



The Effects of the Israel-Hamas War on Young Adults in Israel: Survey Findings

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Abstract

Background

There are more than two million young adults aged 18-34 in Israel. Hundreds of thousands of these young adults were called up for reserve duty with the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas War, and many others are currently in compulsory military service. Young adults were impacted more than any other age group by the terrorist attack on October 7, 2023, and during the ensuing months of the war. Tens of thousands were themselves exposed to the attack and the war, and many more have family members and friends who were murdered, killed, injured, kidnapped, evacuated from their homes, or otherwise affected. Young adults are currently dealing not only with exposure to the traumatic events and their impact on their mental health, but also with upheavals in other areas such as education and employment that have disrupted their daily routines. All of this is occurring during a life stage that is characterized by a lack of stability, by the need to make many decisions and by challenges arising from the transition to independent living and personal responsibility.

Although young adults are found on all fronts during this war, they have received little recognition as a distinct and vulnerable group. Representatives of the Youth Authority in the Ministry of the Negev, Galilee, and National Resilience asked the Children, Youth, and Young Adults Team at the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute to conduct a survey among young adults in order to learn about the war's impact on them.

Objectives

The survey aimed to examine the impact of the Israel-Hamas War on young adults aged 18-34 in Israel in various aspects of their lives, such as education, employment, housing, their economic situation, and health. The survey also aimed to identify subpopulations that are particularly vulnerable to the effects of the war. This information can serve as the basis for developing policies and programs for young adults, with the goal of helping them to overcome the long-term effects of the war and to develop their resilience.

Method

An online self-reported survey was conducted from January 23 to February 8, 2024, approximately three and a half months after the outbreak of the war. The survey was carried out among a sample of 701 young adults representing the Jewish and Arab population in Israel. Data collection was carried out by a panel survey company.

Main Findings

The research findings point to the adverse impact of the war on young adults: 23% of young adults planned to start studying in 2023 but cancelled their plans due to the war; 28% had to leave their jobs for various reasons (furlough, business closure, inability to reach the workplace due to the security situation, reserve duty and layoffs); 53% reported that their ability to meet financial obligations had been somewhat or significantly affected; 50% reported a deterioration in their mental health due to the war; 64% reported a decline in their trust in the government; 25% reported being directly affected by the terror attacks or the war (were injured, were evacuated from their homes, their home or property was destroyed, they or their partner was drafted, they were in one of the communities infiltrated by terrorists or at one of the parties in the area); and 32% reported that a family member, relatives, or close friend had been harmed. On the other hand, the data also point to the resilience of young adults: 65% are optimistic (believe that their lives will be better in the future), 91% have at least one person to turn to in times of crisis and distress, and 61% have engaged in some form of volunteer activity or donated money to social organizations or private individuals (excluding family and friends) since the outbreak of the war.

A multivariate analysis examining the relationship between sociodemographic characteristics and resilience for two dependent variables - deterioration in mental health and economic impact (the reduced ability to meet financial obligations) - revealed differences in vulnerability to the effects of the war across subpopulations. Women, Arabs, young adults in non-marital relationships, and young adults with disabilities were found to be at risk of mental distress. The subpopulations found to be at risk of economic distress include Arabs, parents of children, young adults living in the periphery, and young adults with below-average income.

Recommendations

Young adults are the future of society and constitute the engine of its economic growth. Over the past four years, they have faced two major crises: the COVID-19 pandemic and the Israel-Hamas War. For the past several months, they have borne the burden of defending the country, while demonstrating fortitude and a sense of mission. However, they will need support from state institutions and organizations to overcome the effects of the war.

The research findings point to the need for a comprehensive response (programs in education, employment, housing, mental health, etc.) that is focused on the needs of young adults and that will help them return to their life trajectories. To this end, a dedicated budget is needed in order to provide assistance that will improve the condition of young adults in the short and long term and will expedite their recovery. Special attention should also be directed toward subpopulations at greater risk of being affected, such as women, Arabs, residents of the periphery, and young adults with disabilities, and effort should be invested in tailoring the solutions to their needs.