



**A survey of mothers of young children:  
Experiences, needs, and responses during the 2023 Israel-Hamas War  
(With special attention to mothers whose spouses  
have been called up by the Israel Defense Forces)**

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## **Background**

Approximately 300,000 reservists were called up by the IDF (Israel Defense Forces) at the beginning of October 2023, in the wake of the October 7 Hamas terror attack on Israel. During the first week of war, schools and pre-schools all over the country were closed and 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 whose spouses were called up for reserve duty are playing a key role in dealing with this complex and challenging situation<sup>1</sup>. Approximately 100,000 such mothers are responding to the day-to-day needs of their children and homes, dealing with their children's anxieties regarding the rocket attacks as well as their own, and all this alongside concerns for the safety of their spouses. Most of these mothers are also employed.

There is a widespread impression that the mothers whose spouses have been called up are facing significant challenges, and that many of these challenges are also affecting the mothers of young children whose spouses have not been called up. However, prior to this study there was a lack of systematic information on the subject.

## **Objectives**

1. To analyze the recent experiences and needs of all mothers of young children, the assistance they have received to address those needs, and the nature and extent of unmet needs
2. To compare the experiences, needs and assistance received between two groups of Jewish mothers of young children: those whose spouses are currently serving in the IDF and those whose spouses are not

## **Methods**

The study was based on an online panel survey conducted between October 26 and November 2, a period that largely coincided with the first week of the IDF's ground incursion into Gaza.

In the first stage of the data collection, responses were gathered from 595 mothers who constitute a nationally representative random sample of all mothers of young children who

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<sup>1</sup> In this abstract the term "spouses" is used to connote husbands, wives, and other long-term partners.

had registered with the survey company. This group constituted the basic sample of the study, and it was used by the research team to realize the first objective of the study.

The basic sample included only 72 mothers of young children whose spouses are currently serving in the IDF, which was not enough for calculating reliable estimates for this group and for realizing the second goal of the study.

Accordingly, in the second stage of data collection, the research team used filtering questions to identify, and gather responses from an additional 334 Jewish mothers of young children whose spouses are currently serving in the IDF. The two stages together made it possible to assemble an expanded sample which was used to realize the second goal of the study. The expanded sample included 403 Jewish mothers with spouses currently serving in the IDF and 341 Jewish mothers with spouses who are not currently serving in the IDF.

## Key findings

### **1. Findings regarding all mothers of young children**

Mothers of young children are going through a very challenging time. Many of them are worried and tense about several areas of life. The most prominent concern is for the children: 93% of the mothers reported that they worry about their children to a great extent or a very great extent. More than 40% of the mothers reported many or very many difficulties in a variety of contexts, such as the lack of routine (69%) and demands from work (55%). 41% of salaried mothers are currently working only from home, about 60% work fewer hours than usual and about 20% were asked by their employers to perform tasks they could not or did not want to perform. About 30% of the mothers reported receiving assistance that afforded them time for them to attend to personal needs. About 10% of the mothers reported receiving other types of assistance. Many of the mothers were interested in receiving additional assistance. The most prominent type of assistance sought was financial aid (20% of the mothers).

### **2. Findings from the comparison between the two groups of Jewish mothers**

On many of the topics examined, the findings were similar for both the mothers whose spouses are currently serving in the IDF and the mothers whose spouses are not in the IDF. At the same time, a substantially higher percentage of the mothers whose spouses are in the IDF reported a very high degree of loneliness (21% versus 10%), worry about their spouses (47% versus 28%) and unmet personal needs. A higher proportion of those mothers also reported great difficulty in taking care of their personal needs (31% versus 17%). On the other hand, the mothers whose spouses are in the IDF receive more assistance than the other mothers in most of the areas examined, including assistance with childcare (38% versus 14%), assistance that gave them time for their personal needs (52% versus 30%) and assistance in preparing meals (22% versus 5%). When asked to indicate the area in which it is most important for them to receive assistance, the mothers whose spouses are in the IDF were less likely to identify financial support as their greatest need. Conversely, they were more likely to identify assistance with children's leisure activities and assistance with household chores as their priority needs.

## Conclusions and recommendations

Mothers of young children, and especially those whose spouses are currently in the IDF, are going through an extremely challenging time. Many mothers receive significant assistance from their friends and family members, but they still face substantial challenges in a variety of areas. Employers, local authorities, voluntary organizations and government agencies can do

more to help these mothers, and doing so would be an important contribution to our national and social resilience. Specific recommendations for each of these groups will be presented in the coming days.