

Centers for the Prevention and Treatment of Domestic Violence: Findings for t-0 and t-1 and insights derived from them

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Abstract

Background

The Centers for the Prevention and Treatment of Domestic Violence (hereafter: the Program) is one of the main programs operating within the National Program to Fight Domestic Violence (hereafter: the National Program). It is active in 165 municipalities in Israel. The duration of intervention in the program is about one year. Highly trained social workers at the centers provide both individual and group treatment to women, men and children – both victims and abusers. The centers are operated by social services departments around the country, sometimes in collaboration with various non-profit organizations.

Goals of the Research

The National Program made the following requests to the Outcomes Team at the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute:

1. To assist the National Program in developing tools to accomplish the following: (a) Evaluation and intervention planning for the centers' clients; monitoring of the Program's outputs (activities and strategies included in the Program); and measuring the achievement of goals; (b) monitoring of the characteristics, needs, strengths and previous interventions of the centers' clients. The tools will serve as the foundation for building a computerized system to be used by the social workers in the field in order to plan interventions, document the course of treatment and measure the outcomes of other long-term programs that operate within the framework of the National Program. In addition, the tools will assist the headquarters staff in deciding on policy and work methods.
2. To carry out a pilot measurement study to determine the extent to which the tools indeed achieve their goals, prior to their being put into regular use as measurement tools, as well as gathering preliminary information on the clients' characteristics, needs, previous interventions, and strengths and the degree to which results were achieved.

Methodology

1. Four tools were developed:

Evaluation questionnaires (t-0)

- a. An online questionnaire to be filled out by social workers at the centers, which includes questions about the clients' characteristics and needs, their strengths and previous interventions for the treatment of violence.

- b. A self-reporting online questionnaire for the centers' clients which includes the same types of questions as above (except about the recipient's characteristics) from the perspective of the client.

Questionnaires for the monitoring of output and the measurement of outcomes (t-1)

- c. An online questionnaire to be filled out by the centers' social workers which includes questions for updating the service recipient's characteristics, a reevaluation of their needs and strengths and measurement of the outputs that were used in the treatment of the violence.
- d. A self-reporting online questionnaire for the centers' clients which includes the same questions as above from the perspective of the client, with the addition of questions about the quality of the outputs (professional and respectful service provided according to ethical rules).

- 2. Two pilot evaluations were carried out in which the victims and the offenders (both men and women) under treatment at the centers were asked the following:

First pilot evaluation (t-0) in June 2021

- a. The online questionnaire for social workers was administered in 165 centers (filled out by social workers at 106 centers regarding 524 clients).
- b. The self-reporting online questionnaire was filled out by 201 clients who had been chosen by the social workers.

Second pilot evaluation (t-1) in June 2022

- c. An online questionnaire was distributed to the social workers who had participated in the first evaluation in June 2021. The questionnaire was filled out by 81 social workers regarding 160 clients.
- d. A self-reporting online questionnaire was filled out by 31 clients who participated in the first evaluation.

- 3. At the conclusion of the pilot evaluation, **focus groups** were held with the social workers who had participated in the evaluations, with the goal of understanding the suitability of the measurement tools, how they were accepted by the social workers and clients, etc.

Findings

The findings of the evaluation at the beginning of treatment (t-0)

The findings were used to map the characteristics and needs of the Program's clients, most of whom are at-risk Jewish women with children. The main types of abuse that brought the clients to the centers (both the victims and the abusers) are verbal, emotional or mental abuse and the use of the children as a means of control. The clients also experience problems that are likely to exacerbate the level of violence in the family, such as relationship problems within the family, economic distress, employment difficulties and housing conditions. About one-third of the clients had previously been in contact with various frameworks, such as the social services department, the police, medical institutions, etc., which deal with domestic violence problems.

Findings from monitoring output and achievement of goals (t-1)

The most common outputs at the centers are: individual treatment, group treatment, evaluation of danger, a protection plan in the community and material assistance. Most of the clients were satisfied with the service they had received at the center and reported that it was respectful, sensitive and professional. In the second evaluation, there was an improvement in all of the interim outcomes that were defined as milestones in achieving the final outcomes. It should be mentioned that there were more statistically significant connections between the achievement of the interim outcomes and the reduction in domestic violence against the victims than between the achievement of the interim outcomes and the reduction in abuse perpetrated by the abusers.

Most of the social workers and clients mentioned that, in their opinion, the outcomes of the intervention had been achieved. A comparison between the frequency of violent incidents reported in the first and second evaluations showed that the outcomes were achieved for all types of domestic violence experienced by the victims. With respect to the abuse perpetrated by the abusers, the goals were partially achieved only in the case of certain types of abuse (emotional violence, harassment, damage to property and physical harm), although there was a statistically significant increase in the incidence of social isolation.

Findings of the pilot study regarding the use of the tools

After examining the suitability of the tools for day-to-day use as part of the computerized system for intervention planning, documentation of treatment and measurement of results, the social workers expressed satisfaction with use of the computerized system to document their everyday work. The users reported that the questionnaire is appropriate for clients whose treatment focuses on breaking the cycle of violence; however, it does not meet the need in the case of therapeutic intervention that focuses on the emotional effects of life in the cycle of violence.

Recommendations

1. Development of tools for monitoring implementation and measuring results should continue, with the goals of fine-tuning them for daily use in the field and to meeting the need to gather knowledge and data for use by the headquarters staff.
2. During the pilot phase, the questionnaire was not administrated to illiterate clients or those who lack online access. Later in the process and as part of characterizing the computerized system for day-to-day use, ways should be found to gather information from these clients.
3. It is recommended that comprehensive training be provided in the use of the computerized system (input of data, queries and generation of reports) prior to putting it into service. At the same time, it is important to involve the social workers in the task of documentation in the system and to help them understand the advantages in using it on a regular basis.
4. It is recommended that the tools for clients enable differentiation between questions intended for victims and those intended for offenders.
5. It is recommended that reports and forms be developed within the system, with the goal of meeting the everyday needs of the social workers at all levels of activity.
6. It is recommended that a shared space be created within the system which will serve as the location for forms, procedures, protocols, lists, articles and essential information for day-to-day operations.