

Health Sector Response to Gender Based Violence

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Family Health Bureau is the nodal agency at National Level responsible for addressing GBV in health sector. Many programmes have been implemented by the Family Health Bureau aimed at preventing GBV and responding to GBV survivors. These belong to three main areas; programmes which focus mainly on preventing GBV, those concentrating on prevention and response to survivors of GBV and those centered mainly on provision of care for the survivors.

Package for newly married couples and the package to address reproductive health issues of migrant workers and their family members are the two main programmes implemented aiming at prevention of GBV. The package for newly married couples consist of two sessions conducted at the office of Medical Officer of Health, where the couple is sensitized on some important topics which would enable them to have a good marital life. This sensitization would empower the couple to improve their marital relationship without violence which in turn would improve the health and wellbeing of the couple and the family. The Package for migrant workers and their family members is aimed at creating awareness among migrant workers and family members on how to address reproductive health issues and problems. It aims at reducing sexual abuse faced by migrant workers and reducing physical/mental/sexual violence faced by the children.

Prevention of GBV at community level is a comprehensive process and takes a long time to see results. It also needs collaboration with many sectors and a multi-pronged effort. However, as health care workers who are trusted by the community individual health care professional can take the leadership and play a major advocacy role in addressing GBV prevention activities in the community and in the health institutions. The Family Health Bureau plays a leading role in sensitizing the primary health care workers on GBV issues and empowering them on preventing and responding to GBV. The primary health care team is expected to work at 3 levels to manage and address GBV including at Individual level, at family level and at community level.

GBV care centers initiated by Family Health Bureau are established in curative health care institutions to respond to GBV. The centre is called “MithuruPiyasa” in Sinhala and “NatpuNilayam” in Tamil. It is a friendly shelter in the hospital operated by the hospital staff-mainly MOO and Nursing officers working in the out patient’s department. This centre provides befriending and counseling services. The clients can be referred for other services within(such as Psychiatric unit , JMO, surgical ward) and outside the hospital (such as in depth counseling, legal aid services, rehabilitation services) by the staff of the centre. The centre staff is encouraged to establish a partnership with the network of other service providers outside the hospital such as government and non-government service providers.

A programme is also been developed to prevent and respond to sexual violence at work place. Estate health workers are sensitized on GBV and empowered to prevent and handle GBV.