

First training center for professionals dealing with sexual assault in Arab sector opens

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According to research, cases of sexual assault in Arab communities is under-reported.

The first Israeli training program for dealing with sexual assault of children in the Bedouin and Arab sectors of society opened last month through the Haruv Institute, a Jerusalem based organization established by the Schusterman Foundation that deals with sexual assault on children in Israel.

According to the Haruv Institute, victims of sexual assault in Bedouin and Arab society are often blamed for their situation and suffer humiliation and alienation from their communities. There is very little tolerance for women who are sexually assaulted, something the Haruv Institute believes may a factor in some of the honor killing cases that take place in those communities.

"The traditional Bedouin society is known as attaching great weight to the concept of 'honor killing' and is often very intolerant towards victims of sexual assault who choose to make a complaint. We hope that training caregivers from the [Arab and Bedouin] sector will encourage more reporting by victims," said Taly Shlomi, coordinator of Arab sector at the Haruv Institute.

A study conducted by the Center for the Study of Society at Haifa University in partnership with the education ministry in 2013 found that the number of Arab children affected by violence and particularly sexual violence was 20 percent higher than the number of Jewish children affected by violence.

The study showed that the rate of children under the age of 17 affected by sexual violence in the Arab sector was 3.5 out of every thousand children, in contrast to the national average that stands at 2.1 out of every thousand.

According to research done by the Haruv Institute, cases of sexual

assault in these communities is underreported and this new program to train professionals from within the community as care givers in these situations is intended to increase the rate of reporting.

"The Haruv Institute began this significant project last year and developed training programs for caregivers in Arab society. The courses were built for caregivers specifically from a place of understanding and the need for major sensitivities," explained Prof. Asher Ben-Arieh, Director of the Haruv Institute.

"In the framework of the course, we have given a significant emphasis on the cultural codes of the Arab and Bedouin societies, for example conflicts that arise as a result of treatment, avoiding reporting from fear of exclusion, family honor and more. The course is another way to attempt to address the phenomenon of violence. We see crucial importance in making professionals in the Arab and Bedouin societies accessible with the belief that this will lead to an increase in reporting and handling of the cases," added Ben-Arieh.