

Position Statement

Violence is a Public Health and Health Care Issue

Statement of Problem: Violence is an international public health issue that destroys the quality of life in communities and societies worldwide [1]. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines violence as the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation [2]. IAFN's definition of violence has been expanded to include intentional and unintentional injury found in individuals who seek health care following acts of family violence, intimate partner violence (IPV), child abuse, elder abuse, rapes or sexual assaults, trafficking, youth-on-youth violence, gang warfare, terror, war, disaster, and violence in schools, workplaces and prisons [3]. Worldwide, an estimated 1.6 million people lose their lives to violence each year [2]. Additionally, violence and its sequelae result in physical and emotional injuries and/or long term stress reactions, long term and life threatening illnesses and additional risk for injury [6].

Association Position:

- 1) Forensic nurses have a professional and ethical responsibility to serve, advocate for and empower patients, families, and their communities [3, 7, 8].
- 2) Forensic nurses organize and participate in facilitating the development of policies and procedures that foster the implementation of prevention and intervention programs in response to violence [3].
- 3) Recognition of violence as a global, health care problem is the first step towards solving this critical issue.
- 4) Forensic nurses have the opportunity to improve the ultimate health outcomes that result from violence as forensic nurses are uniquely positioned in intersecting systems such as healthcare, community and legal environments for early identification of patients at risk of victimization or perpetration of violence [3].
- 5) Increased awareness and education for all health care providers and attention to the effects of violence is needed in an effort to reduce immediate, intermediate, and long term physical and psychological injuries that are associated with violence.
- 6) Forensic nurses are able to establish and promote identification, intervention and prevention programs, with the recognition that sustained societal change requires action that includes support of research, development of public policy and passage of legislation to effectively reduce and eliminate the causes, consequences and costs of violence [3].
- 7) Public and private institutions that regulate or provide accreditation for healthcare facilities must promote the development of a coordinated and culturally sensitive response and care for patients who have experienced violence or abuse to include the intervention of forensic nursing.

Rationale: The aftermath of violence creates complex health issues requiring the dedicated efforts of professional groups. Nursing professionals are ethically bound to promote health, welfare, and safety of all people [7, 8]. Using the science of nursing, forensic science and public health, forensic nurses are uniquely qualified to assess, formulate a nursing diagnosis treat, monitor, educate, evaluate, and intervene for persons of all ages affected by violence, minimizing the short and long-term effects of violence. [3] Healthy People 2010 supports health care services, which focus on both treatment and prevention for all members of the global community [9].

Forensic nurses believe that health care providers should:

- (1) understand the global impact and outcomes of violence,
- (2) recognize the dynamics of violence at the individual, family, community and systems levels,
- (3) recognize that compassionate and effective early intervention minimizes the short-term effects and alleviates the long term effects of violence [4],
- (4) develop community strategies for prevention, intervention, and referral to appropriate support systems, and
- (5) use culturally competent strategies for teaching effective coping mechanisms [3].

A primary goal of forensic nursing programs is to raise public awareness that violence is a public health issue that impacts healthcare systems and communities worldwide. To that end, forensic nurses promote interventions that prevent or confront the causes of violence and strengthen the health care response to those affected by violence [3].

In summary, forensic nurses incorporate primary care and prevention strategies in the care of individuals, families or communities. Forensic nurses support the development of policy, procedure and curriculum that educates health care providers and community members. Forensic nurses also contribute to policy and systems change that targets inequity in health care delivery for those affected by violence. Finally, through their culturally competent, holistic and equitable approach to health care delivery and their commitment to the public's health, forensic nurses actively contribute to and support the universal goal of a world without violence.

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