

Assessment of Child Welfare Protection Committees in Fertility Treatment: A Survey of IVF Unit Directors in Israel

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Background

Concerns frequently arise among professionals involved in infertility treatments about the safety and well-being of children born because of these interventions. The Israeli Ministry of Health established a specialized expert committee in 2012 that recommended forming a local child welfare committee in each hospital dedicated for the evaluation of the welfare of prospective children who may be at risk of significant harm. However, the impact of these committees has not been systematically assessed.

Methods

In November 2023, we conducted an anonymous online survey targeting all directors of In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) units across Israel.

Results:

The survey achieved an 88% response rate, with 23 directors out of 26 IVF units in Israel participating. All but one unit reported occasions where concerns about the future child's safety necessitated discussion. These concerns included parental cognitive or behavioral disabilities, mental health issues impacting parental ability, and severe physical disabilities (Figure 1). Approximately 59% of the respondents expressed satisfaction with both the availability and the quality of the Child Welfare Committees. However, about a quarter found the response of the committees inadequate, and 14% indicated that they were unable to receive any response at all (Figure 2). The majority of the respondents identified the primary barrier to the effective functioning of committees as the lack of legal authority supporting the committees' recommendations.

Figure 1. Issues of concern requiring referral to a child welfare committee

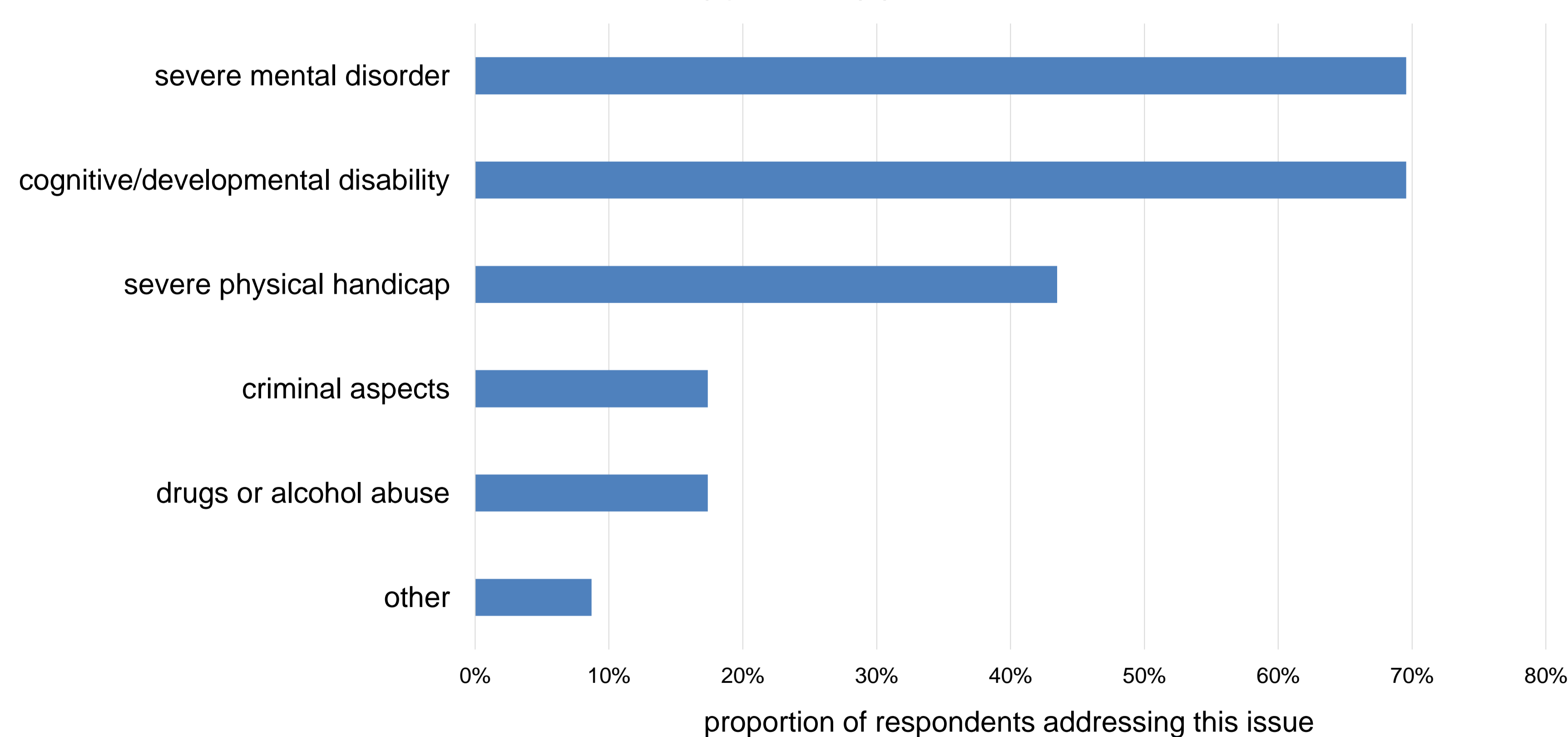
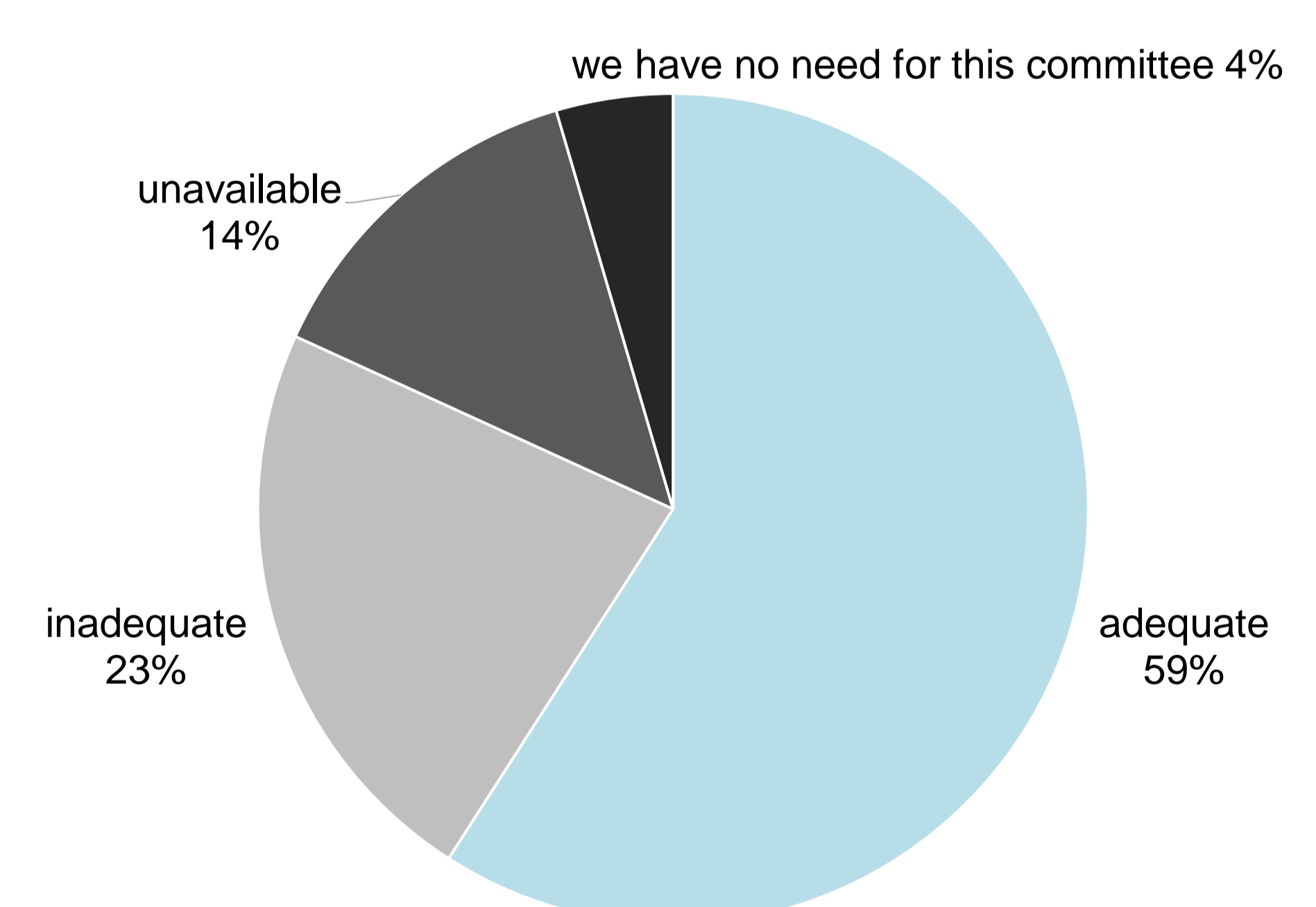


Figure 2. Assessment of Child Welfare Protection Committee Service: IVF Unit Directors' Perspectives



Conclusions

Child Safety Committees are operating effectively in most hospital-based fertility units in Israel. However, the lack of legal enforcement supporting their recommendations is a serious limitation. This deficiency emphasizes the need for regulatory changes to enhance the committees' authority.