



## **The challenges facing mothers of young children whose spouses have been mobilized by the IDF, and what each of us can do to help**

Bruce Rosen, Lior Beserman Navon, Yoa Sorek,  
Bracha Berlin, Rinat Cohen, Merav Borenstein

On October 7, approximately 300,000 reservists were mobilized by the IDF (Israel Defense Forces). During the first week of war, schools and pre-schools all over the country were closed; even a month after the outbreak of the war schools in many parts of the country had not returned to their routines. All over the country, and especially in the south, air raid sirens were often sounded, calling on the population to move to protected areas.

Mothers of young children (up to age 12) whose spouses were mobilized for reserve duty are playing a key role in dealing with this complex and challenging situation. Approximately 100,000 such mothers are responding to the day-to-day needs of their children and homes and are dealing with their children's anxieties regarding the rocket attacks as well as their own, alongside concerns for the safety of their spouses. Most of these mothers are also employed.

A new study by the Myers-JDC- Brookdale Institute (MJB) found that mothers of young children, and especially those with a spouse currently in the military, are going through an extremely challenging time, as detailed [here](#). Many of the mothers receive significant assistance from their friends and family members, but they still face challenges in a variety of areas. As detailed below, many individuals and organizations can do more to help these mothers, and doing so will be critical to our national and societal resilience.

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## **The media**

- The media can use the MJB research findings together with findings from their own interviews and investigations to communicate the story of the mothers: their challenges, the resourcefulness of the mothers themselves, the assistance that has already been given and the needs that have not yet been addressed sufficiently.
- The media have a unique capacity to communicate the story in a way that combines the personal dimension with the systemic-statistical dimension.
- The media can enhance public awareness of the unique needs of mothers whose husbands/partners have been mobilized, draw the public's attention to the needs of these mothers, and call on the surrounding community to proactively offer assistance, since a substantial number of mothers simply do not ask for help.
- Publicizing the fact that there are many mothers who face difficulties can help the mothers feel that they are not alone, that there are many others like them, and that society appreciates their efforts.

## **The families**

- The MJB research findings indicate that families – and particularly the grandparents - are the main source of assistance to the mothers.
- The families need to prepare for the possibility that the reserve soldiers, or at least a portion of them, will continue to be mobilized for a long time.
- Families should not assume that the grandparents will be able to continue to provide the bulk of the assistance; more members of the extended family should be involved.
- The families should acquaint themselves with the assistance options that exist outside the family framework and help mothers to use them.

## **Friends, neighbors, and community**

- Friends and neighbors can proactively provide social support through phone calls, correspondence, and visits.
- Mothers can be offered diverse types of practical assistance including childcare, help with housework, help with shopping, and help with arranging repairs and other services.
- Some of the mothers need just one-time help. Others have longer-lasting needs and would greatly appreciate an ongoing connection.
- Existing frameworks (such as parent WhatsApp groups in schools) could be used as a platform for offering and requesting assistance

### **Voluntary organizations**

- Voluntary organizations could assist mothers in accessing information about their rights and how to exercise them.
- Voluntary organizations could create effective opportunities for youth movements and participants in gap year programs to help the mothers and their children.
- Voluntary organizations could team up with local authorities to spread the word about their activities so that they reach more of the target population.
- Voluntary organizations could create collaborative digital platforms for connecting the mothers with local residents offering childcare assistance or help with housework.
- Voluntary organizations should consider giving priority to mothers who lack strong family support.

### **Employers**

- Employers should inform mothers in their employ about their rights, including the right of those whose spouses are in the reserves to work one hour less a day without this affecting their salary.
- Employers should show flexibility and understanding when mothers in their employ request adjustments to their usual work arrangements. Such requests might relate to temporarily working more from home, working flexible hours (for example, working in part in the evenings after putting the children to bed) and temporarily working fewer hours.
- During national emergencies, employers should consider creating temporary childcare frameworks at the workplace, particularly for those workplaces where physical presence of employees is vital (such as hospitals).
- Employers can provide the mothers with emotional support through workshops and genuine expressions of management concern.

### **Local authorities**

- Local authorities should develop mechanisms to integrate the many children who have temporarily moved to live with their grandparents (including those who are not defined as evacuees) into the local education system.
- Local authorities should continue to organize leisure activities for children of a variety of ages. To the extent possible, the activities should be held in places with access to protected spaces.

- Local authorities, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, should take steps to preserve and strengthen – to the extent possible - the regular functioning of educational institutions, despite the security challenges.
- Local authorities should give priority to providing assistance to mothers who have limited support from their own families and communities.
- Local authorities could help voluntary organizations by disseminating information (by neighborhoods and/or communities when appropriate) about the services offered by the organizations.
- Local authorities could create effective information sharing platforms for their residents. These might include "silent" WhatsApp groups where the local authority would update residents on their rights, on initiatives of voluntary organizations in their areas, and on activities of the educational frameworks.

## **Government**

- Both mothers and employers should be informed about their rights at work, with an emphasis on their right to work an hour less a day, when their spouse has been mobilized for reserve duty.
- Mothers should be informed of their right to receive psychological assistance from their health plans.
- The national government could offer financial assistance to local authorities that develop services or programs to help the mothers.
- The government could provide financial assistance to workplaces that develop childcare services for children of employees whose spouses have been mobilized, thereby enabling the parents to continue working.
- The government could collaborate with the local authorities to preserve the regular functioning of educational institutions, despite the security challenges.
- Temporary financial assistance could be provided to mothers of young children whose spouses have been mobilized. Such financial assistance could allow mothers to decide for themselves which services they need the most and from whom they would like to receive them (for example, receiving paid babysitting services from a familiar figure they trust).
- The government could expand the services that provide emotional support to mothers with young children and to the children themselves. This could include the provision of training on how to deal with fears and concerns for their enlisted spouses, alongside training on the provision of emotional support to their children.