

The House of the Brazilian Woman: impacts of a cross-sectoral public health policy for abused women

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Issue:

Violence against women is a serious public health concern in Brazil; the country ranks 5th globally for femicide and has high rates of intimate partner violence. In response, a national policy created the House of the Brazilian Woman (HBW). HBWs aimed at caring for abused women, are staffed 24/7 with multi-disciplinary teams; cross-sectoral services include: psychosocial support; healthcare; specialized police; courts; public attorney's offices; temporary shelter; and access to financial support.

Description of the Problem:

The purpose of this study was to characterize the preliminary impacts of the HBW of Curitiba. Based on mixed-methods participatory action-research, data were collected between 2018-2020. We present quantitative measures describing the individuals served and a thematic analysis of in-depth interviews with HBW staff.

Results:

Since its opening, in 2016, the HBW of Curitiba has served around 50,000 users, including women and perpetrators. The most prevalent type of violence reported was psychological (67%, n = 14,343), followed by physical (25.8%, n = 5,531), economic (5.2%, n = 1,104) and sexual (2%, n = 428). Positive qualitative impacts perceived by staff were: 1) improved women's empowerment; 2) the importance of centralized resources; 3) acting as a support to ensure existing legal protections. The main challenges were: 1) high demand; 2) discontinuous care; 3) negative impacts on staff's health.

Lessons:

The HBW of Curitiba is a key cross-sectoral service for abused women, part of a greater national policy to prevent violence and support women. Despite serving a large number of women in a short period of time challenges remain including integration with other parts of the network and considerations of staff burnout.

Key messages:

- Effective cross-sectoral policies for abused women are paramount for comprehensive women's health.
- Having cross-sectoral services in just one place operating 24/7 has high impact for abused women.