



## Evaluation of a Project to Prevent and Treat Elder Abuse and Neglect in the Urban Sector

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In recent years, many programs designed to combat elder abuse – now recognized as a significant social problem – have been developed in Israel and abroad.

The current study examined a groundbreaking program designed to reduce elder abuse and neglect, which was developed by ESHEL in partnership with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services and implemented in three local authorities – Beersheba, Bat Yam and Afula – in 2005–2007. The intervention model consisted of two levels of action: direct work with elders identified as victims of abuse (a combination of the main means of treating abuse: legal intervention, provision of supportive services, and provision of individual and group therapy) and community work to raise awareness of the problem and mobilize professional partners providing services to the elderly in the community. The data in the report present a comprehensive picture of the characteristics of the victims and abusers, the types of abuse, patterns of intervention and the impact of the program on the participants, social workers and program partners.

Most of the victims were found to be women and most have impaired functioning. Most of the abusers are men and about half are the adult offspring of the victims who have financial problems, apparently caused by unemployment or addictions.

The social workers reported that the program helped upgrade treatment processes and contributed to an improvement in the condition of two-thirds of the victims in the program. They also reported that the improvement was reflected in less frequent manifestations of abuse, an improvement in the victims' sense of ability to control their lives and in a wider support network for the victims. With regard to the abusers, the reported improvement resulted from efforts to distance them from the victims and initiate therapy. The most marked improvement was in cases of neglect. The findings reveal that the social workers preferred therapy to legal intervention. There was also a distinct increase in awareness of the issue's importance among social workers of the Social Service Department and other professionals in the community, reflected in more frequent consultation and collaboration among them at the stages of identification and treatment.

The study enriches the existing knowledge about the various forms of intervention. It indicates effective ways to raise the awareness of abuse among the elderly and professionals, increase identification of the problem, provide treatment to victims and their abusers and achieve improvement in their condition.

The findings have been presented to the board of directors of ESHEL, forums of senior social service professionals and the Knesset in order to promote discussion of the issues arising from the findings and as background for further service development. The study was commissioned by ESHEL and funded with its assistance.