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## Still Dealing with the Ramifications of COVID: Worsening in the State of At-Risk Youth

ELEM's annual report shows that since the COVID crisis began, there has been an increase in mental distress, violence, and the use of addictive substances among the youth the organization serves. 1,177 youth reported being victims of online violence, and 1,682 reported being sexually abused - 2.3 times more than in 2019.

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**Violence on the street, domestic violence, depression, anxiety, and self-harm:** Today (Sunday), ELEM published its 2021 annual report. The report shows disturbing trends that indicate a worsening in risk situations among the youth ELEM serves. The report was presented to Israeli President Isaac Herzog.

The data show that 2,126 youth, young men and women, reported violence outside of home last year, 1.7 times more than in 2020 and 3.6 times more than in 2019. 1,893 suffered from domestic violence, 1.2 times more than in 2020 and 2.5 times more than in 2019. 1,177 were victims of violence online, 2.3 times more than in 2019. 1,682 reported having suffered sexual violence, 2.3 times more than in 2019.

There has also been an increase in mental distress. 4,000 youth and young people reported suffering from depression and anxiety, 1.9 times more than 2019. 3,446 suffered from loneliness, 1.4 times more than in 2019. 1,432 tried to harm themselves, a 1.2 times increase compared to 2020 and 1.5 times more than 2019. 950 dealt with eating disorders, 1.3 times jump compared to 2020 and 2.2 times more than 2019.

Examining youth's use of addictive substances, it was found that 5,097 consumed alcohol, which is a 1.3 times increase compared to 2019. 4,256 used drugs, 1.5 times more than in 2019. 2,060 attended unsupervised parties, that's a 1.4 times increase compared to 2020 and 3.3 times compared to 2019.

"As a society, we must not ignore the cycles of poverty, distress, and risk," President Herzog said upon receiving the report. "A society that does not help and support the helpless does not deserve to be called a society. We should remember that young people who grow up in supportive and protected environments will become independent, meaningful, and productive citizens."

Nava Barak, President of ELEM Israel, explained, "The lockdowns, isolation, and disconnect from frameworks during COVID have led to an exacerbation in youth risk situations and distress. After two years of COVID, life is back to normal. Still, we are witnessing an entire generation of children and youth being pushed aside and suffering from the difficult mental, emotional and social repercussions. We have seen an increase in inquiries from the youth we serve of cases of violence, depression and anxiety, drug and alcohol use, eating disorders, and self-harm. We continue to work for them in all areas and will not leave any boy or girl behind."

Dana Avraham, CEO of ELEM, said, "although the COVID epidemic might be fading away from our daily lives, we are witnessing its ongoing damages. We see exacerbation and worsening in the various risk situations and an increase in the number of inquiries. It is our duty as a society to join forces for the sake of our children, to locate the youth, to see them, to listen to them, and to support and help wholeheartedly. Provide tools, set boundaries, and strengthen formal and informal support systems. Only through collaborative work between all systems, welfare, education, and health, can we give the youth the best assistance."