

# Policy Statement 2.12 - Abuse and Violence Victims and Dentistry

## Position Summary

Dental Practitioners must be aware of state and territory laws with respect to the reporting requirements of family and domestic abuse and violence. Dental Practitioners should attempt to provide a safe and compassionate environment to discuss issues of abuse and violence and have appropriate referral pathways in place.

## 1. Background

- 1.1. Violence is one of Australia's largest social, legal and health issues and is widespread across all cultures, ages and socio-economic groups in Australia.
- 1.2. States and territories have mandated that evidence of Child Abuse must be reported to the relevant authorities.
- 1.3. Elder Abuse may occur both at home and within aged care facilities.
- 1.4. The victims of violence are not alone in needing assistance and support, their family members and carers may also be affected.
- 1.5. Patients may present to Dental Practitioners for treatment or with signs of violence perpetrated to them.
- 1.6. Patients may present to dental clinics accompanied by their abuser who may attempt to maintain intimidation and control.
- 1.7. Clinical signs of Violence or Domestic Violence include:
  - extra and intra oral bruising and lacerations, torn frenum;
  - hard and soft palate bruising which may indicate sexual acts;
  - patterned bruising on the neck from attempted strangulation such as thumb marks, ligature marks, scratching or petechiae bruising to the face, mouth or neck;
  - fractured, non-vital or abscessed teeth caused by trauma;
  - fractured facial bones or signs of healing bones on radiographs;
  - bite marks and burns;
  - bruising and lacerations to the head, black eyes and hair loss from pulling;
  - excessive anxiety and nervousness;
  - oral aversion;
  - other injuries to the body such as injuries to the arms and legs; and
  - dental neglect which may be due to the abuser preventing the victim from receiving regular dental and medical care.
- 1.8. There are several well-established agencies, including 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732), which provide support and assistance to those suffering from the effects of violence.

*This Policy Statement is linked to other Policy Statements: 2.2.5 Prevention and Management of Oral Injuries, 2.3.1 Delivery of Oral Health Care Special Groups Children, 2.3.3 Oral Health Care Special Groups Aged Persons & 2.3.8 Oral Health Care Special Groups Infants and Pre-School Children*

## Definitions

- 1.9. DENTAL PRACTITIONER is a person registered by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency via the Board to provide dental care.
- 1.10. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE<sup>1</sup> is violent, threatening or other behaviour by a person that coerces or controls a member of the person's family or causes the family member to be fearful.
- 1.11. ELDER ABUSE is a single, or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust which causes harm or distress to an older person. Elder abuse can take various forms such as physical, psychological or emotional, sexual and financial abuse.
- 1.12. VIOLENCE<sup>2</sup> is the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation.
- 1.13. CHILD ABUSE<sup>3</sup> is all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.

## 2. Position

- 2.1. Abuse and violent behaviour are unacceptable in all circumstances.
- 2.2. Dental Practitioners must be aware of state and territory laws with respect to the reporting requirements of family and domestic abuse and violence.
- 2.3. Dental Practitioners are in a position to detect, support and provide advice to patients who present suffering from abuse and violence.
- 2.4. Dental Practitioners should attempt to provide a safe and compassionate environment for patients affected by abuse and violence to discuss issues of abuse and violence with them and have appropriate referral pathways in place.

### Policy Statement 2.12

Adopted by ADA Federal Council, November 22, 2019

Amended by ADA Federal Council, August 19, 2021

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<sup>1</sup> Family Law Act 1975 (Cth).

<sup>2</sup> WHO definition.

<sup>3</sup> WHO definition.