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# **Trauma in Early Childhood: Definition, Impacts, Treatment Approaches, and Interventions Study Report**

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# Abstract

## Background

In recent years, there has been growing recognition in Israel and internationally of the sensitivity and vulnerability of young children from birth to age six, and the need for tailored services to ensure their well-being. Children of this age are the most vulnerable of all children to trauma, including abuse and neglect. Their complete dependence on caregivers and their limited ability to recognize danger, interpret it, or report it expose them not only to harm but also to its long-term consequences. This recognition underscores the need to consolidate and conceptualize existing knowledge from Israel and abroad. In September 2024, the Research and Planning Administration of the National Insurance Institute (NII), together with the NII's National Foundation for Children and Youth at Risk, commissioned the Children, Youth, and Young Adults team, of the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute to undertake a study on trauma in early childhood.

## Objective

The study's primary goal was to provide information from Israel and abroad on trauma in young children, with an emphasis on methods of detection, identification and treatment, and on interventions and services designed for this population.

## Methodology

A comprehensive review of professional and academic literature from Western countries was conducted, focusing on research and empirical evidence. The review took place between September 2024 and February 2025 using academic databases and relevant search terms. In addition, 15 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted between December 2024 and March 2025 with policymakers from the health and welfare disciplines, as well as with variety of practitioners.

## Findings

The findings are presented in two parts:

- International literature: The literature highlights the extreme vulnerability of young children, the importance of age-sensitive therapeutic responses, and the need for evidence-based treatment approaches that address

identification, detection and intervention, and challenges related to this process. Examples of effective programs and therapeutic models are provided, based on principles such as early identification, multi-disciplinary collaboration, parental support, and professional training for caregivers and educators.

- Local field perspectives: Based on in-depth interviews, respondents described key challenges in addressing early childhood trauma in Israel including difficulty in recognizing symptoms of trauma in children of this age, lack of dedicated services, insufficient professional knowledge and training, absence of clear policy, lack of structured training programs for detection and treatment of trauma in young children, and the need for coordinated multi-system collaboration under government leadership.

## **Recommendations**

1. Formulate a comprehensive national policy addressing early childhood trauma.
2. Integrate a trauma-informed approach across all systems. This approach requires systemic change, **including** dedicated training, the development of a shared professional language, and cross-sectoral collaboration.
3. Develop innovative, evidence-based integrative programs for treatment.
4. Design interventions adapted to diverse populations, considering geographic, ethnic, and socio-economic contexts, as well as vulnerable groups such as children with disabilities and children living in poverty.
5. Expand professional training to include updated knowledge on trauma in early childhood, its impacts, detection methods, appropriate responses, and sensitive communication with parents.
6. Strengthen emotional support and resilience for professionals working with young children.
7. Reinforce parental involvement and provide guidance on the subject of trauma in early childhood, recognizing the central role of parents in coping with trauma and in recovery.
8. Create individualized treatment programs tailored to each child, with active parental engagement.
9. Promote systematic data collection, documentation, and long-term research on the prevalence and impacts of early childhood trauma.