

# Cambridge Elements

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## THE HIDDEN TIER OF SOCIAL SERVICES

*Frontline Workers' Provision of  
Informal Resources in the Public,  
Nonprofit, and Private Sectors*

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## The Hidden Tier of Social Services

### Frontline Workers' Provision of Informal Resources in the Public, Nonprofit, and Private Sectors

Elements in Public and Nonprofit Administration

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**Abstract:** What do frontline social service providers do during client interactions when they lack adequate formal organizational resources to respond to clients' needs? To answer this question, this Element presents two large-scale qualitative studies of Israeli frontline providers of social services. Drawing on interviews of public-sector workers (Study 1, N = 214), it introduces a widespread phenomenon, where the vast majority of frontline workers regularly provide a wide range of informal personal resources (IFRs) to clients. Study 2 (N = 84) then compares IFR provision between workers from the public, nonprofit, and private sectors. The comparative analysis demonstrates how workers' rationale for providing personal resources to clients is shaped by particular role perceptions embedded in values, norms, and behavioral expectations that vary by employment sector. The Element concludes by presenting ramifications of the phenomenon of IFR provision in terms of citizens' well-being, social inequality, gender relations, and the future of work in public administration.

**Keywords:** public services, informal resources, hybrid, frontline, discretion

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