

- **Name of the study:** Evaluation findings of: Providing workshops to raise awareness of the importance of early detection of breast cancer for women with Developmental intellectual disability and cognitive decline.
- **Year:** 2025
- **Type of research:** Evaluation
- **Catalog Number:** 890-700-2023
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- **Research Authority:** Shalem Foundation.

Abstract

This study was carried out by 'Michlol' - the Assessment and Measurement Unit of the Shalem Fund

The "Accessible Workshops to Raise Awareness of Breast Cancer for Women with Cognitive Disabilities" project was built and implemented in partnership between the Shalem Foundation, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the "One of Nine" association, with the aim of making breast health workshops accessible to women with developmental intellectual disabilities and cognitive impairment. Breast cancer is the most common disease among women in Israel (approximately 5,500 are diagnosed annually), and early detection leads to a 92% cure rate. According to the National Health Law and the Equal Rights Law, clear and understandable information is an enshrined right, but currently there is no accessible knowledge in this field for women with DI (approximately 11,112 women aged 20 and over). The project includes three phases: development of accessible content, training and piloting in 3-5 settings, and expansion to 10 additional settings. This report presents the evaluation of the pilot that took place in four groups (5 settings).

The evaluation was based primarily on a qualitative research approach, and aimed to be used primarily for improvement, design, and learning purposes. 5 frameworks (4 employment centers and 1 government residence) participated in the pilot, which were combined into 4 actual groups. The evaluation tools included: online reporting forms for supervisors and referents, questionnaires for supervisors and referents, and a questionnaire/interview with 22 service recipients approximately 3 months after the workshops.

The following are the findings that emerged from the supervisors' and referents' reports - the preliminary meeting with the guardian and staff took place in 3 of the 4 groups with medium-high success (rating 4/5), but its absolute importance remains controversial, mainly due to the relatively small number of participants. The workshops themselves were rated as highly successful by most referents, and the main contribution was increasing awareness of the issue.

The facilitators felt moderately successful (rating 3-4) in conveying the content. The presentations were perceived as appropriate, but recommendations were made to increase the use of images, reduce text, and use tangible aids. The second session was more successful due to familiarity with the facilitator. Splitting the workshop into two sessions was perceived as essential, and the third session, which was delivered by the facilitator, contributed to internalizing the material (rating 4-5). All facilitators reported that it was clear that most participants remembered the content in the third session. Despite a high sense of competence (rating 4-5), all facilitators noted that the training did not provide enough knowledge and tools – there was a lack of practice, meetings with those who would actually guide, and work on the presentations themselves. The main challenge in the workshops, reported by the facilitators and participants, was the difficulty in making intangible concepts such as "cancer," "tumor," and "lump" accessible. Additional challenges in the project included, for example, adjusting the level of understanding for each participant, changing the composition of participants between workshops, and difficulty recruiting guardians for the initial meeting.

The following are the findings from the questionnaires/interviews given to the service recipients (22 participants): It is evident that the basic knowledge was internalized - all 22 knew that breast cancer affects the breast, 21 understood the importance of getting to know the breast and 18 knew about the right to be accompanied by a doctor. Identification of changes in the breast was partial: the majority identified a change in size (18), but only about half identified changes in shape, color, and secretions, and only about a third identified a lump. 16 knew to contact a doctor in case of pain, and 14 knew what to do when examining in front of a mirror. In addition to acquiring knowledge, 16 service recipients expressed positive feelings from the workshops themselves (interested, happy, calm, confident) compared to 5 with negative feelings (stressed, sad). 17 did not experience anything that was "not good" during the meetings (only 3 mentioned things that were not good). All participants supported the recommendation for additional companies to participate.

The main insights and recommendations that emerged from the project evaluation are: 1. The importance of the role of the referent - the referent is the key factor for success, mediation, accessibility and continuity of the process, 2. Operational and logistical challenges - difficulties were reported in coordination, in recruiting guardians, lack of continuity in attendance, differences in cognitive functioning, and technical difficulties. These challenges cast doubt on the model's ability to reach a significant number of women, 3. Information and accessibility materials - the materials are well supported, but certain concepts remain difficult. It is recommended to rely on visual content, add tangible means, and reconsider the issue of posters in the public space, 4. Improving training for facilitators – more practice, simulations,

and discussion of real content with professional guidance are required, 5. Training of referents – it was proposed to train referents within the frameworks to lead training independently, in order to establish a positive impact based on their familiarity with service recipients and families, 6. Updating content – periodic updating is required in accordance with Ministry of Health guidelines, 7. Adapting the target audience and framework – employment frameworks are not necessarily suitable due to workload and time constraints. It is recommended to examine other frameworks: community housing, leisure clubs, or family centers, and 8. Expanding circles of influence – it is recommended to reach out to families and guardians and provide them with tools, and to maintain a channel with professional functions in large organizations.

Keywords

Breast cancer | Cognitive disability | Workshops | Awareness | Women | Program evaluation

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