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# Inaugural International Conference addresses child abuse in ultra-Orthodox communities

• By LIDAR GRAVÉ-LAZI

In over half of the cases of minor abuse in the ultra-Orthodox sector, the child knows his or her attacker.

This statistic was brought to light at the inaugural International Conference for the Treatment of Child Victims of Abuse in Jewish Religious Communities, sponsored by The Haruv Institute and MAGEN.

Academics, child welfare professionals and NGO representatives from countries around the world, including the US, UK, Argentina, Switzerland, South Africa and Australia, gathered in Jerusalem for the conference that took place March 3-5.

The purpose of the conference was to bring together international Jewish community organizations to discuss and exchange ideas and information on how to improve the treatment of child abuse in ultra-Orthodox communities around the globe.

"Treatment of child victims of sexual assault from the ultra-Orthodox sector is no trivial matter and I welcome the openness and understanding [for this issue] because this is a horrible plague that must be treated and eliminated," Prof. Asher Ben-Arieh, director of the Haruv Institute, said ahead of the conference.

According to figures gathered from the Haruv Institute and the Welfare and Social Services Ministry for 2012, the number of reports for every thousand minors – children aged 0-17 – in the sector stands at 1.4, compared to 2.9 in the general population.

However, these figures only reflect the reported cases, and it is estimated that for every one case reported between three to 10 cases remain unreported.

"The ultra-Orthodox sector has made



AN ULTRA-ORTHODOX family stands in front of a bus, serving as an illustration of the traditional haredi family that were discussed in the first International Conference for the Treatment of Child Victims of Abuse in Jewish Religious Communities. (Ariel Jerozolinski)

significant strides when in the last few years it decided to break the code of silence on the subject of sexual assaults, and we see this based on the evidence in the rise of reported cases," said Ben-Arieh.

Among the topics discussed at the conference was the difficulty in appropriately responding to child abuse within the community due to cultural sensitivities to the issue and a lack of trained religious child care professionals.

The Haruv Institute developed a program some two years ago to address this issue and has since trained therapists in the ultra-Orthodox community.

A leading authority on child abuse and

neglect in Israel, the institute was established by the Schusterman Foundation in 2007.

As part of its mission to reduce child mistreatment, the institute develops educational and training programs for professionals, advances research on child abuse and neglect and raises awareness of the issue.

MAGEN, founded in 2010 in Beit Shemesh as a response to a number of child abuse cases, focuses on child protection. The nonprofit organization offers counseling and education services to victims, their families and their communities.