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Reducing and Preventing Domestic Violence in the Bedouin Population in the Negev

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Abstract

Background

Violence against women in the Bedouin population in the Negev, and domestic violence in general, are part of a global phenomenon. According to the World Health Organization, approximately 30% of women worldwide experience physical or mental violence by a partner during their lifetime. Domestic violence, particularly in traditional and collectivist societies like the Bedouin society, affects the entire extended family. However, numerous barriers prevent women from reporting the violence they experience.

Research Objective

The study aimed to assist the Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs in improving the services and responses to address domestic violence provided to the Bedouin population in the Negev, with an emphasis on prevention. The research questions were:

1. What are the characteristics of domestic violence in the Bedouin population in the Negev?
2. Which action principles, practices, and programs for preventing domestic violence have been found effective around the world?

Research Methodology

The study had two components:

1. **International literature review** which focused on identifying programs addressing domestic violence in traditional societies, like the Bedouin society. The literature review relied on up-to-date articles and research, government websites, and newspaper articles, as well as websites of associations and organizations working with similar populations.
2. **Semi-structured individual interviews and one group interview** with female professionals from the centers for preventing domestic violence in Bedouin settlements in the Negev, women and men from the Bedouin population, and professionals specializing in family violence in the Arab and Bedouin community.

Key Findings

Findings from the literature review - The literature review identified guiding principles for effective domestic violence prevention programs, such as: involving the entire community in taking responsibility for creating a safe environment for all its members, involving the local community through mutual respect and trust, and full participation of women, even in societies where leadership is predominantly male.

The literature review also presented examples of programs from around the world that were found to be effective in societies with similar characteristics to the Bedouin society. These programs were categorized into four areas: (1) programs targeting men that included diverse approaches to engage them in attitude-changing processes; (2) programs targeting women, primarily programs directed toward increasing their income; (3) programs involving religious leaders, particularly training for Imams; and (4) programs focusing on community-wide collaboration, which viewed domestic violence as a societal issue rather than exclusively personal or familial.

Findings from the interviews - Analysis of the interviews revealed characteristics of Bedouin society that could contribute to understanding the phenomenon of domestic violence, including socio-economic factors, living with uncertainty in non-recognized villages, polygamy, and ongoing social change.

The interviews also highlighted challenges and barriers to accessing services to prevent and treat domestic violence. These barriers were divided into three categories: (1) barriers to seeking assistance, such as fear of harming the family's reputation and the limited responses available; (2) barriers to reporting to the police, including a lack of understanding on the part of some of the women of the significance of filing a complaint to the police and the lack of compatibility of the police stations with the needs of women and children in distress; and (3) barriers to the willingness to enter a shelter for women experiencing domestic violence, such as women's fears of being cut off from their families and the concern that they may not be able to return home, and the lack of congruity between the shelters and the characteristics of Bedouin society.

The interviews also revealed that the existing domestic violence prevention centers are not currently equipped to invest the necessary resources in prevention efforts, despite the acknowledgment by center employees of the importance of this issue.

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The report provides an international overview of programs for the prevention of domestic violence among populations sharing common characteristics with the Bedouin population. Findings from the interviews contributed to understanding the on-the-ground reality in the field of domestic violence prevention, and in mapping existing needs, responses, and barriers to their utilization.

The study indicated that existing domestic violence prevention centers, in their current form, are not adapted to provide prevention efforts, as most of their resources are invested in treatment, which is also necessary. Domestic violence prevention is a community-based field, and it should be led by professionals specializing in the field, involving the local population to tailor responses to the characteristics of each settlement and its needs. Continued investment is necessary for creating responses and developing services tailored to the Bedouin population, with a focus on training professionals in the field.

The report presents recommendations raised by the interviewees and inspired by them. Among the recommendations:

1. Develop programs targeting men: Create programs for men, such as discussions groups with men in workplaces or providing incentives for men to participate in communication workshops.
2. Develop programs targeting youth: Create programs for youth, such as involving students in a social initiative addressing healthy and violence-free relationships as part of their "personal responsibility" volunteer projects in high schools or integrating content related to domestic violence prevention in other youth activities such as sports groups.
3. Develop programs targeting women: Strengthening work with women is recommended. Among other things, it is recommended to establish a center not affiliated with the welfare services or with the police, that brings together all the services for women. It is also recommended to develop economic empowerment programs for women.