

Baghdad, Iraq, 18 January 2021 – The World Health Organization (WHO), in collaboration with the Ministry of Health of Iraq, has adapted a WHO clinical handbook for the health care of women subjected to violence in Iraq.

More than 80 participants attended the launch of the publication, including health care providers, nongovernmental organizations, international nongovernmental organizations, and civil society organizations and activists, signalling national commitment to support efforts to address violence against women and girls in vulnerable settings in Iraq.

“Violence in general and that against vulnerable groups like women, girls, and children, in particular, is a mounting concern worldwide and it is gaining a great deal of attention by the national authorities in Iraq,” said Dr Wael Hatahit, Emergency Team Lead and acting WHO Representative in Iraq. “The gender-based violence team in WHO Iraq, with the technical guidance of staff in the WHO Regional Office, are supporting national multisectoral efforts to address this issue scientifically and stress the importance of the health sector as a key partner in the prevention and early detection of violence in the country,” Dr Hatahit added.

“The handbook will provide efficient responsive tools adapted to the Iraqi context,” a message conveyed during the launch by Dr Maha El Adawy, Director of the Department of Universal Health Coverage/Healthier Populations in the WHO Regional Office. “We expect this manual to strengthen the health sector’s response to violence against women and to provide specific evidence-based guidance to improve health services for this vulnerable group,” she further explained.

Violence against women and children in Iraq remains a priority public health, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic as it directly affects their general health, safety and well-being in addition to limiting their ability to access timely life-saving services.

“It is important to ensure survivors of violence have safe access to health care facilities,” said Dr Lana Fouad, a mental health professional participating in the event. “There are still huge gaps in addressing the basic needs of survivors of violence, especially during emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic which has further stressed the already overburdened health system in Iraq,” she added.

Dr Hussam Shareef, a public health provider in the Ministry of Health, noted that “The Ministry of Health, with the support of WHO, will maintain its efforts to implement interventions outlined in the clinical handbook in 2021, with focus on training health care providers, conducting a quality assessment of health facilities to identify the needs and ensuring an accessible and adequate level of health care for women and girls who are survivors of violence.

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