

# Jewish Women International Releases Report on Domestic Violence in the Jewish Community

*by Carrie Seleman*

On April 26, 2021, Jewish Women International (JWI), “the leading Jewish organization working to empower women and girls,” released a report titled “[Domestic Violence in the Jewish Community: A Needs Assessment](#).” The report is the result of a year-long assessment of every domestic violence program serving the Jewish community, with the goal of determining the needs of Jewish survivors and the advocates who serve them and driving new funding, advocacy and awareness to meet those needs. I greatly urge everyone to read the full report, or at least the executive summary. Below is a *very brief* highlight of some of the report’s findings.

## Key Findings

“The Jewish community is failing survivors and their children,” Deborah Rosenbloom, JWI’s Chief Program Officer told [The Times of Israel](#). “Survivors value the Jewish community but often feel stigmatized by it.”

Over 80% of participants in the assessment reported experiencing abuse in the forms of emotional/psychological, physical, financial, custody conflicts, isolation/ostracization, sexual violence, and get refusal - a form of domestic violence unique to the Jewish community. Barriers to escaping reported by over 70% of participants included lack of financial resources, child custody concerns, fear of leaving the relationship, family pressure to stay with their partner, desire to stay with their partner, embarrassment or guilt, and a lack of clergy support.

Being Jewish adds an extra layer of complications to the process of leaving an abusive relationship. Judaism values keeping the family together and maintaining *shalom bayit*, peace in the home. These values can be used to gaslight victims of domestic violence and pressure them to not leave the abusive relationship. There is also the issue of navigating the *beit din* for a *get*, a Jewish divorce. This is not the same process as a civil divorce; it is an additional hurdle and is actually an additional form of abuse if the husband refuses to give a *get*.

The most vital finding of the report to me, though, was that clergy lack the appropriate training and resources to identify, respond to, and educate their community about domestic violence. Clergy reported generally being the first professional that victims of domestic violence approach, and feeling unprepared to understand what their congregants are going through and to provide appropriate resources and support. Additionally, clergy reported wanting to move beyond just responding to domestic violence, wanting to engage in preventive interventions but not knowing what interventions to use.

## Outcomes

In response to these findings, JWI has established the [National Center on Domestic & Sexual Violence in the Jewish Community](#). This center is intended to be the hub for trauma-informed training, education, resources, peer support, research, policy development, and community collaboration. It houses the National Collaborative of Jewish Domestic Violence Programs, the Clergy Taskforce to End Domestic Abuse in the Jewish Community, and the Jewish Coordinated Community Response Team.

Additionally, in August 2021, JWI received a grant from the Senser Foundation to fund a partnership with the JCC Association of North America. Through this partnership, JWI will train preschool, after-school and camp staff to support children affected by domestic violence. The program began in November 2021 with a small pilot group of JCCs. By the end of the grant period in 2023, 100 of the 173 JCCs across North America will have participated in the training.

It is encouraging to see a coordinated effort to support Jewish domestic violence survivors and end domestic violence in the Jewish community. This Needs Assessment was a wake-up call to those in the Jewish community who either dismissed domestic violence as not being an issue for Jews or who thought that we were already doing enough. The National Center seems on track to fill the identified gaps in the support provided to the Jewish community.

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