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Detection and Treatment of Domestic Violence Victims in Health Systems: An International Review

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Abstract

Background

The health system, including hospitals, health funds, mental health clinics and health bureaus, is one of the major systems that detect and treat victims of domestic violence. In order to promote the ability to detect these victims and treat them in the Israeli health system, permanent committees on domestic violence, sexual exploitation and neglect of minors and incapacitated persons have been active in the health services since 2003. Today, some 240 committees are active in a variety of health services countrywide. Over the years since their establishment, members of these committees have benefitted from a variety of training programs that provided them with knowledge and tools required to carry out their task. The Department for Treating Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault at the National Social Work Service in the Ministry of Health seeks to examine the committees' work: to determine the expected outcomes of their work and specify their procedures based on a set of quality standards. To do so, the department has engaged the Quality in Social Services Group at the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute.

Objective

This review is the first stage in a broad research project designed to assess and regulate the committees' work. It is designed to examine policy and practices in health systems in Israel and worldwide, to answer the following questions: (1) What are the best health system practices for locating and treating domestic violence victims? (2) What mechanisms are in place in other countries to detect and treat domestic violence victims?

Method

A national and international review conducted from October 2021 to June 2022, based on research articles and publications in websites of ministries, government organizations, and health organizations in Israel and worldwide.

Findings and Conclusions

- There are several major best practices, and there is consensus among practitioners regarding their importance. Many of them are applied in Israel, including procedures for detecting and treating domestic violence victims, as well as the violence committees that provide integration and consultation services to medical personnel, offer guidance and training to medical teams, and monitor the identification data of violence victims in the

health system. Nevertheless, the procedures currently in place do not address the inclusion and involvement of health systems representatives and clients in planning and designing relevant policies.

- The units in charge of domestic violence victims in health systems worldwide emphasize the importance of detection, in most cases, by having medical teams question their patients, and providing them with all-round support in this work.
- Regarding children specifically, it was found that the detection mechanisms are not limited to questioning the patients, but include broader aspects of physical examinations enabling to infer whether the harm has been deliberate. Therefore, the mechanisms rely on interdisciplinary medical team trained specifically in identifying and treating child victims.