–life balance arrangements. While thousands of social service NPOs in Israel and many workers in NPOs have working relations with workers in other NPOs, the NPO employees we interviewed did not see themselves as part of a distinct group of workers with shared values and rights. In the interviews, when asked about working in an NPO, they talked mainly in singular terms, referring primarily to themselves and their own. Using words such as “we” or “us” was rare.

“I feel that I am sinning against my role. During my studies, I volunteered at X (an NPO for workers’ rights), and I felt that I had a role in organizing social workers, not to be silent about work conditions they don’t get, and to fight other people’s wars as well. Now, I feel that I don’t do that at all”.

(Sylvie, social worker with at-risk children)

Moreover, the case of COVID-19 pandemic has worsened those experiences. While the need for social services and social care increased due to the pandemic, the women we interviewed sounded exhausted and on the verge of a crisis. When burnout, thoughts of leaving the job, and much stress and pressure were part of daily life, it seems that the pandemic took those experiences to an extreme measure, leaving those workers with “no air”:

“The only time I felt really worn out was recent. [. . .] I had a period recently in the last six months when I was afraid to bring more people into my life to start taking care of more people. I really had such a wish to stop, to stop giving myself to more new people; I couldn’t contain it anymore. It stemmed from the frustration I experienced, this experience that I want to move forward, but I have no clear vision of what to do, if any. And for some reason, most of the therapy I do today—I have been working with them for two years and more. And it’s a lot; it’s much time. And already, yes, I got tired somewhere. There are those who are also stuck somewhere that you can’t really help them. Those who engage and do this process are always spurring. But clients that keep returning for help, then it is very difficult to be there for them for a long time. It causes burnout”.

(Bibliotherapist)

To summarize this theme, when considering those women’s experiences of burnout, heavy workloads, demanding job requirements, and blurred boundaries, loneliness at work worsens, and feelings are polarized.

3.2. Working for a Social Cause While Struggling with Tough Work Conditions

As revealed through the interviews, the professionals’ care work in NPOs gave satisfaction and a strong sense of meaning to the women interviewed. Those women give meaning to the care and help they provide, the relationships they invest in, the processes of change, and their work results. Most interviewees mentioned their meaningful work. Expressions such as “I think we are doing an important job, and that it is work I really believe in” were common in the interviews.

“Obviously, there are frustrations, and there are complex things, but I really, really love my job; I enjoy working with clients, I like the team, I believe in the plan, and I feel a mission to do what I do. Love this job”.

(An occupational therapist who works in an NPO focusing on people with disabilities)

The social mission has great importance to her. Every therapy counts, and she discusses the mission of those human encounters. While not overlooking the job disadvantages, she generalizes them to “complex things” and gives much meaning to the mission.

“All the trust built up, and even someone saying ‘thank you’ for something seemingly small is very gratifying. Let us say children on the Autistic spectrum—their communication skills are not the strongest, but they know how to say ‘thank you’ in many other ways. And it makes my day; it does. Much meaning. That is why I chose it, like, that meaning. One of the reasons”.

(Social worker in an NPO working with kids)

It turns out that this specific work, care work in the NPOs’ setting, allows those professionals to participate in the NPOs’ mission and social change goals and to feel that they are part of “a greater cause” from which they find meaning.

“My starting point was that I want to work in nonprofits to reach those who can’t pay for it. It is not a big deal to be a therapist for those who have much and can finance years of private therapy. No. I want to reach those I work with. This is those who live on social security, so I will not ask them for money”.

(a social worker working with older people)

The testimonial identifies the social component of care work. Many care professionals interviewed used the term “I love my job.” They did not use the words “I like” or “I am fond of”, but deliberately chose the specific term “love.” Interestingly, they conveyed this feeling of love together with all the components that made them almost leave their jobs: the low pay, the low nonprofit budgeting of their projects, the social benefits they lack, the demanding work environment, and the blurry boundaries between work and home. They love their jobs while having to put aside the complexities of their profession in a contracted-out nonprofit in order to sustain themselves there. The experience of employment is driven by a mission and love, while, at the same time, employees suffer from harsh working conditions, poor work settings, and unsupportive work environments in the NPOs. They feel they have an impact on the individual level by treating clients. Notably, the workers are committed to their jobs, but considering the harsh working conditions, they find themselves looking for their next job phase (another NPO or combining nonprofit sector’s jobs with a private clinic) only after the organization has shown the employees the way out.

4. Discussion

This article looks at community resilience from the angle of professional workers employed by NPOs, who deliver social services to build and create resilience in vulnerable communities. These NPOs work and contribute to community resilience, which are considered necessary during a routine, especially during crises. Research has shown that NPOs’ work is critical in building community resilience [12,24–26].

These NPOs are human service organizations highly dependent on their workers to carry out their social missions and aims. Their clients’ wellbeing and the wellbeing of the communities they serve and work with greatly depend on these professional workers. However, the literature on community resilience, human service organizations working with marginalized communities, and on NPOs has rarely discussed this issue. The article presents research focusing on women professional workers employed by contracted-out nonprofit social service organizations in Israel. The findings reveal the loneliness these workers feel at work, a lack of sense of community among NPOs employees, and the dichotomy between “loving the profession and identifying with the NPOs’ social mission” and “struggling with the work conditions” in NPOs serving vulnerable communities. The findings also show that the COVID-19 crisis, in nonprofit settings in Israel and under contracting-out of social services, has worsened those employees’ working conditions, and their work experiences were more polarized and more severe. These findings corroborate Rapisarda et al. [50].

The notion of meaningful work in NPOs is unsurprising and was discussed in the literature (see Sandberg and Robichau [71]). However, our findings reveal that it is accompanied by loneliness, lack of collegiality, solidarity, and community. Not only do these workers feel exploited due to their low pay, lack of social benefits, and long working hours, but they also feel isolated while operating in organizations, surrounded by other workers. Preston [60] claimed that the sense of a high social mission serves as an emotional reward compensating for the lower pay in helping professions, while Baines et al. [72] saw it as “self-sacrifice” by women that stretch their sacrifice from the private sphere to the public sphere. However, the professional workers in NPOs we interviewed were constantly in the position of leaving—either they had already announced their leave to their managers, wanted to leave and were looking for another job, or just left another NPO and started a new job. In addition, many interviewees saw the work in NPOs as a temporary phase that allows them to gain professional experience in their helping professions.

It may be that the employees could temporarily accept the harsh working conditions, as they would allow them to open a private clinic in the future. They did not see themselves advancing their professional career in the nonprofit sector, but rather, only spending a few years there to gain more professional experience and later leave for a better job. They told us: “This is not work for life, it’s temporary”; “The pyramid is very narrow here, and there are not many options for promotion, this is very frustrating”; “When I am trying to look ahead, I have no idea what will happen”. Thus, the sense of high mission and meaningful work did not compensate for the low pay, long working hours, high working loads, and lack of social benefits. The challenging working environment, sense of loneliness, and lack of support in these organizations led to their wish to leave and to their sense of temporariness. While they were willing to self-sacrifice themselves working in the NPOs, they saw this as only a temporary arrangement and not as a career for life. On average, professional workers in Israeli NPOs leave their job every two years [42]. Our findings reveal that, while they strongly believe in their helping professions and in the social missions and aims of the social service NPOs they work for, they will not stay in these organizations for long and will pursue other venues to advance their career. Moreover, they felt that all contracted-out social service NPO are similar, so moving to work for another NPO will not change their situation. They did not see feasible alternatives in other NPOs. One of the interviewees summarized her feeling about being a professional worker in an NPO: “This is absurd; show me one NPO that pays a fair salary and social benefits and overtime—I did not come across one yet.” This situation has important implications for NPOs, their clients, and the resilience of vulnerable communities, who are the main target of these organizations.

Community resilience includes the expectation of fulfilling certain functions to return to routine and recover. What happens when the human resources at the base of the nonprofit sector cannot fulfill their roles as expected, and how will this affect the resilience of marginalized communities the nonprofit sector aims to help? The COVID-19 pandemic is an example of how professional workers in the helping professions in NPOs were stretched to the limit in times of crisis. Kosny and MacEachen [73] warned of possible health and wellbeing hazards of the invisible work performed by workers in NPOs. These hazards included the risk of violence, injuries or infectious disease, trauma, and secondary trauma. They assert that compromising on employees’ wellbeing is perilous. We can broaden Kosny and MacEachen’s warning and argue that the “quality” of community resilience of the human resource under pressure might be affected too. The hazards to communities—the community of workers in the first circle and the larger communities in the broader ones—can be affected by the hurt, burnt, or stretched nonprofit organizations’ employees.

This study focuses on the consequences for employees working in contracted-out social services. While a decline in community resilience may be linked to different causes, our findings imply that resilience on the individual level of the worker, and on the professional community level, has implications for community resilience, its “production”, and quality. Building resilient communities relies on resilient workers. When workers experience loneliness, isolation, temporariness, insecurity in their organizations, and work

under severe conditions, it is hard to expect them to build community resilience. Resilience on the personal–individual level is connected to resilience on the organizational and community level.

The study has several implications for different institutions. First, it seems that NPOs working with vulnerable communities in the age of contracting-out need to pay more attention to their workers, improve their working conditions, develop feelings of belonging, collegiality, and solidarity within the organization, and find ways to help their employees, especially during times of crisis. Second, umbrella and infrastructure organizations of NPOs need to raise awareness among NPOs about their working conditions. They also need to promote policies of governmental supervision of contracted-out social services that will consider workers' conditions in these services and their implications for the services provided by contracted-out NPOs. Third, trade unions of the helping professions need to pay special attention to workers employed by contracted-out NPOs, provide knowledge about employees' rights, actively protect these rights, and serve as a meaningful address for the employees. They also need to develop a sense of community among the helping professions' workers to help them feel more connected and less isolated.

This study did not compare men and women and relied on the fact that women constitute an absolute majority in this study's population of focus. Further studies could compare men and women from the helping professions in NPOs, their working conditions, motivations, and practices. They could also compare employees in contracted-out NPOs with those in contracted-out businesses to see if the sector affects the working conditions.

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