



# EARLY CHILDHOOD IN ISRAEL IN THE SHADOW OF WAR

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Findings of a Longitudinal Study, 2024–2025

This publication is made possible through the generous support of the Beracha Foundation, the Bernard van Leer Foundation, Yad Hanadiv, and the Shashua Family Foundation

Taub Center Initiative on Early Childhood Development and Inequality

Jerusalem, September 2025

Editor: Dana Shay



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## Taub Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel

The Taub Center was established in 1982 under the leadership and vision of Herbert M. Singer, Henry Taub, and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC). The Center is funded by a permanent endowment created by the Henry and Marilyn Taub Foundation, the Herbert M. and Nell Singer Foundation, Jane and John Colman, the Kolker-Saxon-Hallock Family Foundation, the Milton A. and Roslyn Z. Wolf Family Foundation, and the JDC. In addition, generous support is also received each year from individual donors, foundations, and Jewish federations.

The Taub Center is an independent, nonpartisan, socioeconomic research institute based in Jerusalem. The Center conducts quality, impartial research on socioeconomic conditions in Israel, and develops innovative, equitable and practical options for macro public policies that advance the well-being of Israelis. The Center strives to influence public policy through direct communications with policy makers and by enriching the public debate that accompanies the decision making process.

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## Taub Center Initiative on Early Childhood Development and Inequality

The *Taub Center Initiative on Early Childhood Development and Inequality* is tasked with examining the effects of the young child's environment on future achievements and disseminating the latest research on this subject. The Initiative's goal is to assist in the advancement of effective policy to improve the environmental conditions of children in Israel during their early years of life, in order to improve their outcomes and reduce disparities due to socioeconomic background. The researchers involved in this initiative draft up-to-date research reports, literature surveys, position papers, and policy papers. As part of its effort to disseminate the latest available knowledge, the Initiative holds an academic seminar to provide a multidisciplinary basis — both theoretical and empirical — for the investigation of early childhood. The activity of the Initiative is guided by an International Advisory Council consisting of leading academics, policy makers and members of civil society organizations who are committed to the advancement and implementation of effective policy in the area of early childhood in Israel. The activities of the Initiative are supported by the Bernard van Leer Foundation, the Beracha Foundation, and Yad Hanadiv.

The Initiative is headed by Prof. Yossi Shavit, Principal Researcher, Taub Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel; Professor Emeritus, Tel Aviv University.

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# Introduction

Early childhood is a critical period in human development, and the experiences accumulated during these years have a profound impact on children's cognitive, emotional, and social development. The October 7th massacre and the war that followed — still ongoing at the time of writing — have left a deep scar on Israeli society as a whole. Young children are particularly vulnerable to the effects of traumatic events. Research shows that exposure to war in early childhood can significantly harm children's mental well-being and long-term development.

This booklet presents a range of findings from a comprehensive longitudinal survey conducted as part of the Taub Center Initiative on Early Childhood Development and Inequality. The survey focuses on the situation of young children in Israel during the war and how it has changed over time. The findings reveal a complex picture of early childhood in Israel and underscore the urgent need to develop support programs for children who have experienced trauma and for their parents. We hope the survey results will help policy makers and the general public better understand the importance of early childhood care and educational frameworks and the need to support young children and their families during this challenging time.

# The Initiative Longitudinal Study

To better understand the situation of young children in Israel and their parents during the war, the Taub Center Initiative on Early Childhood Development and Inequality conducted an online survey among parents of children from birth to age 6. The survey was carried out in three waves: the first wave, in January 2024, included 1,199 Jewish parents (mother or father); the second wave, in July 2024, included 804 Jewish respondents who had participated in the first wave (approximately 67% of those in the first wave) and 151 Arab parents; the third wave, in January 2025, included 801 returning respondents — 720 Jewish parents from the first wave and 82 Arab parents from the second wave. In total, 1,350 parents of young children participated in the survey.

The survey is based on parents' self-reports about their own situation and that of their children during the war. Its goal was to examine the emotional, behavioral, and developmental state of young children during this period, as well as the emotional well-being of their parents, and to explore various factors that may explain these outcomes. This booklet presents findings from all three waves of the survey, describing changes in the condition of children and their parents from January 2024 to January 2025.<sup>1</sup>

## Data collection

The data were collected through an online survey conducted by the New Wave Research Institute using the iPanel platform. The sample included an intentional oversampling of parents living in communities near the Gaza border and along the Northern front (as defined by the Home Front Command). In the first wave, 117 parents from these areas were included. In the rest of the country, parents were sampled according to quotas based on the distribution of education level and religiosity in the general population, as reflected in surveys by Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics. It is important to note that the sample does not include the Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) population, as participation rates among Haredim in online survey panels are extremely low.

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1 In the course of 2024, three studies were published based on the findings of the first and second wave of the survey. For the full studies see Blank et al. (2024), *Emotional and Behavioral Difficulties Among Young Children and Their Parents: A Status Report During the War*, Taub Center (Hebrew); Shay et al. (2024a), *Young Children and Their Parents During the October War: Longitudinal Survey Findings After October 7*, Taub Center (Hebrew); Shay et al. (2024b), *Young Children and Their Parents During the War*, Taub Center.



# Disruption to Children's Daily Routine During the War

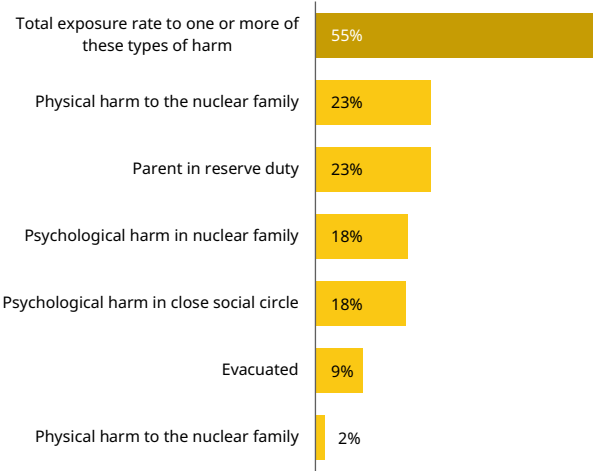




# More than half of families of young children in the survey experienced the war first-hand

International research shows that exposure to war during early childhood can harm children's mental well-being and development. The graph presents the share of families who reported in the first wave of the survey (January 2024) that they were directly affected by the war — whether through physical or emotional harm to a member of the immediate family or close social circle, evacuation from their home, or the mobilization of one of the parents for military reserve duty. Overall, about 55% of the surveyed families experienced direct exposure to the war in one or more of these ways.

**The share of families that experienced physical or psychological harm or injury**  
January 2024



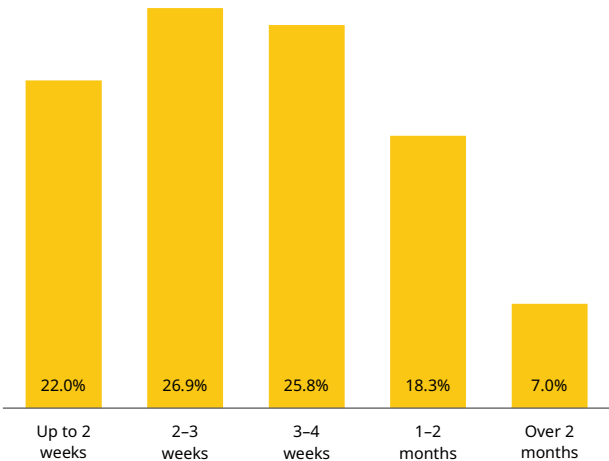
Note: Based on parental reporting in the survey.  
Source: Initiative staff, Taub Center | Data: Early Childhood Initiative Longitudinal Survey

## A quarter of the children under age 6 were without an educational framework for a month or more

Due to the war, early childhood education frameworks were closed for extended periods and operated irregularly — opening only for small groups, relocating to alternate facilities, canceling naptime, and more. As a result, children were deprived of the stability, security, and routine provided by educational settings — elements that are essential for healthy development. The graph shows the length of time early childhood education frameworks were closed from the beginning of the war through January 2024. In the first week of the war, all educational institutions were closed. Some 78% of the parents in the survey reported that their children's educational frameworks remained closed for two weeks or more, and 25% of them reported closures of a month or longer.

It is important to emphasize the critical role that stable, continuous educational settings play in the lives of young children. A consistent routine provides children with a sense of security and daily structure and supports stability for their parents as well. Research shows that the closure of early childhood education frameworks is associated with behavioral problems, developmental regression, and elevated stress levels among children.

**Length of educational framework closure  
at the start of the war**



Note: Based on parental reporting in the Jan 2024.  
Source: Initiative staff, Taub Center | Data: Early Childhood Initiative Longitudinal Survey

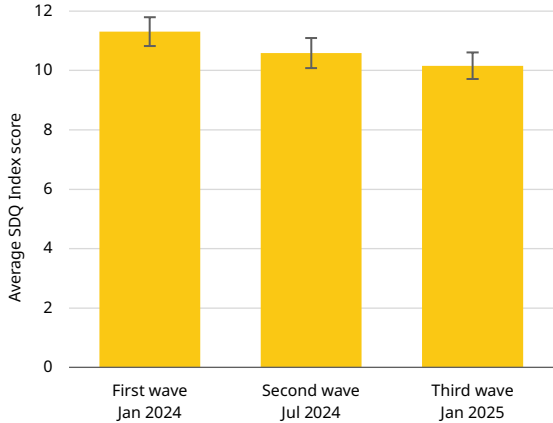
## **Children whose educational frameworks were closed for over two weeks experienced higher levels of emotional and behavioral difficulties — especially early in the war**

Prolonged exposure to emergency situations can harm young children's emotional and behavioral well-being. These difficulties were measured using the SDQ (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire) — a validated and reliable tool for assessing children's mental health (for more, see Shay et al., 2024b).

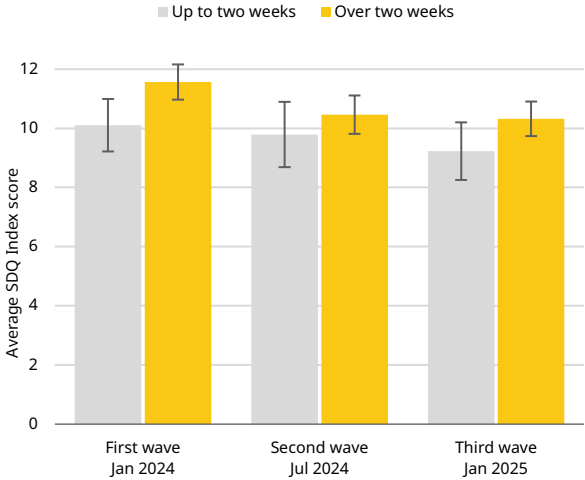
The graph on the left shows the average difficulties score among young children across the three waves of the survey. In the first wave (January 2024), which was conducted shortly after the outbreak of the war, average scores were high. In the following waves (July 2024 and January 2025), a statistically significant decline was observed at the 95% confidence level ( $p \leq 0.05$ ). These findings point to heightened vulnerability among young children early in the war, followed by a gradual decline in that vulnerability over time.

The graph on the right explores the relationship between the length of early childhood education closures and levels of difficulty. In the first wave, children whose educational frameworks were closed for more than two weeks experienced significantly more difficulties than those whose frameworks were closed for a shorter time ( $p \leq 0.05$ ). In contrast, in the second and third waves, these gaps narrowed and were no longer statistically significant. This trend may reflect a process of adaptation by children and their families to the new reality. Overall, the findings suggest that prolonged closures at the start of the war were associated with a worsening of children's emotional well-being, though this effect diminished over time.

Average emotional and behavioral difficulties among young children



Average emotional and behavioral difficulties among young children  
By length of educational framework closure at the start of the war



Note: Based on parental reporting in the survey. The I-bars represent 95% confidence intervals.  
Source: Initiative staff, Taub Center | Data: Early Childhood Initiative Longitudinal Survey

## **Lengthy closures of educational facilities are linked to greater emotional and behavioral difficulties among children, especially among those with high levels of exposure to the war**

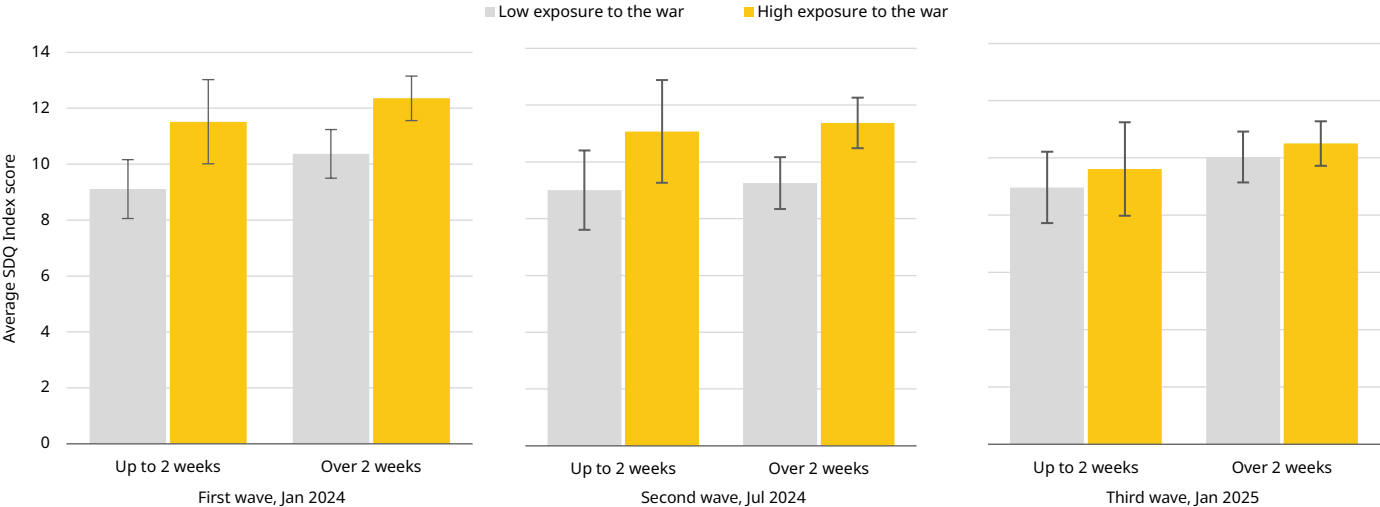
The graphs show the relationship between the length of early childhood education closures and children's emotional and behavioral difficulties, as measured by the SDQ index, broken down by children's level of exposure to the war. High exposure to the war is delineated according to parental reporting of exposure to one or more incidents of war, like evacuation from the family home, having a parent drafted into reserve military service, physical or emotional harm, or loss of a close family member. The findings indicate that in the first wave, children whose educational frameworks were closed for more than two weeks and who had high exposure to the war experienced more severe emotional difficulties (average score: 12.35) than those with lower levels of exposure (average score: 10.37), and the differences were statistically significant. In contrast, among children whose educational settings were closed for a shorter period (up to two weeks), no statistically significant differences were found between exposure groups.

A similar pattern was observed in the second wave in July 2024: significant differences between exposure groups were found only among children whose educational settings were closed for a prolonged period. However, by the third wave, a year into the war, the gaps between exposure groups had almost entirely disappeared — regardless of the length of the closures.

These findings suggest that the length of early childhood education closures had a greater impact on children who were highly exposed to the war, particularly at the beginning of the conflict. Among children with lower levels of exposure, the length of closures was not associated with meaningful differences in emotional difficulties.

Average emotional and behavioral difficulties among young children

By length of educational framework closure and exposure to the war



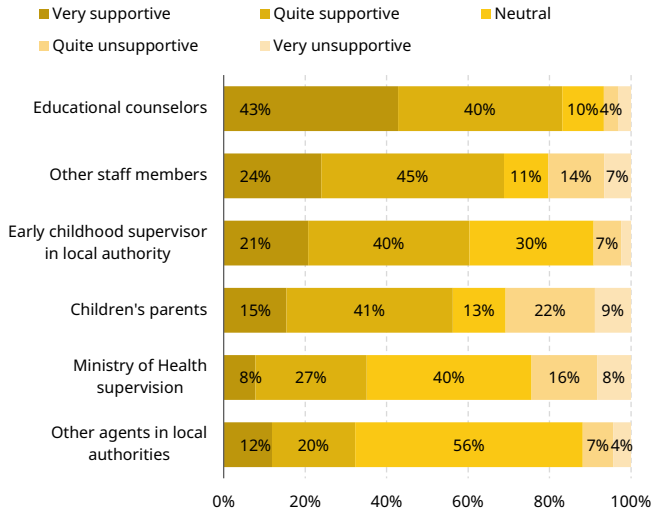
Note: Based on parental reporting in January 2024. The I-bars represent 95% confidence intervals.  
Source: Initiative staff, Taub Center | Data: Early Childhood Initiative Longitudinal Survey

## 83% of daycare directors reported that supervisors were a source of support during the war

It was not only children who faced difficulties — early childhood education staff also had to cope with significant challenges. To examine this, in January 2024, the Taub Center conducted an additional survey among preschool and daycare staff: preschool teachers, educational supervisors, teacher aides, and daycare directors. Directors of daycares for children aged birth to 3 across the country were asked about the level of support they received during the war from various sources, including staff members, parents, local early childhood coordinators, Ministry of Education inspectors, and educational counselors. The graph shows how daycare directors responded to this question. Educational counselors clearly emerged as the main source of support — 83% of daycare directors reported that counselors supported them, and about half described them as “very supportive.” Other sources of support were rated “very supportive” by significantly fewer respondents. Only about 8% of directors described Ministry of Education inspectors as a “very supportive” source.

These findings highlight the importance of increasing the number of supervision hours in daycares. Educational counselors provide staff with tools and emotional support, thereby contributing to the quality of care and education in early childhood settings.

Distribution of responses:  
**What is the level of support you received during the war from the following sources?**



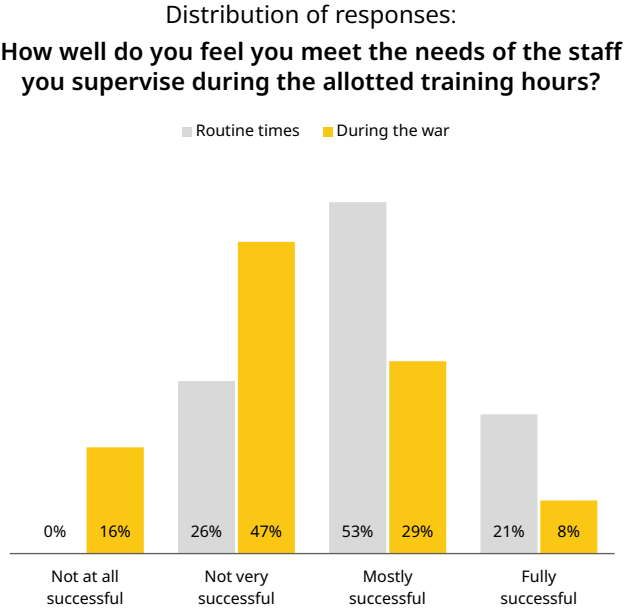
Note: Based on director's reporting in the survey.  
Source: Carmel Blank, Taub Center | Data: Survey of Educational Staff in Day Care Centers and Preschools

# Over half of educational counselors reported that during the war they were unable to provide sufficient support to the daycares they oversaw

Given the significant need for staff support — and the fact that each daycare is allocated only four hours of supervision per month — we asked educational counselors about their ability to provide adequate support to the daycares under their guidance, both during routine times and during the war.

The graph shows that under normal circumstances, a substantial share of supervisors feel the allocated hours are sufficient: over 70% reported that they are “mostly” or “fully” able to provide adequate support. In contrast, during the war, 63% of supervisors said they felt they were either “not very successful” or “not at all successful” in providing sufficient support to staff within the limits of their allocated hours.

During the war, a planned budget increase to expand supervision from 4 to 10 hours per month was canceled.



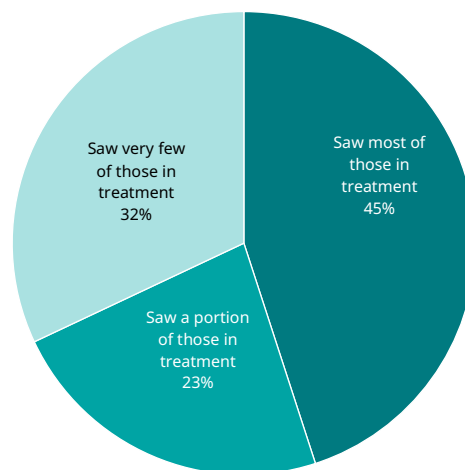
Note: Based on director's reporting in the survey.  
Source: Carmel Blank, Taub Center | Data: Survey of Educational Staff in Day Care Centers and Preschools



## Over half of the children in need of routine treatments did not receive them in the first 3 months of the war

Another indication of the disruption experienced by young children and their families during the war is the share of children who missed routine or essential developmental treatments. Parents were asked whether their child required regular treatments or support — such as speech therapy, well-baby clinic checkups (Tipat Halav), follow-up care at their health fund, and similar services — and whether those services continued during the first three months of the war. About two-thirds of children did not require such treatments at all. However, as shown in the graph, among those who did require ongoing care, only 45% continued to receive most or all of the treatments they needed during the first three months of the war. In other words, more than half of the children who required routine care did not receive it as needed during this period.

**Receiving support and routine care for young children in the first three months of the war**



Note: Based on parental reporting in the survey.

Source: Initiative staff, Taub Center | Data: Early Childhood Initiative Longitudinal Survey



# The Economic Impact of the War on Families

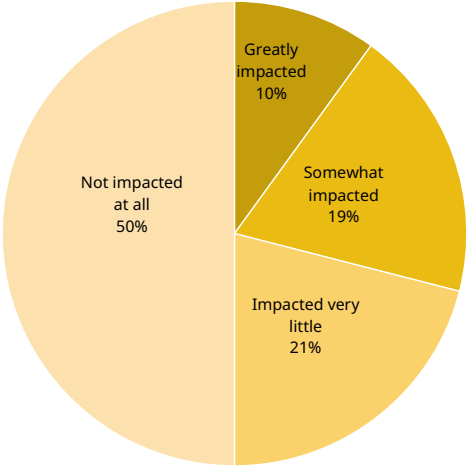


# Over half of the parents in the survey reported economic hardship due to the war

Economic hardship significantly affects the well-being of families, and, in turn, the well-being of children. In January 2024, survey participants were asked whether their family had experienced economic harm due to job loss, damage to a business, or other reasons. As shown in the graph, nearly 30% of parents reported moderate to severe economic harm, and overall, about half of parents reported some form of economic hardship. These findings point to the widespread economic impact on families with young children.

As noted, the sample included intentional oversampling of parents from communities near the Gaza border and along the Northern front (117 parents), based on the Home Front Command's designation of emergency zones. The data thus reflect, to a greater extent, the situation of families living close to the conflict zones, and do not necessarily represent the experience of the overall population of parents of young children in Israel.

Parents of young children reporting economic harm due to the war  
January 2024



Note: Based on parental reporting in the survey.  
Source: Initiative staff, Taub Center | Data: Early Childhood Initiative Longitudinal Survey

## Arab parents reported more severe economic impacts during the war than Jewish parents

To broaden the picture of the war’s economic impact on families with young children, we also examined changes in household income over time. This graph shows parents’ reports of changes in their family’s income between January 2024 and January 2025, broken down by sector. As seen in the graph, a higher share of Arab parents reported a decline in household income at this time than did Jewish parents. About 31% of Arab parents reported a slight decline in income, compared to only 17% of Jewish parents, and 16% of Arab parents reported a significant decline in income, compared to just 7% of Jewish parents.

Change in family income between January 2024 and January 2025



Note: Based on parental reporting in the survey.  
Source: Initiative staff, Taub Center | Data: Early Childhood Initiative Longitudinal Survey





# Mental Distress Among Parents of Young Children



## **As the time to get to the shelter shortened, parents experienced more anxiety and stress**

Since October 7, 2023, the security situation in Israel has had a major impact on the mental well-being of many families and especially parents of young children, who must cope with uncertainty, concerns for their own safety and that of their children and families, and the accompanying economic and educational challenges. To assess the psychological effects of the war on parents of young children, we measured their mental well-being using the DASS (Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale) — a widely used psychological tool for evaluating levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. The scale is divided into three subscales and captures the intensity of these experiences as reported by respondents during the week prior to the survey (for an additional review, see Blank et al., 2024; Shay et al., 2024b).

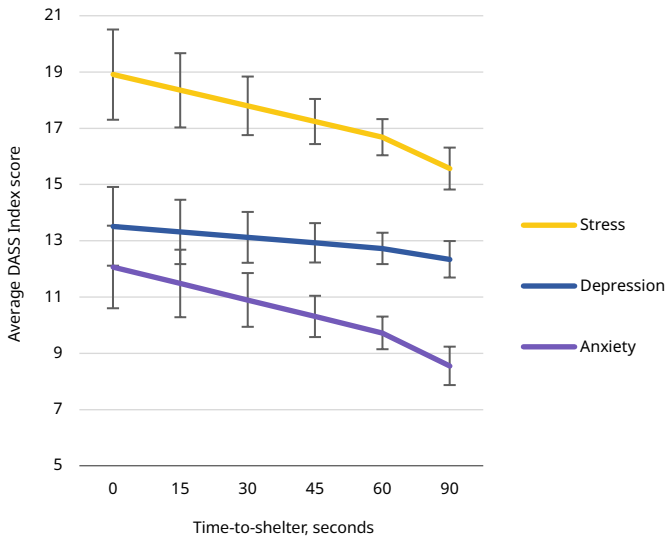
The graph presents average scores for the three components — depression, anxiety, and stress — according to time-to-shelter, a measure of exposure to missile threats. Each locality in Israel is

assigned a “shelter time,” which is the amount of time residents have to reach a protected space. Times ranged from immediate to 15, 30, 45, 60, or 90 seconds. The data were analyzed while controlling for demographic and socioeconomic variables that may influence parental well-being, including parental education, gender, household income, and number of children.

The findings show a clear pattern: the shorter the time-to-shelter (i.e., the greater the immediate threat), the higher the average levels of psychological distress among parents — particularly anxiety and stress. In contrast, among parents living in areas with a longer warning time, average anxiety and stress levels were significantly lower.

These findings indicate a clear link between physical threat and psychological distress: the less time parents have to seek shelter, the higher their levels of anxiety and stress. They highlight the heavy emotional toll paid by parents of young children living in areas more exposed to the dangers of war.

**Average level of symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress among parents of young children**  
By time-to-shelter, January 2024



Note: Based on parental reporting in the survey. The I-bars represent 95% confidence intervals.  
Source: Initiative staff, Taub Center | Data: Early Childhood Initiative Longitudinal Survey



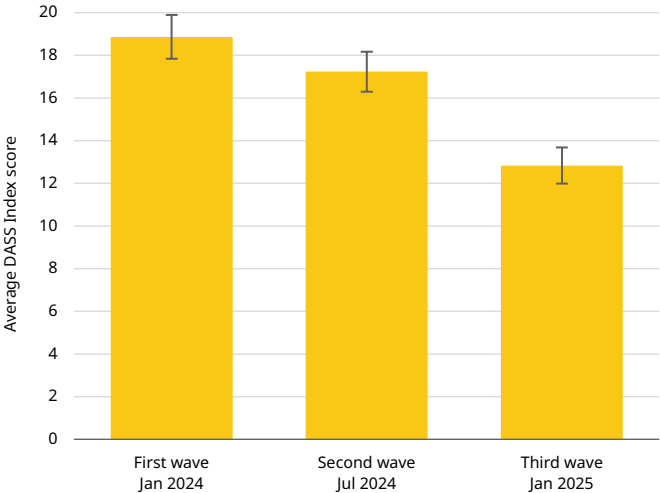
# Parent’s mental distress was high at the war’s start and gradually diminished over time

The graph shows the average overall DASS score (which combines the three components — depression, anxiety, and stress) among parents of young children over time. The first wave recorded especially high levels of mental distress among parents. In the second wave, distress levels declined, and the rate of decline increased in the third wave, reaching the lowest level observed so far.

The findings suggest that the level of parental mental distress lessened over the time of the survey although the decline was not uniform over time. While between the first and second survey wave there was a slight lessening of depression, anxiety and stress, the majority of the decline was between the second and third wave. This may indicate a gradual process of emotional recovery among parents that took place over time.

It is important to note that we did not measure parents’ levels of mental distress prior to the war, so we lack a baseline for comparison with peacetime conditions. In addition, comparisons with data from other countries are not reliable due to cultural and social differences.

Average level of symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress among parents of young children



Note: Based on parental reporting in the survey. The I-bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Source: Initiative staff, Taub Center | Data: Early Childhood Initiative Longitudinal Survey

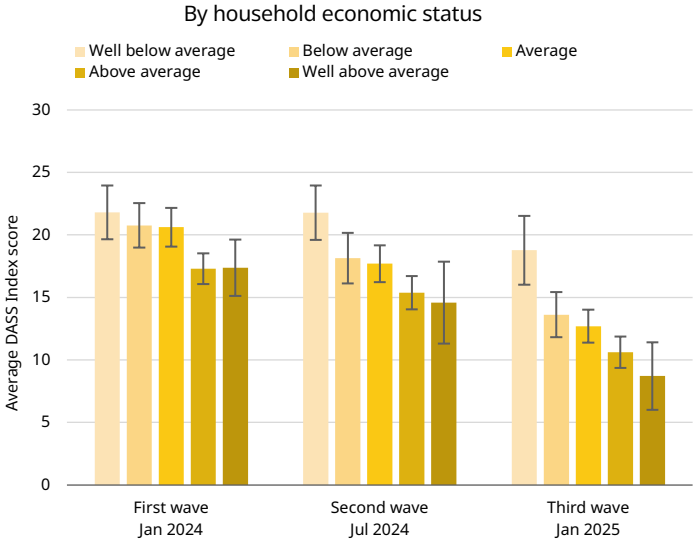
## Parents with low income reported higher levels of symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress

Parents of young children were asked to report their average household income relative to the national average, which stands at approximately NIS 17,000 net per household. The graph shows changes over time in parents’ reports of depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms, broken down by income level.

Across all three waves of the survey, there is a consistent gap between income groups: the higher the income level, the lower the level of mental distress. With the continuation of the war, mental distress declined across all income groups, but the decrease was especially pronounced among parents with above-average income. Among lower-income parents, the decline in distress was more modest. This suggests that their hardship may not be driven solely by the effects of the war, but also by ongoing struggles with economic insecurity.

It is therefore possible that the levels of distress recorded in January 2025 reflect the “baseline” stress levels of low-income families, shaped by persistent financial hardship.

**Average level of symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress among parents of young children**



Note: Based on parental reporting in the survey. The I-bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

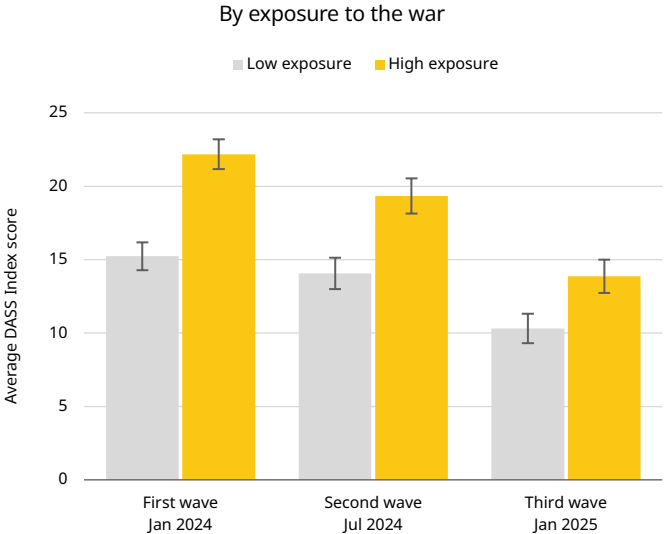
Source: Initiative staff, Taub Center | Data: Early Childhood Initiative Longitudinal Survey

Parents of young children with high exposure to the war experienced more symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress — even over time

The graph presents symptoms of mental distress (depression, anxiety, and stress) among parents of young children, according to their level of exposure to the war (high vs. low), across the three waves of the survey. The data show that parents who were highly exposed to the war experience significantly higher levels of psychological symptoms compared to those with lower exposure. This is a statistically significant gap that persists over time.

However, as time passes, a gradual decline in symptom severity can be observed — likely due to personal adaptation, strengthened coping mechanisms, and initial support provided to families. Still, despite this improvement, parents with high exposure to the war and its consequences continued to show significantly higher levels of distress even in the third wave. These findings suggest the need to consider ongoing support for this population, in line with emerging needs on the ground.

Average level of symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress among parents of young children



Note: Based on parental reporting in the survey. The I-bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

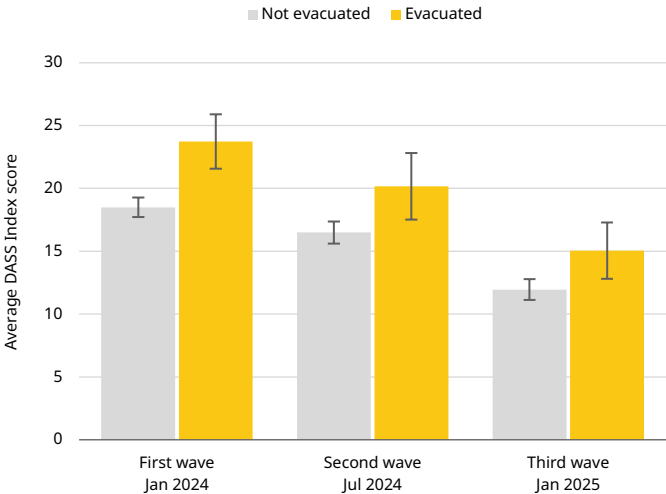
Source: Initiative staff, Taub Center | Data: Early Childhood Initiative Longitudinal Survey

## Parents evacuated from their homes experienced more mental distress — even over time

The graph shows the levels of depression, anxiety, and stress reported across the three survey waves by parents who were evacuated from their homes compared to those who were not. The data indicate that parents who were evacuated consistently report higher levels of mental distress than those who were not. However, both groups show a gradual decline in distress over time — a trend that may reflect the development of resilience among evacuated parents or the return of some evacuees to their homes.

Nevertheless, the gap between the two groups remained significant even after a year ( $p \leq 0.05$ ). Parents who were evacuated reported more severe symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress, suggesting a lasting negative association between the experience of evacuation and parents' mental well-being.

**Average level of symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress among parents of young children**  
By evacuation status due to the war



Note: Based on parental reporting in the survey. The I-bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

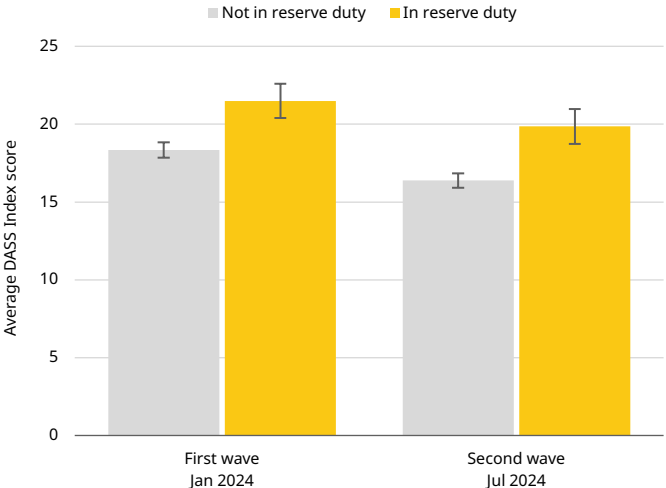
Source: Initiative staff, Taub Center | Data: Early Childhood Initiative Longitudinal Survey

## Parents with a partner in reserve duty reported higher levels of mental distress

A partner's reserve military service can be a significant source of stress for parents of young children, especially during emergencies such as war. The graph presents the emotional difficulties of parents of young children over the first two survey waves, broken down by whether a parent was called for reserve duty or not. The data show that parents whose partners were mobilized since the beginning of the war reported greater emotional difficulties — both in the first wave and again six months later — compared to parents whose partners were not called up. The difference was statistically significant in both the first and second waves, indicating that reserve duty is associated with higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms among the partners who remain at home.

### Level of symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress among parents of young children

By reserve duty status of a parent, January and July 2024



Note: Based on parental reporting in the survey. The I-bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Source: Initiative staff, Taub Center | Data: Early Childhood Initiative Longitudinal Survey

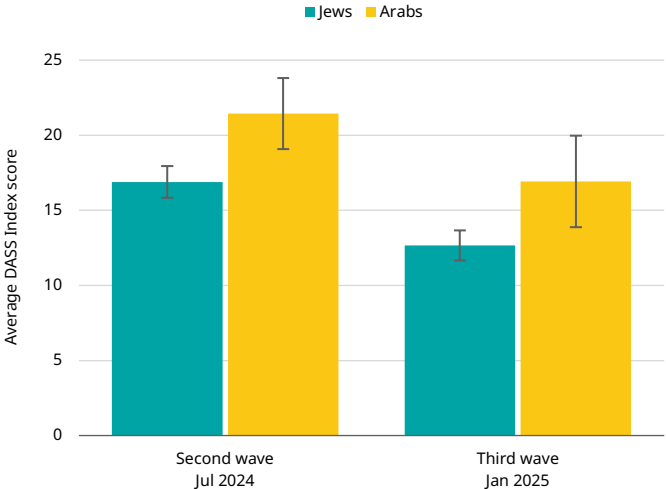
## Arab parents of young children experience more symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress than Jewish parents — even over time

To understand the different dynamics of mental distress across sectors, symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress were examined among Jewish and Arab parents at two points in time: July 2024 and January 2025. The data reveal consistent and significant gaps: on average, Arab parents reported higher levels of psychological symptoms than did Jewish parents. Although both groups showed a decline in symptom severity over the six-month period, the gaps between the groups remained statistically significant ( $p = 0.00$ ).

However, it is possible that these findings reflect not only the impact of the war on parents' mental health, but also the differing living conditions of the two groups. The high rate of homicides in Arab society, employment instability, and feelings of exclusion and insecurity may help explain the particularly high levels of mental distress among Arab parents.

### Average level of symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress among parents of young children

By sector, July 2024 and January 2025



Note: Based on parental reporting in the survey. The I-bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Source: Initiative staff, Taub Center | Data: Early Childhood Initiative Longitudinal Survey

## **Parents evacuated from their homes and those with a partner in reserve duty at the start of the war expressed a decline in their day-to-day functioning**

Parents in the survey were asked to assess whether their functioning in various areas had changed for better or worse — their work or academic performance, their patience with their children, their ability to concentrate, and their peace of mind — compared to their situation before the outbreak of the war. The rating scale ranged from 1 (“much worse”) to 5 (“much better”), with a score of 3 indicating that parents perceived no change in their functioning.

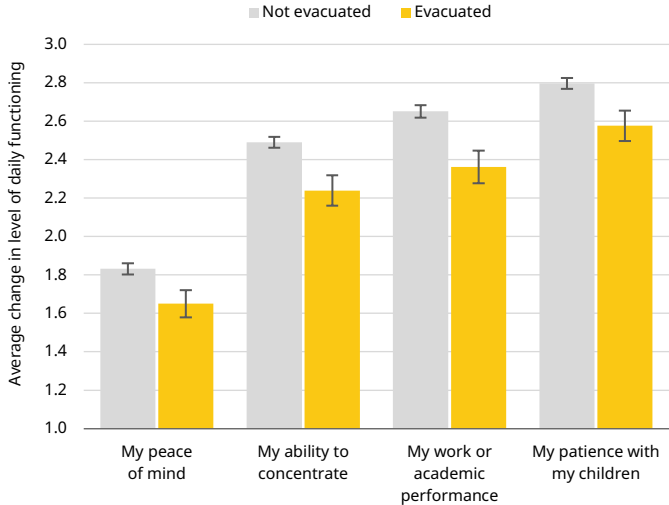
The graphs show that parents who were evacuated from their homes due to the war, as well as those whose partner was called up for active reserve duty at the outbreak of the war, reported a noticeable decline in functioning across all four areas examined, three months into the war (January 2024). The average functioning of evacuated parents was significantly lower than

that of parents who were not evacuated, and the same was true for parents whose partner served in the reserves, compared to those whose partner was not mobilized. The differences between the groups in each of the four areas were statistically significant ( $p \leq 0.05$ ).

These findings highlight the negative relationship between evacuation from one's home or a partner's reserve duty and parents' daily functioning. They further indicate that evacuation and reserve duty affect not only parents' mental well-being but also their ability to function at home and at work. A decline in functioning in areas such as patience with children and ability to concentrate may point to a deterioration in parental quality of life and a reduced capacity to manage daily life effectively which may also impact family communication.

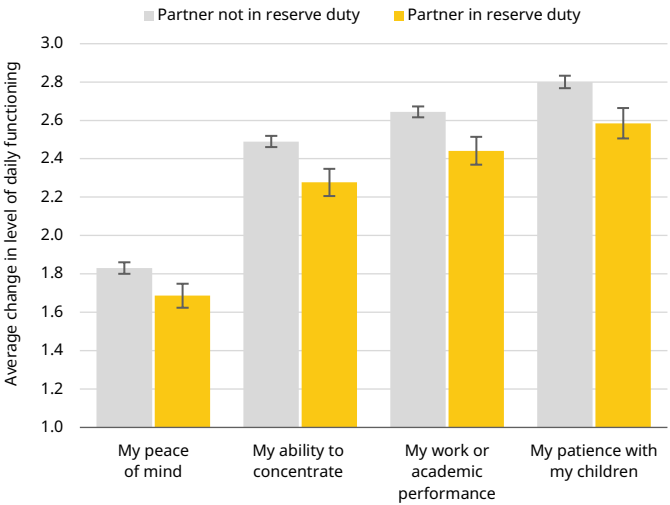
Average change in level of daily functioning among parents of young children

By evacuation status due to the war, January 2024



Average change in level of daily functioning among parents of young children

By reserve duty status of a parent, January 2024



Note: Based on parental reporting in the survey. The I-bars represent 95% confidence intervals.  
Source: Initiative staff, Taub Center | Data: Early Childhood Initiative Longitudinal Survey



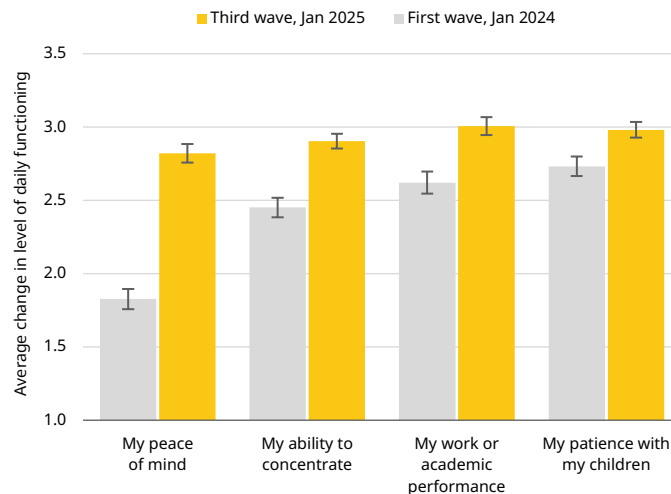
## Parents' day-to-day functioning declined considerably at the start of the war — but stabilized over the year

In January 2024, about three months after the outbreak of the war, many parents reported a decline in their functioning compared to the period before October 7. The most significant impact was observed in their sense of peace of mind (average score: 1.82), while areas such as work or academic performance, patience with children, and ability to concentrate showed a more moderate decline (average score: 2.60). In other words, there was a decline in daily functioning, though in most cases it was not extreme.

A year later, in January 2025, parents were asked to compare their current state to their functioning one month earlier. This time, a different picture emerged: most parents reported stability, with an overall average of 2.90 — suggesting that functioning had not significantly improved, but also had not continued to deteriorate.

Overall, the findings likely reflect a process of adaptation to a new routine — even if that routine is shaped by war. It is important to note that while the graph shows that parental functioning did not continue to decline a year after the war began, it does not indicate that it improved.

**Average change in the level of daily functioning among parents of young children**



Note: Based on parental reporting in the survey. The I-bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Source: Initiative staff, Taub Center | Data: Early Childhood Initiative Longitudinal Survey



# Emotional and Behavioral Difficulties Among Children

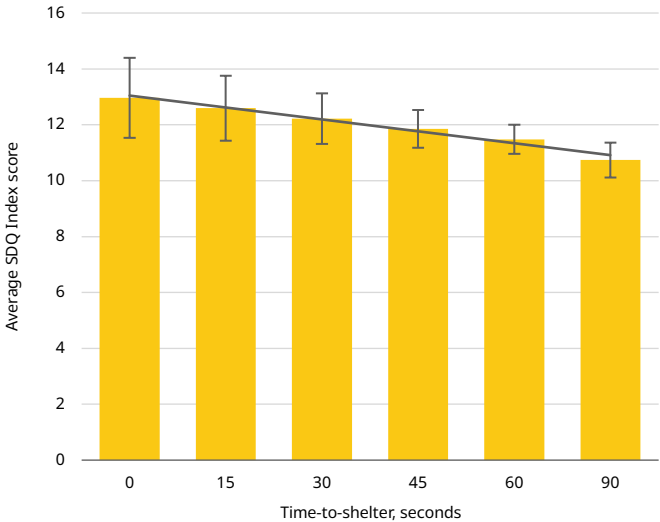


## With less time to reach the shelter, children experienced more emotional and behavioral issues

Time to reach shelter is also associated with the level of emotional and behavioral difficulties experienced by children shortly after the outbreak of the war. The graph presents the predicted averages of the SDQ (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire) score by time-to-shelter. The findings show that the more time a family has to reach a protected space, the fewer difficulties parents report in their children. This result is based on a linear regression model controlling for sociodemographic variables: parental education, child's gender and age, household income, number of children in the family, and whether the family was evacuated from their home. The data indicate that children living in areas with greater exposure to the security situation — as reflected in shorter times to reach shelter — experience more emotional and behavioral difficulties. Interestingly, even when rocket fire expanded to areas farther from the border, such as the Tel Aviv metropolitan area (Gush Dan and Jerusalem), children living in places with a 90-second warning time experienced fewer difficulties than those in areas with shorter response times.

These findings highlight the impact of prolonged security threats on the mental well-being of young children and their parents, and they underscore the need to provide psychological support to families living in border areas.

**Average emotional and behavioral difficulties among young children**  
By time-to-shelter



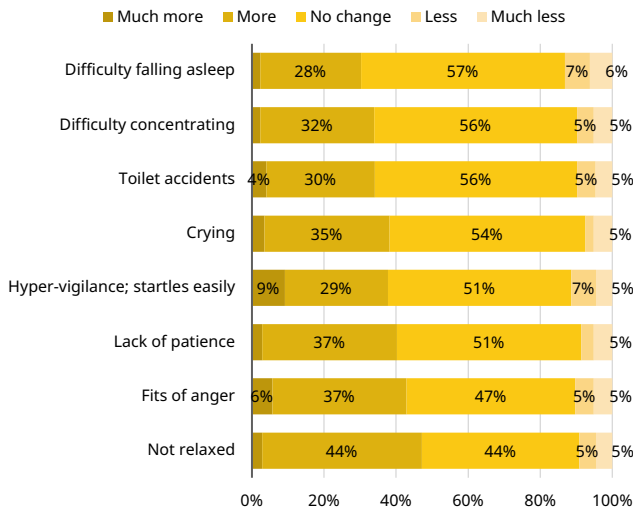
Note: Based on parental reporting in the survey. The I-bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Source: Initiative staff, Taub Center | Data: Early Childhood Initiative Longitudinal Survey

## Day care directors for children up to age 3 reported numerous difficulties for children during the war

In January 2024, the Taub Center conducted an additional survey — this time among preschool teachers, educational supervisors, teacher aides in daycares and preschools, and directors of early childhood education settings (see pages 14–15). As part of the survey, directors of daycares for children aged birth to 3 across the country were asked about a range of difficulties and behaviors observed in children since the outbreak of the war — such as frequent crying, loss of toilet control, or restlessness — and were asked to assess whether the frequency of these behaviors had changed compared to the period before the war. The findings indicate that these difficulties became more common among young children. About half of the directors reported an increase in restlessness, and over 40% noted a rise in behaviors such as impatience, tantrums, and heightened alertness or fear in response to environmental stimuli. More than a quarter of directors also reported an increase in sleep difficulties and loss of toilet control. It appears that the war intensified the typical developmental challenges of early childhood — something clearly reflected in the daycare settings where children spend most of their day.

Rate of change in the frequency of various difficulties among children ages birth to 3 since the start of the war



Note: Based on director's reporting in the survey.  
Source: Carmel Blank, Taub Center | Data: Survey of Educational Staff in Day Care Centers and Preschools

# Children with a parent in reserve duty experienced more emotional and behavioral regression at the start of the war

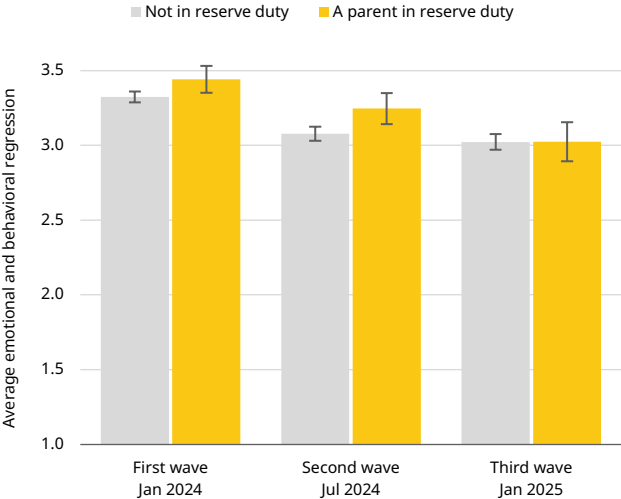
This graph compares emotional and behavioral regression among children whose parent was in reserve service during the war and those whose parents were not, across survey waves. Regression was reported by parents, based on changes in their child's condition compared to three months earlier, and included symptoms such as fear of sudden noises, tantrums, or trouble falling asleep. Responses were on a 1–5 scale, where 1 = “much less” and 5 = “much more.”

In January and July 2024, children with a parent in reserve duty showed significantly higher regression than those without. By January 2025, more than a year into the war, regression levels declined for all children and the gap disappeared, suggesting adaptation to the prolonged emergency.

It should be noted that reserve duty was tracked over the entire war, with mobilization rates higher at the start. Thus, in early 2024, children were often assessed while their parent was still serving or had just returned, whereas by January 2025 many had been back home for over a year, narrowing differences between groups.

## Average emotional and behavioral regression among young children

By reserve duty of a parent, January 2024–January 2025

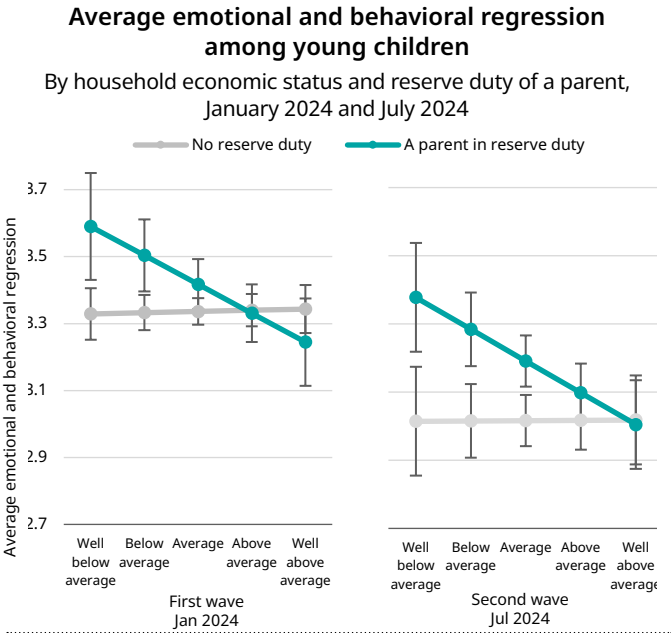


Note: Based on parental reporting in the survey. The I-bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Source: Initiative staff, Taub Center | Data: Early Childhood Initiative Longitudinal Survey

## Children with a parent in reserve duty experienced more emotional and behavioral regression — especially in low-income households

The graphs show the relationship between the degree of children’s emotional and behavioral regression and the family’s income level, distinguishing between children whose parents served in the reserves and those whose parents did not. Among children from low-income families with a parent in reserve duty, emotional regression was significantly greater than among children from similar families whose parent was not mobilized. As income level rises, the gap between children of reservists and children of non-reservists narrows, and in the highest income group, the difference nearly disappears — or even reverses. In addition, between January and July 2024, emotional regression declined across all income groups — but the decline was more pronounced among children whose parents did not serve in the reserves, meaning that the gap between the two groups widened over time, especially among low-income families. These findings suggest that economic resources have a protective effect: higher-income families are better able to buffer the negative impact of a parent’s absence on the child’s well-being, while lower-income families are more vulnerable to this negative effect, even over time. It is possible that these families have fewer resources to cope with the consequences of the war, which may exacerbate the emotional and behavioral difficulties experienced by their children.



Note: Based on parental reporting in the survey. The I-bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Source: Initiative staff, Taub Center | Data: Early Childhood Initiative Longitudinal Survey

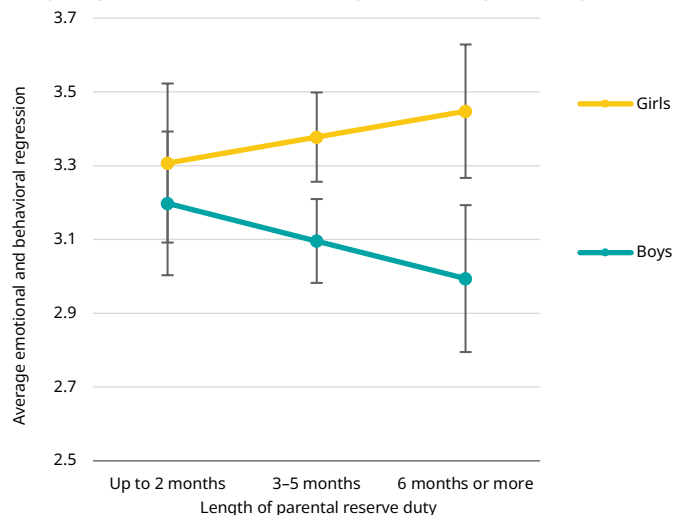
## Girls experienced more emotional and behavioral regression following the prolonged absence of a parent due to reserve duty

The graph shows the average level of emotional and behavioral regression among children, based on the length of the parent's reserve duty, broken down by gender. It appears that differences within gender groups are not statistically significant, for example, significant differences were not found between girls with a parent in reserve duty for a short period of time or for a more prolonged duration and the same for boys. Nevertheless, the data suggest that among children whose parent served a prolonged period in the reserves, girls experienced, on average, greater emotional and behavioral difficulties than boys. It is important to note that these findings were obtained while controlling for additional variables such as the child's age, parents' education level, household income, family status, and family size.

This finding may indicate increased sensitivity among girls to a parent's prolonged absence due to reserve duty and highlights the need for targeted emotional support for them in such situations.

### Average emotional and behavioral regression among young children

By length of parental reserve duty and child's gender, July 2024



Note: Based on parental reporting in the survey. The I-bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

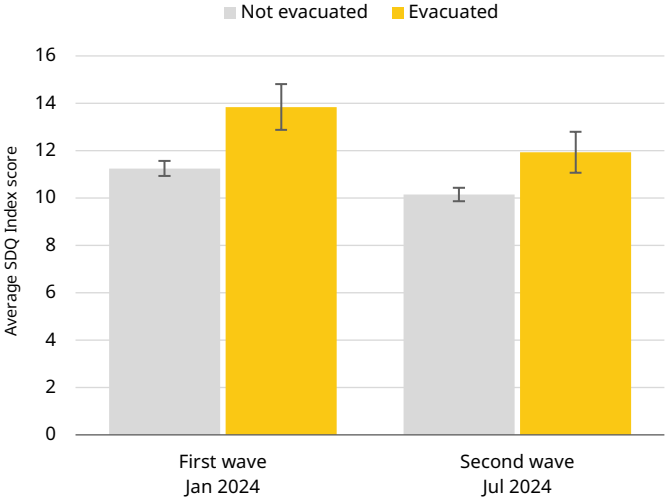
Source: Initiative staff, Taub Center | Data: Early Childhood Initiative Longitudinal Survey

## Like their parents, children who were evacuated from their homes experienced greater emotional difficulties — including over time

Evacuation from one’s place of residence during the war may also affect children’s well-being. This graph illustrates the relationship between evacuation due to the war and the level of children’s emotional and behavioral difficulties, as measured by the SDQ index. As expected, and consistent with the findings observed among parents, children who were evacuated from their homes due to the war experienced more severe emotional and behavioral difficulties than children who were not evacuated. Although there was a significant decline in the overall level of difficulties among all children between January and July 2024, the gap between evacuated and non-evacuated children persisted, highlighting the hardship caused by evacuation.

### Average emotional and behavioral difficulties among young children

By evacuation status, January 2024 and July 2024



Note: Based on parental reporting in the survey. The I-bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Source: Initiative staff, Taub Center | Data: Early Childhood Initiative Longitudinal Survey

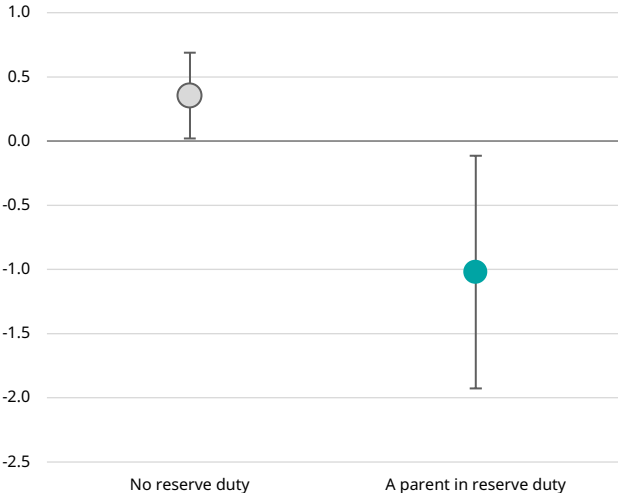


# A decline in school readiness among children whose parents served in the reserves

The graph shows the school readiness levels of young children based on whether their parents were called up for reserve duty after the outbreak of the war, as reported by parents in the first wave of the survey. The findings indicate that children whose parents were mobilized during this period were rated as having lower school readiness compared to children whose parents did not serve in the reserves. It is important to emphasize that this result was obtained while controlling for a wide range of demographic, family, and emotional variables — including the child's age and gender, household income, parents' education level, family structure, number of children in the household, the emotional state of the parent who remained at home, and the child's own emotional well-being.

This outcome may reflect the impact of a parent's absence during a time of crisis, and the challenges it presents for young children — particularly at a critical stage of preparing for entry into formal educational settings.

**Average level of school readiness among ages 4–6**  
By parental reserve duty, January 2024



Note: Based on parental reporting in the survey. The I-bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Source: Initiative staff, Taub Center | Data: Early Childhood Initiative Longitudinal Survey



# Policy Options

The findings presented in this booklet show that the harms of war have not spared young children (ages birth to age 6). Many young children in Israel experienced being evacuated from their homes, the absence of a parent due to reserve military service, or had an immediate family member who was physically or psychologically harmed by the war. A significant share of children and their parents were exposed to sirens and rocket fire, and their daily routines were disrupted by prolonged closures of educational settings and the suspension of routine treatments essential for young children. Economic hardship due to the war also affected many families. In this context, it is not surprising that a considerable share of young children are showing signs of distress and various emotional and behavioral difficulties, and that many parents are experiencing symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress.

While it is likely that older children also suffer significant consequences that were not explored in this study, it is important to remember that the youngest children are currently in critical stages of emotional and cognitive development. Harm experienced during this sensitive period may have long-lasting effects and may further deepen social disparities in Israel. Given these findings — and the concern that the harm to young children may carry serious long-term consequences — it is essential to strengthen the system of support currently available to them, as outlined here:

## ■ 42 Policy Options

- *Maintaining continuity in educational frameworks.* Following the closure of early childhood education settings at the start of the war, an increase in emotional and behavioral difficulties among children was observed — particularly in areas where closures lasted longer. It is essential to ensure the continued operation of educational services even during emergencies, and, where necessary, to implement alternative education programs to minimize harm to children.
- *Support for evacuated families.* Families who were forced to evacuate their homes experienced more prolonged emotional difficulties. Long-term emotional support systems should be established, particularly for families who did not evacuate as part of an organized evacuee community. Resources should be allocated for early identification of emotional and behavioral difficulties — especially among children under age 6 living in hotels or in communities that absorbed individual families who were evacuated outside of group frameworks.
- *Support for families of reservists.* Parents whose partners served extended reserve duty faced emotional challenges that also affected their children. Tailored support systems should be established for these families, with special attention to those with young children and those with relatively low household income.
- *Training and guidance for daycare staff.* In May 2023, a five-year national plan for early childhood care and education was launched to improve quality through increased supervision hours and expanded training for teacher aides. Despite the urgent need to continue and expand this initiative, most of the funding intended for training and guidance was cut as part of wartime budget reductions. Given the survey findings presented here, such programs are especially critical during wartime, and it is vital to ensure that all daycare staff across the country receive training and tools to help children cope with emotional and behavioral challenges during this period.
- *Tailored support for the Arab population.* Arab parents reported higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms than Jewish parents, and also suffered more severe economic harm. To alleviate these unique challenges, targeted programs should be developed to provide both economic assistance and psychological support for Arab families, and to ensure equality in the services offered to them.

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