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Psychological Services in Elementary Schools in Normal Times and in Emergencies

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Academic Advisor: Professor Shifra Sagy

The study was funded with the assistance of the Jewish Federations
of North America (JFNA) and Ms. Karen Lombart of Virginia, USA

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In December 2014, Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute published a full report in Hebrew on the psychological services in elementary schools in normal times and in emergencies (RR-667-14). The current publication is a translation of the executive summary of that report and a section from Chapter 5 that provides greater insight into the role of the educational psychologist in emergencies.

A. Executive Summary

1. Background and Study Goals

The educational psychological services in Israel's schools were developed in order to identify difficulties experienced by students and to assess the needs of students in regular and special education. They also provide advice to the principals and teachers, and psychological support to children and their parents, both routinely and during emergencies. The psychologists work through the municipal Educational Psychology Service (EPS) under the auspices of the Psychological and Counseling Services (PCS) of the Ministry of Education. The role of the educational psychologist is complex and involves working in collaboration with numerous people within the school, such as the principal and school counselor, and with representatives of the health and mental wellbeing services outside of the school. Despite this complexity, most of the studies conducted in Israel have only examined the role of the educational psychologist from the perspective of the psychologist himself¹ and little is known about the way in which other professionals perceive his position within the school.

The study presented in this report was intended to contribute to the further development and strengthening of educational psychology in Israel by examining all aspects of the role of educational psychologists in elementary school from the perspective of the psychologists themselves, the school principals and other members of staff both in normal times and in emergencies.

The information about the performance of the psychologists in emergencies was collected in two stages: 1. During the first round of general interviews; 2. In an additional round of interviews after Operation Pillar of Defense in localities affected by the events of that time.

More specifically, the study examined the following topics:

- ◆ The actual work of the psychologists and their perception of their role
- ◆ Factors contributing to the psychologists' ability to fulfill their role successfully
- ◆ Factors making it hard for psychologists to fulfill their role.

The above topics were examined in three contexts:

- ◆ The routine work of the psychologist
- ◆ His work in emergencies
- ◆ His role in programs addressing emotional issues that are implemented in collaboration with external agencies.

¹ For convenience, where not specified otherwise, we use the masculine pronoun for all individuals (psychologist, principal, teacher, student, etc.). However, in all cases, the reference applies equally to female individuals.

The study was funded with the assistance of the Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) and Ms. Karen Lombart of Virginia and conducted in cooperation with the Psychological and Counseling Services Division (PCS) at the Ministry of Education.

2. Study Method

This was a qualitative study. Most of the data were collected in in-depth interviews with the psychologists and other professionals in the schools. Additional professionals associated with the organizational environment in which the psychologists work (mainly directors of the Educational Psychology Services and directors of educational departments and social service departments in local authorities) were also interviewed. In devising the study, interviews were also conducted with key personnel in the PCS at the Ministry of Education (MoE), volunteer organizations and academia. As noted, in the aftermath of Operation Pillar of Defense (November 2012), we conducted an additional round of interviews in localities that had been exposed to the hostilities in order to gather additional data about the performance of the psychologists during the emergency. Altogether, some 80 interviews were conducted during 2012.

The study was conducted in 15 State and State-Religious elementary schools. The schools were carefully selected to allow data collection from a broad range of perspectives and issues relating to the work of school psychologists. The localities in which the schools are located were chosen to include both Jewish and Arab schools, in both the center of the country and the periphery. Of the 15 psychologists interviewed, 4 were men, 11 women; 9 were interns, 6 were specialists; 7 had entered the profession having studied educational psychology or clinical-educational child psychology, 6 had studied clinical psychology and 2 had studied developmental psychology; 8 had studied abroad, the rest in Israel. All the psychologists had been working in the profession for at least 5 years and the one with the most experience had been doing so for 35 years. At the time of interview, all of them had been at the school where they were interviewed for at least one year (a prerequisite of the study team). The longest that any of them had been at the same school was 8 years.

3. Summary of the Findings

a. The Routine Role of the Psychologist

The school psychologist is the key player among all the other professionals (teachers, counselors, special education teachers and paramedical professionals) providing input in the area of student mental wellbeing. The role of the school psychologist is a complex one, in which he is required to perform a range of duties at both the individual and the system-wide school level. He works with various people, including students, parents, teachers, the school principal and professionals from outside of the school. His main duties include:

- ◆ At the individual level, counseling for not only the students but also parents, teachers and professionals outside of the school, diagnostic work, and care for students
- ◆ At the system level, providing tools, guidance and counseling to the school staff and principals.

His work is done by identifying the needs of the individual and the system and adapting interventions for them, either independently or in cooperation with other professionals in the education system.

The role of the psychologist was not always structured in this way and has undergone considerable changes over the years. If initially the psychologist was charged primarily with diagnosing children with difficulties and providing one-on-one psychotherapy, today he plays a broader role, based on an ecological-system approach² that takes the entire school system into account. In most cases, the psychologists we interviewed identified strongly with this approach, which is spearheaded by the PCS, and they preferred to work at the system level rather than individually with the children. The work at the system level was preferred, inter alia, in light of the increased needs of the system and because it gave the psychologists greater influence. This finding conflicts with findings from a 2002 study, which reported gaps between the PCS perception of the role (including the emphasis on the system aspect) and that of the psychologists (Raviv et al., 2002). In view of these findings, the author of that study recommended that psychologists be trained at the PCS and in accordance with PCS's view of the role of the school psychologist. Apparently the training provided at the PCS College for Advanced Studies (set up to provide in-service training to educational psychologists in the field) has indeed been productive and has achieved the desired effect on the participants.

In line with the system emphasis in the work of the psychologist, the interviews reveal the perceived importance of the psychologist's cooperation with other individuals in the school. The interviews also emphasize how crucial it is for management to support the psychologist's work at the system level and to facilitate understanding of the psychologist's role (at both the individual and system-wide levels) among the school's staff. Accordingly, in order for the psychologists to succeed in the schools, it is extremely important for their collaborative work to be structured, for there to be a consensus about the division of labor, and for interpersonal relations between the psychologist and other members of the school staff to be based on mutual trust. Coordinated work with the school counselor is especially important, since her work intersects with that of the psychologist. In most schools, the counselor – who spends more hours in the school than the psychologist and is on the permanent school staff – works as a coordinator and screens the cases to be referred to the psychologist. She may sometimes serve as a liaison to update the psychologist as to what has happened in his absence, and she may also set up meetings for him with parents, teachers and students. This cooperation was noted positively as a mechanism to help the psychologists cope with the heavy workload. In most cases, the psychologists interviewed had succeeded in establishing the trust required for collaborating with the school staff and were satisfied with their joint work.

The psychologists work a limited number of weekly hours in the schools – in most cases not more than one day a week – and in that time have to complete all the work assigned to them. The personal and professional preferences of the psychologists do not always determine the way that they

² This approach considers the child to be part of the environment in which he lives and to be affected by this environment and his relationship with it.

actually divide their time at work. The diagnostic work required by law for placement and inclusion committees,³ attendance at committee meetings and other associated duties take up a greater part of their time than they often wish, while the remainder of their duties are divided over the limited time remaining. This sometimes comes at the expense of inputs at the system level as well as individual treatment for the children, which is not provided at all in some schools. Characteristics of the schools themselves, such as their ability to cope with the students' problems, their practices for dealing with the children's difficulties, and the preferences of the principal and his relationship with the psychologist sometimes also affect the division of the psychologist's time.

Our study found several difficulties that the educational psychologists have to contend with in their work:

- ◆ The main difficulty is the heavy workload, which is due mainly to the large number of duties to be accomplished in relatively little time. Another difficulty concerns the conditions of employment – a low salary and, sometimes, inadequate physical conditions.
- ◆ Although in most cases, the joint work with the school staff was reported to be successful, it was found that in certain cases, some staff members were unfamiliar with the role of the psychologist, the boundaries between him and the counselor were not clear, and other members of staff were sometimes over-involved in the psychologist's work.
- ◆ The dynamic school environment, characterized by numerous unexpected events, makes it hard to maintain long-term processes that require continuity.

Several factors assist and contribute to the psychologists' work. The study found the following:

- ◆ The support and guidance provided by the EPS help them to cope with the difficulties and make them feel supported in their task.
- ◆ The psychologist's status as a professional and an "outsider" makes it easier for him in complex interpersonal situations with staff members or parents and gives him greater room to maneuver than that experienced by other members of the school staff.
- ◆ Investing in activities that facilitate the forging of relationships between the psychologist and the other school professionals allows the psychologist to manage expectations and build trust that can help him work considerably more productively with the school staff and give him greater room to maneuver.
- ◆ Maintaining regular work routines that include scheduling certain duties in advance contributes to order and organization and allows the psychologist to allocate the appropriate amount of time to each of the areas with which he deals.
- ◆ Creating agreed work practices regarding the process of referring the students for diagnosis can reduce the psychologist's workload.

³ Inclusion committees determine the eligibility for programs to assist students where needed; placement committees discuss the transfer to other frameworks (such as special education).

b. The Work of the Psychologist during Emergencies

Intervention during emergencies is an integral part of the psychologist's work. All of the psychologists we interviewed had had experience of dealing with localized emergency situations (those that generally affect only one school) and national emergencies. The intervention model for educational psychologists in an emergency consists of three stages: Preparation for the event, intervention during the disaster and rehabilitation afterwards. In all three stages, the work is mainly at the system level and includes identifying the circles of vulnerability, organizing the intervention, and providing guidance and support to the school staff. The interviews revealed that emergency work is characterized by close cooperation between the school psychologist and other therapy professionals both within the school and outside of it. In a national emergency, cooperation between the psychologist and those outside the school becomes closer and the psychologist functions as part of the municipal emergency team, working with municipal agencies, the IDF, the police and other civilian agencies.

The interviews reveal high satisfaction with the psychologists' performance both in localized and national emergencies. Most of the principals noted that the psychologists were available and played an important role in organizing interventions in emergencies and in reassuring the school staff under pressure. Many principals noted the importance of the physical presence of the psychologists in the schools during an emergency for the successful functioning of the school at such times.

The interviews also reflected a high level of satisfaction among the psychologists with their performance in emergencies, and a high level of readiness for such emergencies. It is evident that they are conversant with the components of their duties and that they work according to the PCS guidelines. The psychologists noted the emotional burden they experience in emergencies, but added that they receive substantial formal and informal assistance from the EPS, which alleviates the burden significantly. The respondents noted that along with the difficulty and the toll of emergency events, they could identify positive outcomes of having to cope with such situations, such as the strengthened cooperation among the various agencies and professionals in the community.

The second round of interviews conducted shortly after Operation Pillar of Defense revealed that during the operation, the psychologists followed the practices that had guided their work in previous national emergencies. Moreover, the respondents considered that the psychologists had functioned at a higher level than in the past and had succeeded in providing more immediate responses. The improvement in the readiness for the emergency was attributed mainly to the psychologists' practical experience from previous events and to more effective use of online media in real time. The respondents also noted improvement in the way that the PCS arranged for psychologists from unaffected areas to provide temporary reinforcement in the affected areas during the emergency.

The interviews also brought to light several challenges, including the need to improve the readiness for emergencies in the Arab sector and among parents in general. In addition, the lack of appropriate long-term therapy interventions for children and families in need of such services was also reported.

c. External Programs in the Schools to Address Emotional Problems

In the context of this report, external programs are those designed to address emotional problems that are implemented in the schools in collaboration with external agencies.

The main contribution of external programs is the provision of additional inputs both during "normal" times and in emergencies. They also contribute in other ways: they can introduce new skills and knowledge, help bring about changes in the system and provide incentives for different agencies and professionals to work together.

With regard to their direct contribution to the psychologists, external programs can help to reduce the workload by bringing additional therapy professionals into the schools, and they can also increase the psychologists' income in cases where they are involved in the program and receive remuneration. However, in instances where the program employs psychologists who do not belong to the school, the school psychologist's workload in areas that he prefers (e.g., workshops and training) may get reduced. The resulting shift in balance towards less desirable duties (such as diagnostic work) that they have to perform (since the external programs do not include such routine tasks) may contribute to psychologist burnout.

Although the programs address areas for which the psychologists are responsible, the psychologists are not always involved in them, and the activities are not always coordinated with their work. This scenario is frustrating for some of the psychologists, who would like to be more involved, and it may lead to unnecessary duplication of interventions. In addition, some schools may implement several programs concurrently without coordinating them, which is inefficient and unnecessarily adds to the workload of the system. Having experienced such multiplicity and realizing that implementing programs also imposes extra work on the schools, some principals have learned to say "no" to programs – they examine them thoroughly and only take those that they really have a need for and can accommodate.

The distribution of programs in the schools is not only dictated by the needs at the school but is also affected by other factors, including the location of the school, contacts of the principal and his ability to leverage them. We saw, for example, that in Arab schools where there are multiple needs and difficulties but little contact with the volunteer sector, there were relatively few programs.

Finally, the study reveals that a number of factors can contribute to the successful implementation of programs in the school: Programs must be appropriate for the specific characteristics of the school and the school population and must respond to the school's particular needs. The respondents noted that in order to ensure that these criteria are met, it is important for the program implementers to make early contact with key players in the locality such as the EPS or the heads of the education

department who are familiar with the conditions and particular characteristics of the population and the school. Programs should be developed and adapted to the target client together with the local agencies and not imposed from above by the external organization. In addition, if programs are to be successfully introduced in the schools, they need to be managed and supervised. Resources must be allocated for this supervision, otherwise, the extra workload for the school might make it impossible for the program to succeed.

d. The Educational Psychologist in the Arab Sector

The study revealed several issues that specifically concern the provision of school psychological services in the Arab sector.

As with the lack of other social services in Arab society in Israel, the Arab localities suffer from a severe lack of educational psychologists. The study revealed that this shortage stems, inter alia, from a shortage of Arab educational psychologists in general, due, among other things, to the small number of Arab students accepted to psychology departments, and to the fact that many EPSs in Arab localities do not meet the requirements for supervising interns (and therefore the interns do not want to work there), as well as a lack of Arab expert psychologists with a teaching qualification. In addition, we found that there was a problem of under-investment in the psychology service in some of the Arab local authorities (either due to budgetary problems or lack of awareness of the importance of the service).

Another issue identified in the study is the need to adapt the psychological services to the cultural sensitivities of the Arab society. Firstly, the work practices have to be adapted to the characteristics of the population, which include difficulty with and embarrassment about talking openly about feelings in front of a therapist or group, living in community frameworks where "everyone knows everyone else," where there are powerful social pressures and where strong family loyalty can make it hard to deal with emotional problems. Secondly, there is a great need to translate and adapt the professional materials for Arab psychologists, which is not always done. Finally, it is clear that national emergency situations are very distressing for the Arab population due to a heightened conflict of identity, concern for relatives on the "other side," and more pronounced feelings of anger and a sense of discrimination, which are felt even in the absence of crisis.

e. Satisfaction of the Psychologists with their Role

The study found that most of the psychologists are highly satisfied with their role. This is due, among other things, to the varied and challenging work, the satisfaction they get from interpersonal interaction, the sense that their work makes a difference and contributes to their target population, their identification with the ecological-system approach that characterizes their work, and the feeling that, over the years, they are learning and developing along with their work. This satisfaction is despite the fact that many expressed dissatisfaction with their conditions of employment, their workload, and certain aspects of the job (e.g., spending much time on diagnoses).

4. Conclusions from the Study

- ◆ In recent years, the concept of the psychologist's role has broadened to include a dominant system-based component – i.e., work intended to bring about changes at the overall school or classroom level. There is currently a greater emphasis on this type of work than on direct work with children. The change was spearheaded by the PCS and the study found that it has been internalized by the psychologists as well as by the principals and other members of school staffs, despite the fact that working in this way makes greater demands on teachers who have children with difficulties in their class. This finding is reinforced by a recent study that found a considerable increase in recent years in the percentage of homeroom teachers who discuss sensitive topics with students and their parents (Ben-Rabi et al., 2012).
- ◆ The system-based work may strengthen the staff members' ability to cope with the children's needs and help to create a supportive and protective environment in the school. The study found that it gives the psychologists the sense that they have extensive influence, which contributes to their job satisfaction.
- ◆ The system-based approach of the psychologists is clearly expressed during emergency events and the structured system-based work is perceived to be very successful by all those involved.
- ◆ System-based work has the potential to enhance the school for the overall good of all the students, but the emphasis on this approach to work means that the psychologists provide little individual therapy and, in most cases, those few children in need of it cannot be treated through the school. Since there is a shortage of public frameworks in the community where such treatment is available, it is feared that the children will not receive it. In this context, in emergency situations, it is evident that although interventions are provided during the event itself, there are not enough inputs for children who have adjustment difficulties returning to routine life in the aftermath of the event and need professional emotional support.
- ◆ It is important to work with parents and develop effective practices for doing so, not only routinely, but also – and particularly – in preparing for emergency situations and coping with them, despite the difficulty of getting parents to participate in activities of this kind.
- ◆ Arab localities in particular suffer from a shortage of educational psychologists, which stems inter alia from the small number of Arab psychologists in general, from the shortage of approved clinics for specialist training, and the lack of investment in this area by some Arab local authorities. In addition, the study found that there was a need for culturally sensitive adjustment to the practices of the psychologists in Arab society. It also found that this population has particular difficulty in national emergency situations due to the heightened conflict of identity, fears for relatives on the other side of the border and a more pronounced sense of anger and discrimination.
- ◆ External programs could effectively provide additional emotional services and expertise into the system. On the other hand, if they are to be introduced, there has to be a systematic process of selection and preparation, and resources have to be allocated for supervision and management. It is also essential for the programs to be coordinated to avoid duplication and, where appropriate, for the school psychologist to be involved or at least informed.

- ◆ The study found that the programs are not evenly distributed among the schools and are not necessarily dictated by the needs at the school. This factor is liable to increase inequality among the schools.

5. Programmatic Directions

Based on the study findings, several programmatic directions are proposed for the areas examined in the study:

a. General

Clearer definition of the boundaries of the role of the school psychologist: The school psychologist's role is a broad one and it overlaps with other positions, which could lead to various problems such as tension with other professionals and misunderstandings about the boundaries. The situation could be improved by clarifying and defining the role of the psychologist and his associates and formulating a clear division of labor.

Reduced workload: The pressure of work on the educational psychologist can be reduced in various ways such as: Streamlining work processes; transferring some of his duties (e.g., diagnosis) to other professionals; and adding hours to the psychologist's position in all schools, which can be done by adding more psychologists to the system.

b. In Emergencies

- ◆ ***Preparedness for emergencies:*** The interviews revealed a sense of high level of readiness for emergencies in recent years, and showed there had been an improvement. This was attributed to the extensive preparatory work conducted by the education system and external programs. Various changes such as the introduction of a system enabling staff mobility and online communication also contributed to the improvement. It is important to continue to consolidate these activities and monitor their success after every event.
- ◆ ***Challenges:*** Nevertheless, the interviews also revealed a number of challenges regarding the treatment provided during Operation Pillar of Defense – the need to better prepare the parents for emergencies, the need to provide appropriate long-term responses to children in need of them, and to improve the service during emergencies in the Arab sector:
 - ***Preparing the parents:*** The behavior and responses of parents during emergencies considerably affects the way their children cope with the situation. The interviews revealed the need to prepare the parents for such situations. Since existing programs have not always managed to attract parents to participate, it is important to develop more appropriate programs and effective intervention methods.
 - ***Lack of long-term responses and the need for continuity:*** Along with the relatively high level of satisfaction with the level of preparedness of the system in general and in particular of the psychologists, some psychologists expressed dissatisfaction and even concern about the interventions provided during the rehabilitation stage, particularly the long-term responses. They noted that they themselves cannot provide

long-time care, and that at the same time there is a lack of available agencies in the community to whom they can refer the students, and that those that do exist are not always acceptable to the population in question.

- ***Service for the Arab population:*** The service in the Arab sector in emergencies needs to be improved. This is due in part because the psychological service in the Arab sector is less developed in general and in part due to issues of cultural sensitivity in emergency situations.
- ◆ ***The ultra-Orthodox:*** The study did not include ultra-Orthodox schools. However, some of the respondents noted concern that the level of readiness for emergencies was lower in ultra-Orthodox schools. It is important to examine these concerns.

c. External Programs

- ◆ ***Early association of program implementers with agencies in the locality:*** The study found that one of the important steps to be taken to make the programs suitable for the target population is for the program implementers to cooperate with key players in the locality who know the needs, problems and characteristics of the population and who should be involved right from the planning stage in adapting the programs to their target population and the institutions where they will be implemented.
- ◆ ***Involvement of the school psychologist in existing programs in the school:*** The interviews revealed that the psychologists do not always know what programs are being implemented in their schools. There should be more coordination within the school.
- ◆ ***EPS to synchronize and integrate the programs:*** The EPS can be used to synchronize and integrate external programs that address emotional issues in order to avoid duplication and ensure that the programs are being implemented where there is a need for them.
- ◆ ***Awareness of the investment required to implement the programs:*** It is important to be aware of this issue before programs are introduced and to fund the appropriate manpower to introduce and manage the program.
- ◆ ***Equal distribution of the programs:*** The study found that the programs were not necessarily distributed according to the extent of the needs in the various schools. In view of the important role that the external programs can play in responding to the needs of the schools, it is important to find ways to rectify this unequal distribution.

d. Ensuring Accessibility to the Service for the Arab Population

- ◆ ***Increasing the number of Arab psychologists:*** The shortage of Arab psychologists calls for an examination of ways to increase the number of Arab students and graduates in this area. The goal can be achieved by: Developing a specific program in the college preparatory program (*mechina*) to help increase the number of students admitted to the department; providing support and academic assistance for Arab students during their undergraduate studies to increase the number of those who graduate and can continue to a master's degree;

opening a special training track for Arab students; opening a track for students who do not have a bachelor's degree in psychology to enable them to meet the requirements to transfer to the department and earn a master's in the subject.

- ◆ ***Cultural sensitivity:*** The service has to be culturally sensitive to the population. Training psychologists to provide a multicultural service has to start during studies and training and continue throughout their career.
- ◆ ***Follow-up study:*** Given the difficulties regarding the psychological service in the Arab population (cultural sensitivity, effective intervention in emergency situations, etc.) that came up in the study, we recommend a follow-up study focusing on this sector.

The following section provides greater insight into the role of the educational psychologist in times of emergency and appears in Chapter 5 of the full Hebrew report

B. The Role of the Educational Psychologist in Times of Emergency

This chapter starts by examining the respondents' definitions of an "emergency situation" and is followed by a description of the psychologist's role in an emergency, the characteristics of working in emergency situations, and the factors that the respondents perceive as contributing to successful work in such situations. Their role during emergencies was examined in two rounds of interviews, the first before, the second after Operation Pillar of Defense.

The findings in the first four sections refer to the situation as described in interviews conducted before Pillar of Defense. However, they are also relevant, in large part, to the situation that followed it. The changes that occurred during the operation are described in Section 5 and are based on follow-up interviews conducted with some of the respondents soon after the conclusion of the operation. In the interviews, we examined whether the psychologists' role during Pillar of Defense differed from their role in previous emergencies.

1. What is an Emergency?

Most of the respondents defined an emergency as a sudden, extreme event that disrupts the normal school routine. Intervention during an emergency is an integral part of the psychologist's work. The director of an Educational Psychological Service (EPS) noted: *"When I train educational psychologists, I customarily say to them: 'When I ask you who you are professionally, part of your answer should relate to working in emergencies.'"*

There is a clear distinction between local emergencies, which usually affect a particular student or school, and national emergencies, which have a much wider impact. This fact is evident both from the policy of the Psychological Counseling Services (PCS) (PCS, 2008) and from the interviews with the psychologists, school principals and directors of the EPSs.

Local emergencies: Local emergencies include a broad range of extreme situations in which the students, their families or the school staff experience loss or suffering. The respondents described a variety of localized emergency situations that they had dealt with, including domestic or community violence, suicides and attempted suicides, terminal illnesses, sexual harassment and assaults, and accidents. Importantly, these situations – although extreme – are relatively common and *all* the psychologists and school principals interviewed reported that they had addressed this type of situation. Particularly frequent were reports of coping with sexual harassment and assault and cases of death and bereavement in the families of students and members of staff.

National emergencies: National emergencies include events due to political violence, such as terrorist attacks, rocket attacks and war, and large-scale natural disasters such as storms and fire. Most of the psychologists and school principals reported that in recent years they had dealt with the consequences of national emergencies. The national emergencies were, in general, connected to direct or indirect exposure of the school to various security events, short or long-term periods of hostilities (such as Operation Cast Lead and Operation Pillar of Defense) and terrorist attacks. In addition, some of the respondents had dealt with the 2010 Carmel forest fire.

At schools where there had been *prolonged exposure to national states of emergency*, the respondents noted that it was different and more complex to deal with these than with one-time events. As a director of the EPS in such an area described: *"Every other child wets himself at preschool, every other child stays close to his parents, sleeps in the parents' bed, wakes up at night ... Sadly, we also see a lot of violent or dangerous behavior among the children, acting out and abusive behavior."*

2. The Role of the Educational Psychologist in Times of Emergency

The PCS has set out guidelines for the role of educational psychologists in times of emergency (Ministry of Education, Pedagogic Administration, PCS, 2008). The PCS guidelines refer mainly to situations of national emergency. According to these guidelines, during a national emergency, the psychologist functions as part of a "municipal emergency team" in cooperation with municipal agencies, the IDF, the police and additional civilian agencies. In such situations, the PCS has to make professionals (educational counselors and education psychologists) available to the local authority.

At the PCS, emergencies (local or national) are dealt with by the Stress and Emergency Unit, which is responsible for preparing the education system for emergency situations. The unit's website is replete with information about preparing for and coping with crises and stress, including a kit to cope with large-scale emergencies and links to other related websites. In 2011, the PCS published a book *Growth from Crisis – School Preparation for Coping with Emergency Events and Crises* (Simantov & Chen-Gal, 2011 – Hebrew), which systematically sets out the model for coping with emergencies, and presents work concepts and practical briefings for the educational psychologist in an emergency. This material is based on the model widely accepted by the literature on the subject and formulated in the Model for Intervention in Emergencies (Vernberg & Vogel, 1993). This model is based on the principle of prevention and divides crisis intervention into three stages:

1. **Stage I:** The Pre-Disaster Preparatory Stage – Preparation of prevention programs and development of resilience, including training and specialization in interventions during a disaster
2. **Stage II:** Disaster-Impact Stage – Interventions during the disaster, e.g., systematic mapping of the situation, provision of psychological counseling to the on-site team, provision of psychological first-aid and telephone hotlines

3. **Stage III: Post-Disaster Rehabilitation** – This stage has two phases:

- ◆ Short-term adaptation phase, which starts 24 hours after the disaster has occurred and continues for several weeks. This phase includes individual and group interventions and focuses on the experience of the trauma, experience prior to the trauma, and encouraging functionality.
- ◆ Long-term adaptation (or recovery) phase – re-integration and improving the ability of individuals and groups to return to normal routine life. This stage includes short-term interventions aimed at preventing regression in the adjustment of the individuals and groups and preparing the education staff and peer groups to reintegrate the victims (Klingman & Cohen, 2004). The standard for the work of PCS psychologists stipulates that the work of a psychologist during all three stages of stressful and emergency events is to be conducted at the individual, family, and/or system-wide level as needs arise, based on the professional judgment of the psychologist.

The interviews revealed the different assignments that the educational psychologist performs in each of the three distinct stages. Below we describe the role assigned to the psychologist in each of them.

Stage I: The Pre-Disaster Preparatory Stage

It was reported in the interviews that schools do much to prepare the staff and students for crises and emergencies and that the psychologists are highly involved in this activity. Naturally, most of the work at this stage is conducted at the system level: workshops to prepare the school, revision of the procedures and participation of the psychologist in preparatory exercises at the school, municipal and national levels. Almost all discussion of the preparatory stage in the interviews was in the context of a national emergency. The heavy investment in preparation for a national emergency is reflected in the following comment by one of the psychologists: *"I work hard on preventive care and preparation for an emergency: I provide tools and strategies to cope with events before the disaster occurs, and improve the ability of the students and staff to cope. I work with them on personal empowerment and with the council on organizing things that have to do with an emergency."*

One of the school principals described the preparations for an emergency at his school: *"There is an emergency team with a list of their duties in such a situation and the psychologist is on the team. She also enriches the staff's knowledge of emergency procedures, what we have to do in emergency situations, what the role of the Psychological Service is etc..."* Some of the psychologists and principals noted that the psychologist was also involved in preparing an "emergency file" containing procedures, the duties of every member of the school's emergency team, a list of vital telephone numbers, etc.

It was clear from the interviews that the psychologists participate in numerous drills and seminars on emergency situations organized by the PCS and local EPSs, or by external programs as part of the national Home Front Command preparatory program. The readiness for emergencies at the PCS

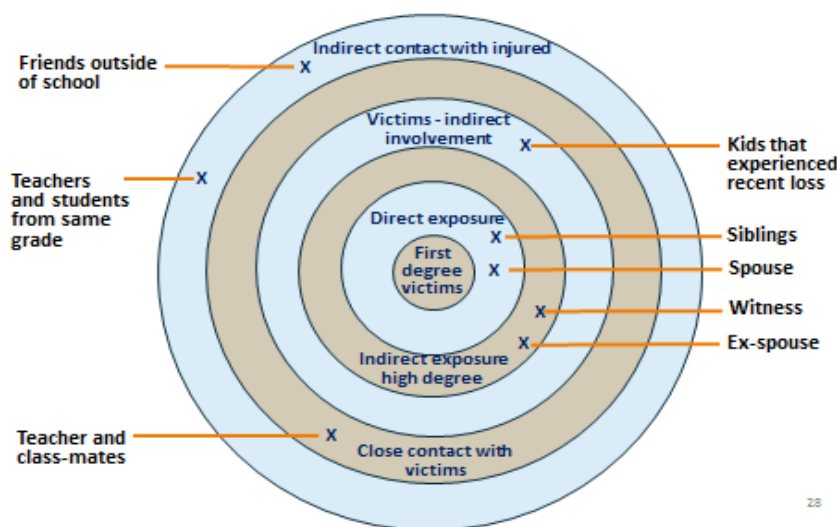
is also evident on its website, which, as noted, contains helpful materials and numerous up-to-date publications on coping in an emergency. In light of the above, it is interesting that none of the respondents complained of an excess of preparation for emergencies. One of the psychologists described the emotional barriers that could impede preparations for emergencies and noted the need to carry on refreshing the procedures: *"It's necessary to review the procedures from time to time, and it's terribly hard ... because nobody really wants to think about the horrible situations that could happen. It's one of the reasons why people avoid thinking and planning for emergencies and tend to focus more on routine. You have to go back to that, consciously and institutionally."*

Stage II: Disaster-Impact Stage

Most of the interventions by psychologists at this stage are at the system level – both in localized emergencies and, even more so, in emergencies at the national level. Accordingly, most of the psychologist's work in emergencies is with the school staff rather than directly with the students.

Identification of concentric circles of vulnerability: One of the first tasks of the psychologist is to identify the concentric circles of vulnerability. The term "circle of vulnerability" comes from the system-based concept that takes account of the need to identify and map needs at different levels – from the individual to the entire community – as a preliminary stage of intervention. The identification relates to the different circles that might be affected by the event (e.g., students, parents, school staff, other people in the community) and the level of exposure according to the proximity to the events (e.g., direct exposure, eye witness, indirect exposure, Figure 1). The concept is discussed extensively by Glasner et al. (2012, Hebrew), and in the PCS guidelines for emergencies (Ministry of Education, Pedagogic Administration, Psychological Counseling Services, 2008). An emergency situation is one in which there are multiple circles of vulnerability and it is the psychologist's job to ensure that they all receive attention.

Figure 1: Concentric Circles of Vulnerability



It was evident from the interviews that the concept of concentric circles of vulnerability is commonplace among the psychologists and it was mentioned in the context of the complexity of coping with emergency and crisis situations. Psychologists noted that even in localized emergencies they had identified and attended to individuals who belonged to circles outside of the school, such as in the tragic case of a family that perished in a fire: *"We got fully organized to contact every individual that was in some way affected by this awful tragedy. There were 3 or 4 days of intensive work. There were children of different ages who were deeply affected... former teachers of the children... the children's friends and cousins at schools all over the city."*

Intervention by the psychologist in emergency situations: In times of emergencies, most of the direct intervention in the school is done by the educational staff. The main task of the psychologist is to guide and support the staff during the intervention process with the students. The rationale for this approach is explained by one of the psychologists: *"We work more with the staff. Because they [the students] know the teacher [and not the psychologist] ... If the teacher can't cope on her own, she needs support from another professional, who will be there, beside her. She needs support too."*

The work with the staff during emergencies featured prominently in the reports by the school principals as well. To quote one of them on the role of the psychologist in an emergency: *"Above all, the psychologist's meetings with the teachers are most important. [The psychologist] instructs them how to cope through activities in the classroom or sometimes he himself goes into the classroom and helps the teachers hold a discussion to help the students get away from the situation. But generally he works more with the teachers and provides tools for coping with stress situations."*

The psychologist's work with the educational staff includes several components:

- ◆ ***Providing guidance and counseling to the staff about emergencies and trauma:*** The interviews revealed that members of staff believe the psychologist is knowledgeable about emergencies and is the person to consult with in times of stress, crisis and trauma. A psychologist described different aspects of her guidance to the school staff in an emergency: *"In preparing them, you tell them what needs attention, what to say, how to answer, how much information to give, to pay attention to those whom we identify as at risk of a more extreme reaction, such as a child who has experienced a loss in the previous two years."* In this context, a school principal stated: *"In an emergency, the psychologist's job first and foremost is to explain the situation correctly to the students and to the teachers. A correct explanation of the situation solves half of the problems."* In some cases, the psychologist even advises whether to relate to what is happening as an emergency event. This strategy applies particularly in cases of localized emergencies. As one of the psychologists noted: *"The problem is often not how to work in an emergency situation, but to identify whether the situation really is an emergency. It often takes you and the system time to understand what kind of a situation you're in."*
- ◆ ***Organizing the staff and coordinating the emergency intervention:*** In some of the cases, the psychologist is perceived as the person who organizes and heads the staff during emergencies. One of the principals noted: *"Two years ago, we had a case of a so-called pedophile [later*

proved not to be so). *[The psychologist] was so up for it ... she was the leading force and did it so well, so correctly.*" A school psychologist noted the importance of his involvement in organizing emergency intervention: *"The psychologist has to be the dominant figure in the school and needs to sit with the principal at the outset of the event, even in the evening if necessary. We are very important in this regard and have a key role to play in such cases."*

- ◆ **Reassuring the staff and providing emotional support:** The psychologists also provide direct emotional support to members of the staff, who may be emotionally affected by the stressful events. A report by a homeroom teacher shows that providing emotional support to the staff is part of the regular emergency intervention program: *"The psychologist is our anchor ... he is focused on supporting us. During the operation [Cast Lead], we had meetings and there was a very structured program that was designed to support us and help us cope with the events."* One of the psychologists described her role as being the "national tranquilizer." In the following quotation, she describes a case in which she was asked to help a teacher calm down, so that she would be able to deal with one of her students who had experienced a loss. *"The girl's mother had died ... the child was crying, a 12-year old ... Crying is normative. [The teacher asked me to] do something with the child ... I said that I could help her to do something for the child. I can support the teacher."* Some respondents reported that, when necessary, psychologists also give support to staff members who have undergone personal crises, as described by one of the school principals: *"When there is an emergency with a member of staff, the psychologist helps too, and there have been many unfortunate situations (e.g., a teacher having a nervous breakdown, a teacher who lost her husband in a car accident) ... The psychologist supports us too."*
- ◆ **Intervention at the Individual Level:** Alongside extensive system-level intervention, in some cases, psychologists indeed perform direct interventions with students, family members or a whole class during the events. In most cases, it is a one-time intervention while the events are actually happening and is conducted particularly with those in the first circle of vulnerability. One psychologist spoke of an individual intervention during a national emergency: *"When you identify a child with more extreme reactions, the response of the person who treats the child makes a big difference. It's important to know whom to refer to, to assess whether it's enough to meet with the parents or whether there is a need for parental guidance or longer-term treatment. Sometimes we start short-term therapy for the child and/or parents who help the child to cope at home."*

Stage III: Post- Disaster Rehabilitation

As noted, the intervention model used by the educational psychologists (Vernberg & Vogel, 1993) divides the rehabilitation stage into short-term adjustment (until several weeks after the event) and long-term adjustment (i.e., adjusting back to routine). In the following pages we examine the role of the psychologist in each stage of adjustment.

Short-term adjustment: In the case of localized emergency situations, one of the important tasks of the psychologist is to assess whether there is a need to continue the intervention and, if so, to

determine which agency (EPS, mental health services, social services or another agency) should continue treating and monitoring the child. In the case of a localized event, the psychologist also has to decide if he feels the child is at risk and whether or not to report the incident to a child protection officer.

In national emergency situations the interviews reveal that one of the psychologist's tasks is to identify cases that require further treatment. Some of the cases will remain in the psychologist's care, but most of them will be referred to other services such as mental health clinics, resilience centers,⁴ social services or private therapists.

When a case is referred for treatment outside of the EPS, whether in a localized or national emergency, it is sometimes *difficult for the system to follow up on the case*. One of the problems is that responsibility for following up on the case is not stipulated in the PCS guidelines. The interviews reveal that in cases that are followed up by the school, it is the counselor who monitors the children who have been referred for treatment. As one of the psychologists stated: *"It is the counselor's responsibility to do the follow-up and make sure that things are dealt with and don't get forgotten. If a family is referred to the psychiatrist or to a child development institute, or the police, or social organization, it is the job of the counselor to make sure that progress has been made."*

Another task of the psychologist at this stage is to *"summarize the event."* The psychologist holds meetings with the student/s affected, their parents, the class or the teaching staff, aimed at bringing the event to a close and reintegrating the individuals or the group into normal routine.

In cases of national emergency, it was found that some psychologists conducted workshops for the staff as soon as the events came to an end in order to "get the system back to normal." One of the principals noted: *"When we returned to normal after Cast Lead the psychologist held a workshop for the teachers as we prepared to return to normal, both to strengthen the staff and to give them tools."* Psychologist: *"After the war, we conducted a workshop for the teachers on how to speak to the children and how to identify those suffering from post-trauma, and when to refer them to a psychologist."*

Long-term adjustment: *We found very little evidence of the involvement of psychologists in long-term adjustment* and it was clear that most of the psychologist's work during the rehabilitation stage focuses on short-term adjustment. However, there are rare cases in both localized and national emergencies where the psychologists are involved in more extended treatment of individual children. One of the psychologists spoke of treatment lasting two years or more in the case of children in an area exposed to prolonged fighting who were suffering from anxiety. This intervention was made possible thanks to funding provided by an external program.

⁴ Resilience centers are multidisciplinary municipal centers where mental health professionals provide emergency interventions for the entire population of the locality.

3. Characteristics of Psychologist's Role in Emergency Situations

The interviews reflect several characteristics that portray the psychologists' role performance in times of emergency:

1. **Full and immediate mobilization:** An emergency event is characterized by the mobilization of the whole system that is responsible for dealing with the event at the macro level (i.e., the EPS and PCS) and the micro level – the psychologists in the schools. When necessary, this mobilization includes the allocation of manpower and other resources to EPSs in exposed areas as stipulated in the PCS guidelines: *"In places where the local EPS cannot provide the necessary input due to limited manpower, the director of the EPS will contact the District Psychologist to receive additional professional assistance."* (Ministry of Education, Pedagogical Administration, PCS, 2008).

The full and immediate mobilization of the educational psychologists in times of emergency was also prominent in the interviews with directors of the EPSs. To quote one of them: *"The emergency immediately engaged all the time and resources, not only of those working in the exposed area, but also of additional psychologists."* The mobilization of the psychologists was also described by psychologists and school principals. A good example can be found in the following words of a school principal from an area that was exposed to prolonged security incidents: *"The truth is that in every emergency situation, we go to her [the psychologist] at all hours and she advises us how to function. I have never dealt with a family in an emergency situation without her input. Even when she went abroad, she left a phone number. So I have never felt completely alone."* Full and immediate mobilization of the educational psychologists also characterizes localized emergency situations, as reflected in interviews with the psychologists themselves and with principals and homeroom teachers. For example, one of the teachers spoke of a localized event in her class: *"First of all [the psychologist] was entirely available for everyone who wanted him ... [for] guidance to parents, children, and the teachers."*

The PCS guidelines specifically stipulate that ***in emergency situations, EPS services will also be provided in schools that do not have a psychologist*** (Ministry of Education, Pedagogical Administration, PCS, 2008). This provision was also noted in the interviews. A principal talked of a tragic event that occurred when there was no permanent psychologist in her school. *"In early September, one of the children disappeared. His body was found three days later. When it happened, the entire psychological service turned up to help us cope with the situation."* In emergencies, EPS services may also be provided to private schools that are not under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. In this regard, an EPS director noted: *"Not long ago, we had a private school, and there was a case where a father and mother were injured in an accident and we went to the school and offered assistance."*

2. **Teamwork:** Work in an emergency is characterized by teamwork and a clear division of roles that is known in advance so that everyone knows what s/he has to do. One of the principals: *"Thanks to this collaboration, we are able to work properly"* in national emergencies. The EPS functions as part of the Municipal Emergency Team (MET) and is required to provide

service to all residents and not only to the school population. One of the psychologists described her work during a national emergency: *"Once a national emergency is declared, we belong to the MET. We don't work as the psychologists of a particular school, we work in teams. There is a team that functions as a hotline. [In that team] we work together with psychiatrists, with the hospital and with social workers. In other words, we are not confined to the EPS, we work under the municipality."* Another psychologist described the complexity and difficulty he felt due to having to be a member of several teams at the same time: *"We are part of the MET and I'm stationed at the Stress Center – if they set one up – it's like an emergency room for those suffering from anxiety ... as was set up in Cast Lead. There is also a municipal hotline ... I can't really be at both places at the same time."* He added: *"Incidentally, at the next Cast Lead, I will probably be called up to the reserves as well ... and I'm also on the emergency team in my home community."* These statements reflect the inner conflict that a psychologist might find in an emergency situation when called up to serve in several arenas at the same time.

- 3. Not going alone:** Some respondents noted that they never go alone to meet victims who have experienced a disaster. An EPS director presented the justification for going in pairs: *"It's understood that there is a very high level of anxiety and you need to hold on tight ... There's a lot that is unknown and unexpected when you make 'emergency' visits and two people can share the load between them. For example, a grandfather has died, which may seem on the surface to be a 'natural' crisis, but the event can escalate into unexpected events and could get out of control ... Two can cope better with the unexpected."*

There are cases when two psychologists go to visit families during an emergency event, while in other cases, the psychologist goes with another member of the school staff, as described by a school principal: *"When a parent dies ... I inform the counselor and the psychologist, they never go alone, and they treat the student together."* However, some respondents noted that in most cases psychologists will go alone to an emergency event.

- 4. Workload:** Although some school principals noted that the psychologists had a heavy workload during emergencies, the psychologists themselves did **not** consider workload to be one of the problems of emergency situations. This is in contrast to many comments about a heavy workload during normal times. A possible explanation is that during emergencies, educational psychologists work in collaboration with other professionals according to clear guidelines that focus only on tasks that relate to the emergency event, and are relieved of many of the tasks they perform in normal times, such as performing diagnostic tests or administrative work, and consequently do not feel the pressure due to workload.
- 5. Emotional burden:** Emotional burden was found to be one of the main difficulties experienced by the psychologists during emergencies. To quote one of them: *"An emergency produces a lot of pressure. You also wonder 'What have I done wrong,' and if you get stuck there, it's very bad."* Another noted: *"Sometimes there are really heavy cases. Let's say a mother has committed suicide... I have to go home with the father to tell the child that his mother has died. That's just an example. It's hard ... These are very emotional, very heavy areas."*

6. **Online emotional support:** In a national emergency, there are times when schools in exposed areas are closed and the children stay home. In such situations, some schools function through the school website. In some cases the school website is also used for online emotional interventions, as noted by a principal: *"On the school website, each of the classes has its own web pages and they include forums in which the parents and children can share and air their feelings. The homeroom teacher replies; if necessary she consults with the counselor or psychologist and replies or refers them to someone else."* Another principal described how the website provides remote support: *"Children from other schools in the country also visited [the website] to support us ... There was a dialogue during the events and friendships were formed ... Teachers throughout the country wrote to my teachers ... And there were parents supporting other parents."*
7. **Possible benefits of experiencing emergency situations:** Some respondents noted that alongside the suffering and painful consequences of the exposure to traumatic events, there are some benefits to these situations. Some of the principals felt that having to cope with an emergency had strengthened interpersonal relationships in the school. Another described how her school coped with a localized event: *"We all had a difficult time with the story ... it was such a nightmare ... [but] we benefited from getting to know the staff and [the experience] brought us closer together."* Others noted that the exposure to emergency situations resulted in increased investment of resources in the EPS and that additional hours had been allocated for a psychologist following the event.

The psychologists reported that working in an emergency had brought about a deeper understanding of the system and its strengths and weaknesses. Some said that the emergency had brought to light distress among students and their families that had existed in normal routine life and that they would not have been aware of it had it not been for the emergency intervention.

Another positive outcome of the emergency was the increased willingness of the population to receive assistance and emotional support. One of the principals whose school is located in an area exposed to prolonged security events noted: *"Over the years, parents already ask to meet with the counselor and psychologist, and the teachers ... The situation here has matured us when it comes to receiving assistance."*

4. Assessment of Performance in Times of Emergency

In this section, we discuss the performance of the psychologists during emergency events, as perceived by the psychologists themselves as well as by other professionals working with them in the schools and by the directors of the EPS.

The respondents' reports reveal a high level of satisfaction both with the schools' preparedness for emergencies and with the performance of the psychologist during the emergency events. One of the principals said: *"There are clear plans for working in an emergency and I feel ready. There is an emergency team that includes the psychologist, and the people on this team know exactly what to do in such situations."* The principal of a school that was exposed to a national state of emergency

assessed the school's performance: *"I'm satisfied in general with the functioning in the emergency – we've really had so much practice ... for example, if we're instructed not to send the kids to the school, there's all sorts of ways to deal with that – distance learning, phone calls to the children who can't come."*

Along with the relatively high satisfaction with the psychologist's performance during the emergency events, the psychologists expressed dissatisfaction and even concern about the service that they are able to provide in the rehabilitation stage. The psychologists noted that they themselves cannot provide long-term treatment for individuals who suffer from emotional consequences in the aftermath of adversity, yet at the same time there is a serious shortage of public mental health services in the community. One of the psychologists noted: *"For instance, that child who was killed on a motorbike ... I wish I had someone, one place to refer the parents for further treatment... Because I can't continue the intervention in this case..."* Another psychologist said: *"If, for example, I knew there was an emergency center where I knew I could refer someone ... that this was the procedure and that the center would coordinate treatment in the long term – a multidisciplinary center.... Today it is impossible to refer someone to the mental health clinic..."*

Contributing Factors to Effective Performance in Times of Emergency

Most of the school principals noted that the **availability of the psychologist** was a contributing factor to the effectiveness of the psychologist in emergencies. One of them remarked: *"She made herself available wherever she was needed and she was here even on days when she wasn't supposed to be ... She completely committed herself."* Principals noted the importance of the **physical presence of the psychologist** at times of disaster and crisis. *"Having the psychologist in school does a lot for the students mentally and behaviorally."* One of the psychologists stressed: *"As a psychologist, my presence is very important."*

Finally, principals noted the importance and the contribution of **external agencies**, most of them philanthropic, to the school's success in handling emergency situations. Such agencies fund important emergency preparation programs that have proven very successful. According to the principals, external agencies also provide vital supplemental resources that improve the ability of the school to cope in emergencies, such as paraprofessional caregivers and additional hours for psychologists.

The psychologists stressed different factors than those emphasized by the principals. A **good rapport and working relationship with the school staff** were perceived as key factors to effective performance in emergencies. To quote one of them: *"If the principal-counselor-psychologist relationship is good (in routine, everyday work), it [the work in an emergency situation] will be good. If it isn't, it won't be."* The psychologists also stressed the **importance of formal and informal support** provided to them by the EPS. This element was expressed frequently in the interviews, for example by a psychologist who noted: *"In general, what is particularly helpful is to share our experiences and feelings with other psychologists."* Another psychologist referred to the importance of the support of the EPS director, even when she makes mistakes. And another

explained: *"It's very helpful when there is someone to consult with ... in psychology this is known as 'parallel processing' – in order for you to be able to 'hold' someone, you need someone to 'hold' you. It's not because we're falling apart, but it's how the process of support works."*

5. The Role of the Educational Psychologists during Operation Pillar of Defense

Pillar of Defense was a military operation in Gaza that took place in November 2012. It lasted about a week, during which time hundreds of rockets and mortars were fired into Israel from the Gaza Strip. Schools in localities within a 40-kilometer radius, where some 250,000 children live, were closed. Thousands of families in the area spent days and nights in shelters, their very lives under threat, cut off from work and educational frameworks. During the operation, a small number of long-range missiles were fired from Gaza into the Dan region and Gush Etzion. Thus, for the first time in decades, residents of these areas, including 370,000 children, experienced civil defense sirens – the signal to race to bomb shelters.

About two weeks after the operation, we conducted follow-up interviews with 17 of the respondents including psychologists, school principals and EPS directors in the areas that had been exposed to the attacks from Gaza, respondents with management positions at the CPS, and directors of external programs. These interviews enabled us to gather information about the work of the psychologists while the emergency events were still fresh in the minds of the respondents. We asked the respondents whether there had been a change in the performance of the psychologist and the response of the school system in the recent events compared with previous emergencies.

The psychologists' performance during Pillar of Defense, as described by the respondents, to a large extent matched the description given in the previous round of interviews. The respondents referred to the same three stages of the psychologist's work in an emergency: the pre-disaster preparatory stage, the disaster-impact stage and the post-disaster rehabilitation stage. They reiterated the importance of the pre-disaster preparatory stage and the building of resilience to successful functioning during the operation (as described in the full report). As in previous events, the psychologists worked as part of the municipal emergency team and provided psychological support to the entire community. Nevertheless, the respondents identified certain changes in the performance of the psychologists during Operation Pillar of Defense. Psychologists of all levels noted that in general the PCS at the administrative level and the individual psychologist in the field performed better than in previous events. The high level of satisfaction with their performance was attributed by most of the respondents to the fact that they had learned from the experience of previous national events. For example, in response to our question whether the performance of the psychologist in this event was any different from previous events, an EPS director replied: *"It was different in one respect only. We have more practice, we're more organized, things move more easily. Everything goes faster, flows better."* Another EPS director attributed the sense of satisfaction with the performance to the support provided to the municipal EPS by the PCS head office at the Ministry of Education. *"The PCS was in touch with us. The district psychologist who is responsible for emergencies was in contact, checking if we needed anything during the operation."*

Service directors at the national level (PCS) and at the municipal level (EPS) singled out the improvement of the PCS in their *ability to mobilize psychologists from one EPS branch to another*, i.e., from areas not under threat to those exposed to the rocket attacks. Despite this mobilization being an important need in emergencies, it was less organized in previous events. A senior administrative psychologist at the PCS described what she called the "back-up system": *"In Operation Pillar of Defense we managed this as an organization, not as a members' club. We reached an arrangement with the Union of Local Authorities in Israel that additional psychologists would be mobilized [only] with the approval of the directors of the education departments. The agreement was between the heads of education departments 'giving' and 'receiving' manpower – the exchange was recognized as working days and they were released from their jobs in the 'safe' areas. It was understood and official."* The back-up procedure for moving the psychologists around was formulated following the lessons of the Second Lebanon War in 2006 and was partially implemented in Operation Cast Lead (2008). The respondent continued: *"In the end, in Pillar of Defense, there wasn't that much need for manpower movement. But there was the feeling that the procedure was fully implemented and everyone, including the psychologists in the field, was very clear about how it worked."*

The ability to provide an immediate response during the emergency also improved as a consequence of *the increase in the use of online communications* for both teaching and emotional support purposes. The use of online communications in an emergency should be seen as part of the extensive process of assimilation of online media in the education system. The process has accelerated in recent years and online communication has in many places become a significant teaching tool. The respondents noted that during Pillar of Defense there was a feeling that the online arrangement was effective and had a considerably greater impact on the way the emergency interventions were conducted than in the past. At management level, the PCS used the website forum of professionals for the first time on a daily basis, in order to transmit information and answer questions from psychologists and education staff. According to a PCS director, during Pillar of Defense, the PCS received many queries online from psychologists, counselors and other education staff members. The unit provided an immediate response to these questions and attached the relevant guidelines, which were distributed to all the psychologists and counselors. At the municipal and school level, online communication was used as a tool for the psychologists to advise the school staff on how to cope with difficulties as they arose in real-time. Teachers also used the Internet to keep in touch the students in order to both identify children in distress and provide emotional support.

The respondents also noted a number of challenges and difficulties that came up more strongly during the current operation.

- ◆ It emerged that not enough preparation had been done in certain sectors, notably among the ultra-Orthodox, immigrants from Ethiopia and – particularly saliently – *among the Arab population*. A senior official at the PCS noted: *"Readiness for emergencies is particularly poor in the Arab sector and in some places it simply doesn't exist ... I felt very bad that we*

hadn't pushed enough during routine times to make the preparations better. There was opposition [in the Arab schools] and we gave in."

- ◆ Another problem that was mentioned regarding the Arab population was the inner conflict that this population often experiences in times of national emergency events. Although they suffer from exposure to these traumatic events as Israelis, they also identify with the Palestinians and their cause. In many cases Israeli Arabs have friends and close relatives on the other side of the border.
- ◆ An additional difficulty was brought up by another EPS director, who said that keeping ready for emergencies requires enormous resources, and a continuous state of readiness. He proposed, therefore, that there should be a position in every EPS for an "emergencies director," which would make it possible to prepare better for the challenges presented by prolonged emergency situations.
- ◆ Another challenge that was mentioned was the need to strengthen the resilience and readiness of the parents. Some respondents felt that the parents of the students were relatively unprepared for Pillar of Defense. An EPS director said: *"If I had more resources, I personally would like to raise the awareness of parents [about adequate parental behavior in an emergency] We observed that children sat with their parents for hours in front of the television watching the events, which might add to their fears and anxieties."* In the same context, a senior psychologist at the PCS noted: *"Our next goal is to focus on the readiness of parents, which is very important ... I would conduct workshops for the parents – how to respond to the child, how to talk to the child, how to live normally in such an emergency,"* and added: *"But I don't know how many parents would come."*
- ◆ A challenge that was raised in the first round of interviews was noted again regarding Pillar of Defense: The respondents mentioned that individuals who need long-term emotional intervention in the aftermath of the events do not always have somewhere to turn. A senior PCS director reported: *"In Pillar of Defense, 850 children throughout Israel were found to be at risk for developing adjustment problems. It is hard for the psychologists to provide the response ... The therapy allocation per child is currently 15 hours, which is nothing ... I'd like to provide interventions that are slightly more appropriate for what is really required to treat the child and prevent PTSD."*

To conclude, the follow-up interviews found that in Pillar of Defense the psychologists worked according to the same principles that had guided their work in earlier national events. However, it was also found that the respondents perceived that the PCS in general and the psychologists in particular had performed at a higher level than before and managed to provide more immediate "here and now" responses. The improved performance was attributed mainly to the practical experience the psychologists had accumulated in previous emergency situations and the more effective use they made of online media during the operation. However, a number of challenges were reported in the interviews in the context of what was done during the operation, including the need to raise the capacity of the service for the Arab sector, the need to increase the parents' readiness for emergency situations, and the need to provide long-term responses to children who need them.

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