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Identifying cases of violence against women and children: an essential skill set in family medicine

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Introduction: Child abuse, sexual and domestic violence are among the most destructive experiences afflicting women and children that result to physical, behavioral, psychological, and economic consequences. Physicians in the front line need to be sensitive and vigilant in identifying both overt and subtle signs of these violations. As such, identification of victims is vital to prevent further abuse and injury, as well as to manage the patient holistically.

Objectives: To assess the skill of Family Medicine (FM) residents in detecting cases of violence against women and children (VAWC).

Methods: Eight case scenarios were presented to resident trainees from government and private hospitals in Metro Manila. They were tasked to identify cases pertaining to VAWC, and distinguish the case type.

Results: Red flags that were easily detected by more than 80% of trainees were cases of rape and physical abuse towards women. Circumstances with moderate challenge were neglect, sexual harrassment, abandonment and sexual abuse, in that order. On the other hand, respondents had inadequacy in detecting cases of physical abuse towards children; while the most difficult to recognize was emotional abuse .

Conclusion: Acquisition of this new skill set may prove beneficial in providing the ideal environment for proper management and support provision for the VAWC subjects. Lack of knowledge and training in this rising societal and health threat may cause underdiagnosis of common VAWC presentations. Consequently, this leads to failure of identification, assessment, documentation, and management of such patients.