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The Corona consequences: A spike in the numbers of at-risk youth who experienced violence and became homeless

A large increase in reports of at-risk youth suffering from depression, anxiety and violence at home between the months of March – May compared to the same time last year. According to a report by ELEM, which examined the influences of the Corona period, there's been a 5% increase in inquiries. "It's only going to get worse. It's not going away," they clarified.

Written by Maya Horodniceanu

A major increase has been recorded when it comes to reports about violence at home, anxiety and depression among at-risk youth between the months of March – May compared to the same time last year, according to a report published today (Monday) by ELEM. The report, which examined the influences of the Corona period on at-risk youth, also shows that there's been an uptick in youth that was left with no roof over their heads. Meanwhile, the Knesset Committee for Children's' Rights will convene today on the subject of the hardships of providing services to at-risk youth during the crisis.

ELEM has received 4,800 inquiries during the aforementioned months, a 5% increase compared to last year. During the shutdown, 251 youths reported that they were left with no roof over their heads – a 47% increase compared to the same time last year, and 145 reported they ran away from home due to distress.

In addition, 232 youths attempted self-harm. "When everyone said home is the safest environment, for our kids and youth home is hardly safe and COVID won't change that," says Roi Homri, Head of the Street Work Field at ELEM.

The report also shows that 336 youths reported violence at home compared to 195 last year, and that 160 experienced sexual violence compared to 83 last year. 40% of the youth reported anxiety, depression and crises of loneliness, 4 times more than in 2019. ELEM mentioned that the comparison was made based on an estimate of the same time last year.

ELEM said that its volunteers met the youth on the field and on social media, and they learned that for many of them the problems and hardships intensified during the Corona period, due to their lengthy stay at home. "If home was a place of tension and violence before, it only gotten worse. If home was a place where a parent hurt his child on a daily basis, during this period the parent won't go to work and the child couldn't go to school, so there was more room for abuse," says Homri.

He added that youth in distress who found ways to cope during normal times, now found themselves unable to do so. "They're used to, for example, sleep over at a friend's or family's house, but now they couldn't really wander. So there was a dramatic increase in the number of youth who had nowhere to go, and they ran away or got kicked out and were left with no roof over their heads." According to him, the expectation is for things to get worse and that "it's going to take a while before we understand the full implications of the damage the youth experience at this time."

Homri added that "we'll probably see more youth who need to stay at home, more unemployed parents and less face-to-face meetings with the youth, and I think it's only going to get worse. It's not going away."

"We'll see the social and mental consequences on the youth for a long time to come."

The report was handed to President Ruvy Rivlin yesterday and to Minister of Welfare, Itzik Shmuli. "The youth have recently started summer break, and while we're fearful of a second wave at this challenging time, there's no doubt that we'll see the social and mental consequences on the youth for a long time to come," says ELEM CEO, Inbal Dor Kerbel. "We'll do everything within our power to keep being there for them."