

**REVEALING REALITIES BEYOND THE FORMAL LAW:
UNTOLD STORIES OF ISRAELI SINGLE MOTHERS LIVING ON WELFARE**

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the phenomenon that single mothers living on welfare are cut-off from their Income Maintenance Allowance because they have a relationship with a man. I explore this phenomenon from two new perspectives: by investigating the law in action and by presenting single mothers' viewpoints. First, I reveal the legal regime that regulates the welfare allowances of single mothers in a relationship with a man by examining the actual court interpretation of the legal definition as well as the ways in which it has been implemented by the National Insurance Institute (NII). I analyze the evidence presented in the court; interviews with NII officials and NII internal investigations' documentation. Second, I unveil the ways in which single mothers living on welfare and being investigated by the NII view the legal regime, by analyzing the in-depth interviews I conducted with 13 single mothers.

It is clear that one major problem with the legal regime is the fact that single mothers are disentitled from their allowance due to a partner, even though they are often left without any other means of support. This problem is partly due to a serious gap between the formal legal definition of a "couple" and the ways in which the legal definition is actually implemented by the courts and by the NII. Another reason that women and children are left without other means of support resides in the fact that the law on the books itself fails to address the need for single mothers to provide for their children from previous relationships. This research suggests that within the complex nature of single mothers' relationships, constructed upon differences in power between the man and the women, the partner—who has no legal obligation to support the single mother's own children—will often refuse to do so. However, the formal law disregards this fact and ties the children's entitlement to the mother's entitlement. Another important implication of the legal regime is the fact that single mothers are deprived of their basic human rights, while their lives are being totally controlled by the NII.