



## Care leavers versus at-risk youth in the community during Covid-19 outbreak in Israel

Short Report by

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### *Summary*

The survey assessed the short-term impact of the first wave of COVID-19 crisis on at-risk youth and care leavers in Israel. We surveyed 525 young adults from March 31 through May 2, to explore how care leavers and other at-risk youth fared during the lockdown in terms of employment, income, social support, psychological well-being, and fulfillment of basic needs. Findings showed that during the first wave of the pandemic in Israel, a staggering number of at-risk youth were unable to pay rent, buy food supplies, or afford hygiene products. Almost half of the participants reported carrying debt. In terms of mental health, one-fourth of participants reported suffering from severe anxiety and depression and seeking urgent psychological support. Only a few reported that their families would be able to support them when needed during the crisis. Care leavers were significantly more likely than other at-risk youth to deal with lack of basic need and familial support, and to receive financial or material support from national NGOs or local welfare agencies during the outbreak. Initial findings were presented to The Israeli Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs in May 2020. The results led to the enactment of a special rent grant and other benefits, which aimed to alleviate the pandemic-induced suffering of at-risk youth.

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## **Care leavers versus at-risk youth in the community during Covid-19 outbreak in Israel**

The worldwide Coronavirus pandemic has generated multiple challenges for modern societies, increased economic-psychosocial problems experienced by social welfare service users, and created on-going anxiety-producing times for service users and providers (Walter-McCabe, 2020). Despite the quick response of the Israeli government to the outbreak, social distancing and shelter-in-place policy brought to financial shock and additional social challenges. Unemployment rates have risen rapidly, as many were sent by employers to unpaid leave or were immediately dismissed. A survey of 2000 Israeli adults showed that young adults aged 18-24 at the time of the outbreak were hit the hardest, as 41% were sent to an unpaid-leave, and 10% were dismissed (Yaish & Kristal, 2020). Among unemployed young adults were those who were not entitled to unemployment benefits since they lacked the qualifying time-period required. During the first wave of COVID-19 pandemic in Israel, care leavers and at-risk youth (who grew up in the community) have experienced acute socio-economic distress. This distress was due to their lack of familial support and preliminary vulnerability. Also, at-risk youth had to deal with the loss of employment and the cost of independent living at the same time. It can be assumed that the combination of social and economic hardships could lead to a devastating and long-standing impact on their mental and physical health.

The current study aimed to explore how care leavers and other at-risk youth fared during the lockdown in terms of employment, income, social support, psychological well-being, and fulfillment of basic needs. The following findings are based on the first wave. The data was collected from March 31 to May 2, using an on-line survey. The snowball convenience sample included 525 young adults connected with or received services from public and voluntary welfare agencies during the year before the COVID-19 outbreak. Most of them lived independently or in transitional housing programs. Among them, 62.4% were foster and residential care leavers. Participants aged 18 to 30. More than half were 21-25 (53%), about a quarter were 18-21 (26%), and the others 25-30 (21%). In the following, we referred only to significant differences in the variables examined, between the two groups: care

leavers and other at-risk youth (who were not care leavers). When significant differences were not found, the findings refer to the whole sample.

In the time of the Covid-19 outbreak, 39% of the participants lived in shared-apartments. Among care leavers, an unknown percentage lived in subsidized shared-apartments of the Israeli national transitional housing program. 29.1% lived on their own, 15.6% with a romantic partner, and less than 5% lived with their biological parents. An additional 11.3% of participants lived in various housing arrangements, such as with their siblings and other relatives and at a close friend's house.

### **Facing unemployment, debts and lack of basic needs**

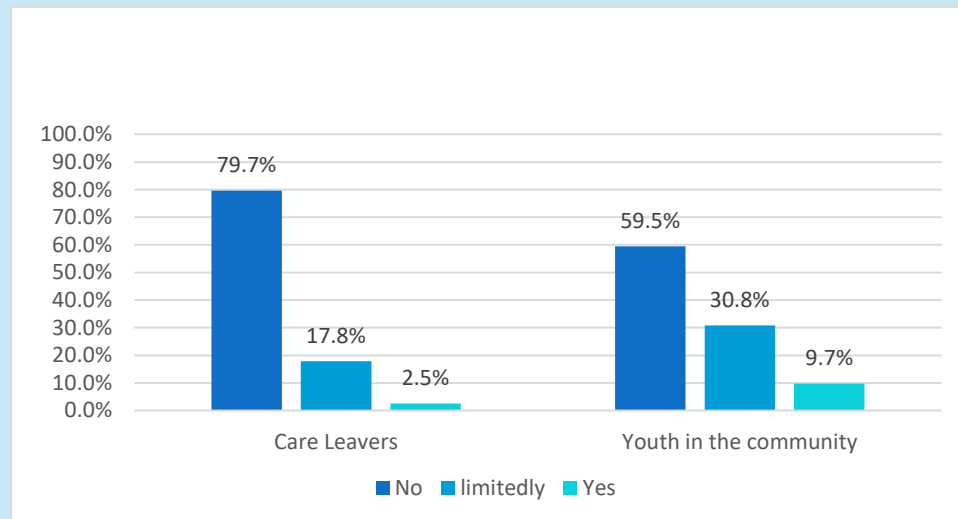
During the first wave of COVID-19, 40.8% of participants were sent by their employers to unpaid leave. Among these, 45.3% were not entitled to unemployment benefits due to their lack of qualifying period. Among employed, 75% reported they feared to lose their jobs. Among participants, 47.7% reported they had debt. Of these, 70.2% of debts reported, were to banks. Debts ranged from 1000NIS to 100,000NIS. An overall of 82% of participants reported that they might not have enough money to pay rent, and 27% could not afford hygiene products. Significant differences were found between care leavers and youth who grew up in the community lacking basic needs. 85.5% of care leavers and 77.6% of the other youths reported they might not have enough money to pay rent ( $\chi^2(1)=5.41, p<.05$ ). 53% of care leavers and 37.2% of the other youths reported they could not afford to buy food supplies ( $\chi^2(1)=9.81, p<.01$ ). 32% of care leavers and 19.4% of the other youth could not afford hygiene products ( $\chi^2(1)=12.06, p=.001$ ). Only 23.2% had some savings ranged from 1000 to 15,000 NIS.

### **Informal and Formal Social support**

Among care leavers, 80% reported on lack of potential familial support when needed, 17.9% reported their families would be able to assist them very limitedly, and only 2.5% reported their families would be able to support them when needed during the crisis. Whereas, 59% of youth who grew up in the community reported they lack familial support, 30.8% reported their families would be able assist them very

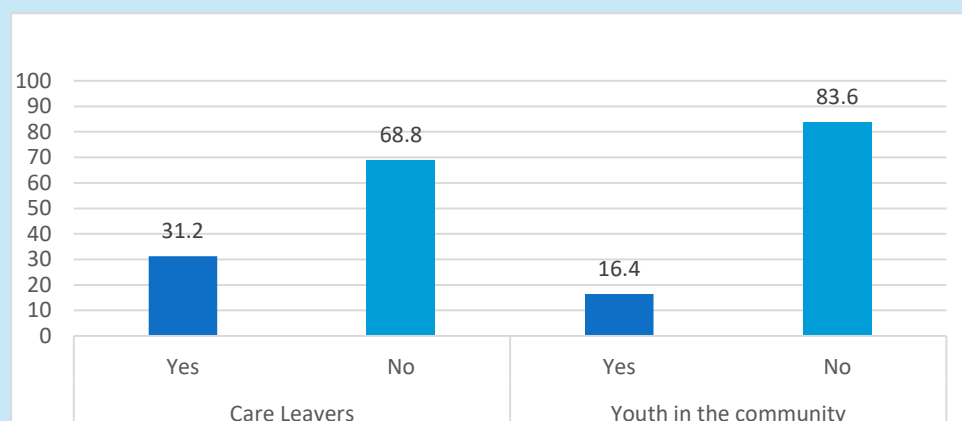
limitedly, and 10% reported their families will support them when needed during the crisis ( $\chi^2(2)=26.95, p<.001$ ).

Figure 1. Potential support from family and relatives, economically and emotionally



Thirty-one percent of care leavers and 16.4% of at-risk youth (who grew up in the community) received financial or material support from national non-profit organizations (NGOs) or local welfare agencies during the outbreak ( $\chi^2(1)=13.85, p<.001$ ).

Figure 2. Rate of participants who receive formal material support during Covid-19 outbreak



### Mental health

In terms of mental health, 67% of participants reported find it very difficult to deal with the crisis, and 25% reported they had been suffering from severe



anxiety and depression and sought urgent mental support. 27.2% reported they would have wanted to receive an on-line emotional support.

### **Post-secondary education**

Twenty-nine percent of care leavers and 41% of youth who grew up in the community were students ( $\chi^2(1)=7.81, p<.01$ ). Among students ( $n=127$ ), 25.6% reported they did not have a computer to use for e-learning, and 34% needed support in studying on-line.

### **Recommendation for policy and practice**

The evidence on the consequences of coronavirus pandemic crisis indicates that this crisis hits the hardest in the lives of the most vulnerable socio-economic groups (Bol, 2020; Bernardi, 2020; Recchi et al., 2020), and the young people (Yaish & Kristal, 2020). Although hit by the economic downturn, public and non-profit welfare agencies working with at-risk youth responded quickly to the aggravation in the financial and mental situation of at-risk youth, especially care leavers. Survey findings were presented to the Israeli Ministry of Welfare in May 2020 and led to the consideration of policy alternatives, including joint governmental efforts to enact a special rent grant and other benefits aimed to support at-risk youth in dealing with the short and long term impact of the pandemic.

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