



State Comptroller of Israel | Local Government Audit | 2021

Social Audit

Dealing with the Phenomenon of Spousal Violence



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Background

The phenomenon of spousal violence is a social problem prevalent among all classes, cultures and ages. The Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Social Services (the Ministry of Welfare) in collaboration with local government, government ministries, enforcement agencies and third sector organizations, operates and develops services and solutions to prevent domestic violence and treat its victims. The departments of social services in the local authorities are responsible for dealing with the direct and indirect victims and assailants in families where violence erupts. The departments intervene in emergencies and are responsible for the treatment of the direct and indirect victims and assailants. In 2020, those requiring treatment were treated in approximately 110 dedicated centers for the prevention and treatment of domestic violence, which operate in local authorities (centers).




Key figures




13 women	NIS 128 out of 300 million (43%)	25,327	9,758 patients
Were murdered by their spouses in 2020.	The budget allocated in practice versus the estimated budget for implementation of the National Plan for the Treatment of Domestic Violence for 2017–2020, that was adopted by the government.	The number of those in need of treatment for domestic violence, that were defined in local government social services departments in 2019.	Which are 38% of those in need of treatment for domestic violence, were treated in 2019 in 95 of the 110 centers – 6,546 women, 2,458 men and 754 children.
Approx. 23,000 case files	Only 10%	An increase of 800%	Approx. 50% of the women
Were opened by the police for spousal violence in 2019. In that year, the police forwarded approximately 6,500 applications to centers for the prevention and treatment of domestic violence.	Of the budget of the Ministry of Welfare for a grant for women leaving the shelter was used in 2019. The budget used amounted to NIS 1.24 million.	In the number of applications to the 118 hotline in may 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic compared to the corresponding period last year; during this period, there was also a 26% increase in the number of applications to social services departments and centers, and a 22% increase in the number of case files opened by the police.	Who were murdered in the years 2004 to 2019 were known to the welfare services prior to the murder.








Audit actions

 From May to November 2020, the Office of the State Comptroller examined the manner in which the governing authorities – central and local – deal with the phenomenon of spousal violence. The audit was conducted at the Social and Personal Services Administration at the headquarters of the Ministry of Welfare and its districts. Audits were also conducted in the social services departments of the **Yavne Municipality**, the **Kadima-Zoran** and **Shibli-Umm al-Ghanam** local councils, the regional councils of **Drom HaSharon** and **Mateh Yehuda**, and in the centers for the treatment and prevention of domestic violence in the municipalities of **Beit Shemesh**, **Bnei Brak**, **Dimona**, **Hadera**, **Lod**, **Sakhnin**, **Acre**, **Kiryat Malakhi**, **Rosh HaAyin** and **Rahat**. The audit was also conducted in the Adult Probation Service and the Prisoner Rehabilitation Authority in the Ministry of Welfare, the Ministry of Public Security, the Israel Police, the Israel Prison Service, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Construction and Housing. The audit was conducted at a time when restrictions on movement and gatherings were imposed in Israel due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and therefore most of it was carried out through written and telephone inquiries.






Key findings

-  **Definition of the Phenomenon of Spousal Violence** – In the absence of a uniform, binding and comprehensive definition of the behaviors protected under the definition of spousal violence, and in the absence of an up-to-date database on the phenomenon of spousal violence, the ability to efficiently deal with this phenomenon is impaired.
-  **Partial Budgeting of the National Plan** – In 2017–2020, the government allocated only NIS 128 million out of the NIS 300 million estimated as necessary to implement the national plan for dealing with domestic violence, even though the government has adopted the main points of the plan. As a result, dealing with the phenomenon remains partial and is accompanied by temporary solutions.
-  **Initial Prevention** – Although informative actions and initial prevention have the potential to reduce the extent of the phenomenon of spousal violence and reduce the resources invested in dealing with it, the budget of the Ministry of Welfare and the Authority to Combat Violence is about 1.4% of the budget allocated for tertiary prevention of the phenomenon (incarceration of domestic violence offenders and protection of women through shelters).



-  **Locating Families in the Circle of Violence** – The Ministry of Welfare, which serves as a central link in locating cases of violence, does not have an orderly policy regarding the location of families in the circle of violence through the departments of social services and the centers for treatment and prevention of domestic violence in local authorities.
-  **Geographical Distribution of the Centers for the Treatment and Prevention of Domestic Violence** – Most of the centers (62 out of 110) operated in the local authorities associated with medium to high socio-economic status in the Jewish sector, although calculating the number of those in need per 1,000 residents showed that as the socio-economic level of the residents of the local authority decreases, the number of people in need of domestic violence treatment increases. Data available to the Ministry of Welfare, relating to 95 centers, show that only 9,758 (38%) of the 25,327 of those in need of domestic violence treatment were specifically treated in centers, and that those in need in 41 local authorities were not referred to professional treatment in the aforementioned centers in 2019, although the centers are supposed to provide services also to nearby local authorities.
-  **Waiting Periods** – In 2020, the waiting periods for treatment in centers in the municipalities of **Lod, Sakhnin and Dimona** were three months, a month and a half and a month, respectively. Additionally, people in need who are not residents of **Beit Shemesh, Bnei Brak and Sakhnin** are required to wait for treatment in the centers in these local authorities for a longer time than the local authorities' own residents in need.
-  **Number of Patients in the Centers** – In 2019, 8,641 families were treated in 95 of the 110 centers for the prevention and treatment of domestic violence. However, reports from local authorities entered into the Ministry of Welfare's computerized system for budgeting indicate that they reported only 4,266 (approximately 49%) of the families actually cared for in the centers. The local authorities refrain from reporting the exact number of families treated in the centers in order to avoid a situation in which the local authorities record a higher expenditure than the income they will receive from the Ministry of Welfare and in practice the workload of the social workers (SW) increases.
-  **Dedicated Budget for Handling Domestic Violence Phenomenon** – A dedicated budget for dealing with the phenomenon of domestic violence is transferred to the local authorities in which the center operates. The designated budget per needy person allocated by the Ministry of Welfare in 2019 to local authorities with a low socio-economic level was considerably smaller than the designated budget for the needy person received by local authorities with a medium and high socio-economic level (NIS 680 and NIS 1,480, respectively). Additionally, most of the local authorities participating in dedicated programs of the Ministry of Welfare and other ministries, dealing with the phenomenon of violence, are at a medium and high socio-economic level.



-  **Activities of the Centers for the Prevention and Treatment of Domestic Violence** — Most social workers in the centers are not employed directly by the local authorities but through external corporations and budgeted by the Ministry of Welfare and the local authority. The local authorities examined in the audit reported in 2019 to the Ministry of Welfare, for the purposes of receiving funding, that the number of treated families was 307, but in practice 1,042 families were treated in the centers, and as a result a heavy workload was placed on the social workers.
-  **Training Social Workers and Training in the Field of Domestic Violence** — In the years 2015-2019, the social workers employed in 22 (about 20%) of the centers were not sent for training or advanced training held by the Ministry of Welfare. Although the Ministry of Welfare finances the training of social workers in the field of domestic violence and coordinates participation in the training, it does not monitor the implementation of the relevant provision of the Israeli Social Work Regulations, does not obligate the treating SW to attend refresher courses and annual seminars in the field, and compiles only partial data on the matter.
-  **Rehabilitation of Violent Men** — Only approximately 4,000 of the approximately 20,000 men included in the circle of violence in 2019 were treated through the centers, the Israel Probation Service, the Israel Prison Service and the Prisoner Rehabilitation Authority of Israel. There are few treatment frameworks accessible to violent men, and they do not work continuously. Additionally, not enough action is taken to “court” the abusive man in order to harness him for treatment, and there are men who are not consistent in receiving treatment and who drop out during the treatment.
-  **Shelters** — Although according to the centers and departments of social services, they sometimes have difficulty finding a vacant place in a shelter, especially for unique populations such as (Jewish) ultra-Orthodox women and Arab women, in October 2020 the Ministry of Welfare did not have accurate data on waiting times for women in need of shelter protection. It was also found that in 2019, 38% of women stayed in shelters for up to a month and 7% stayed in them for up to two months, and therefore they were not entitled to a grant or a guaranteed minimum income allowance. Additionally, 24% of the women who stayed in a shelter in 2019 had more than two children, and are not eligible for grants for their additional children. These things may make it difficult for these women to rehabilitate and break out of the cycle of violence.
-  **Early Release** — The vast majority of prisoners are released on administrative release due to the burden on the prisons, with their degree of danger being examined only as far as possible in terms of the time frame and without the Israel Prison Service notifying the victim of the offense of the expected release of the prisoner. In addition, most of the existing centers find it difficult to receive for treatment prisoners who have been imprisoned due to domestic violence and have been released, especially in the case of



complex cases or prisoners with a high level of danger. As a result, most of them do not receive further treatment and rehabilitation in the community.






“Silent Appeal” – During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Welfare activated a device known as a “silent appeal”, which allows female victims of violence to contact the welfare services center by text message.

Establishment of Additional Centers – During the audit, the Ministry of Welfare proposed to 59 local authorities to establish a center in their territory through participation in financing the staffing of a single position of a social worker for the treatment of violence.

“Community Courts” Program – Since 2014, the Israel Probation Service has been running a “Community Courts” program in collaboration with the Ministry of Justice, the Israeli courts administration, the Israel Police and the Joint (the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee). It was found that as at the end of 2019, no new indictments had been filed against approximately 90% of the program graduates, and that by February 2020, approximately 930 people had participated in the program.

Key recommendations

-  It is recommended that the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Welfare work to promote additional budgetary sources for the implementation of the plan to deal with the phenomenon of violence adopted by the government in 2017. According to the plan, the budget allocation should be gradual – so that NIS 50 million will be added to the budget from 2018, and the annual budget for its implementation from 2022 will be NIS 250 million.
-  It is recommended that the Ministry of Welfare examine the distribution of centers throughout Israel according to the extent of the need to treat the phenomenon, taking into account the number of persons needing treatment in the local authority, along with the number of residents in the local authority and the local authority's desire to establish a center in its area; it is recommended that the Ministry of Welfare consider changing the budgeting method of the centers in such a way that the budget of the local authorities for their operation will be based on a report of the number of actual people treated in the previous year; it is recommended that the Ministry of Welfare examine the discrepancies between the allocation of jobs for social workers dealing with violence and the actual needs and the lengths of time for receiving care in the centers, in order to improve the service for those in need.
-  It is recommended that the Ministry of Welfare examine the waiting times of women victims of violence for shelters, as well as the difficulties raised by the centers for the treatment and prevention of violence in the interfaces between them and the shelters. It is also recommended that the Ministry of Welfare work to increase the intake capacity



of the shelters and to improve the service and therapeutic response in them, as well as to examine the possibility of additional responses tailored to the needs of unique populations.



It is recommended that the Ministry of Welfare, in collaboration with local authorities, work to formulate a policy to increase the number of men participating in programs for the treatment of violent men, to monitor and accompany them, while compiling data and identifying areas of difficulty in recruiting patients and causes for dropping out. It is also recommended to formulate a response for violent men from designated populations, such as the (Jewish) ultra-Orthodox and Arab populations.



It is recommended that the Ministry of Public Security and the Ministry of Justice act to regulate the administrative release mechanism for domestic violence prisoners while preparing for it in advance, and after examining the degree of danger of the prisoners, and examining incentives for treatment, whether within the prison walls or after their release, and subject to the provision of prior notice to the victim of the offense.



Handling the Phenomenon of Spousal Violence, 2019

25,327

**Persons who needed treatment
due to domestic violence**



255

departments of social services



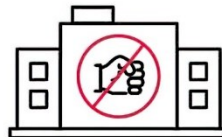
6,546
women treated



754
children treated



2,458
men treated



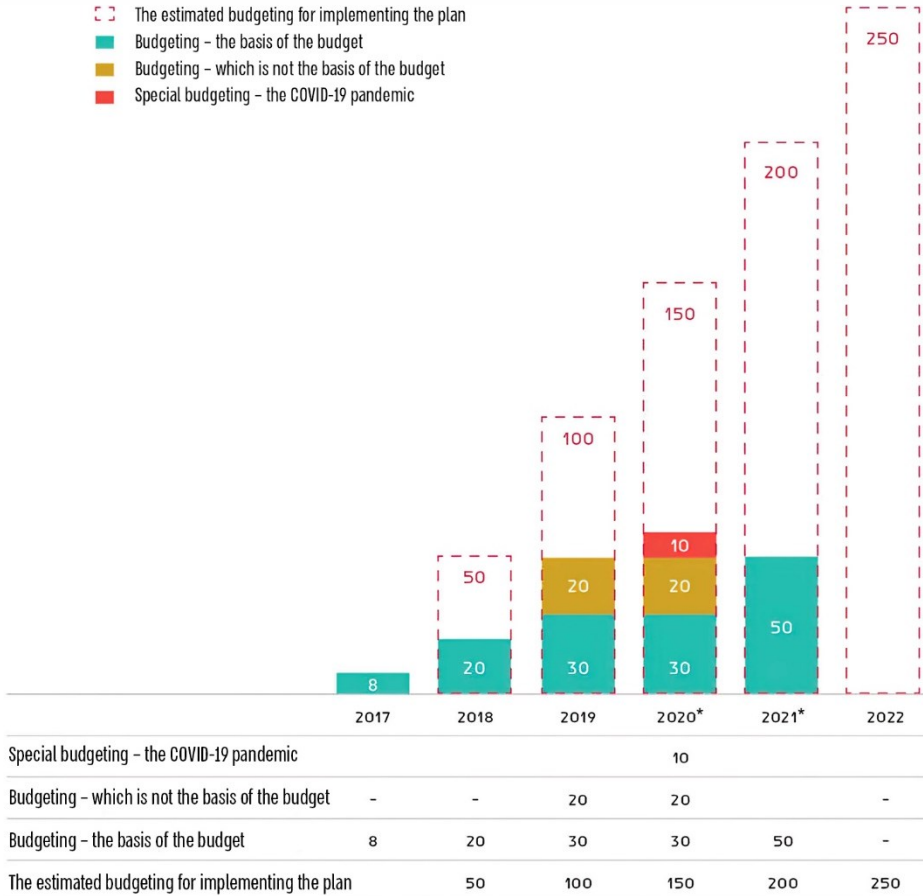
38% of all persons who
needed treatment in 95 center
for the prevention
of domestic violence

According to the data of the Department of Family and Youth in the Community of the Ministry of Welfare, processed by the Office of the State Comptroller.



Budgeting the Five-Year Plan for Implementing the Recommendations of the Inter-Ministerial Committee (2016), 2017–2022

- The estimated budgeting for implementing the plan
- Budgeting – the basis of the budget
- Budgeting – which is not the basis of the budget
- Special budgeting – the COVID-19 pandemic



* The State of Israel did not have an approved budget from the beginning of 2020 and close to the date of publication of the report in July 2021.

According to the data of the Budget Department of the Ministry of Finance, processed by the Office of the State Comptroller.



Summary

During the covid-19 pandemic there was a considerable increase in the number of applicants seeking help from welfare agencies. In the month of May 2020 as opposed to May 2019, there was an increase of 800% in the number of call to the 118 hotline, 26% in the number of applications to departments of social services and centers for the prevention and treatment of violence within the family, and 22% in the number of files opened by the police. In addition, there was a rise of 160% in the number of women murdered by their partners in 2020 as opposed to the previous year. This palpable increase emphasizes the crucial need to augment the activity of welfare services to prevent this phenomenon, to identify families locked in a circle of violence, to give help and support to victims of violence and to rehabilitate violent males. It is recommended that the bodies involved in the field work cooperatively to deal with this phenomenon, while ensuring continuing treatment of victims and of perpetrators, providing appropriate training to therapists and reducing their heavy workload.

The many factors involved in the field, including the Ministry of Welfare, local authorities, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Public Security, the Israel Police and the Authority to Combat Violence – must cooperate from a systemic perspective to eradicate the phenomenon of spousal violence, which causes immediate and long-term damage to both the individual and the community.