

Are Contractual Relationships a Partnership?

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The first shelter for battered women in Israel was founded in the late 1970s at the initiative of the Feminist Organisation (Yanai, 2005). Today there are 14 shelters (Ministry of Social Affairs and Services, 2014), all established by nonprofit organisations, although not necessarily feminist ones. Interrelationships between these organisations and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Services has changed over the years. First, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Services joined the initiative and independent activity of women's organisations by providing minimum funding. Later, and due to growing awareness of battered women's needs, the Ministry took more responsibility for financing the shelters. As the state's financial participation increased (particularly from the mid-90's), so has the professional involvement and oversight of the ministry (Yanai, 2005). At this time, government policy has also begun to encourage and support partial privatisation policy (Katan, 2007; Zichlinsky, 2010), which is expressed primarily by encouraging different suppliers (third sector organisations and/or businesses) to compete for the operating contracts offered by the State.

Partial privatisation policy was adopted by the Ministry of Social Affairs in the field of shelters for battered women. A first tender was held in 2002, the third one was held in 2011. This tender failed and the State had to hold another one.

Using a qualitative method, the present study examines the interrelationships between the Ministry of Social Affairs and Services and third sector organisations before tenders, during the tender period, and immediately after the third one which failed. Analysis of in-depth interviews conducted with third sector organisation representatives and those of the Ministry, raised three main themes we called: "voluntary relationships", "non-agreed subcontracting relationships" and "agreed subcontracting relationships".

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By describing these themes and the changing interrelationships expressed in the abject failure of the third tender, we aim for a better understanding of co-operation between nonprofit organisations and the government.

The discussion focuses on the promoting and inhibiting factors influencing interrelationships between third sector organisations and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Services, expressed in the three periods.

We conclude with recommendations for the establishment of a round table that would act as a public council for the development and promotion of policies on women's shelters and for reducing violence against women in general. Council representatives would also be agents for the shelters, for government agencies, academics as well as representatives of battered women. Such a forum could promote knowledge and information-sharing, the development of new solutions and offer models of the best shelters with reference to existing realities and organisational capabilities with government funding. It could also build a policy document that would be the basis for tenders. Moreover, such a forum would find other solutions for funding shelters, not necessarily through tenders.