

## How Long Can a Hostage Survive in Captivity?

### Expert Report on the Health Effects of 300 Days in Captivity Summary

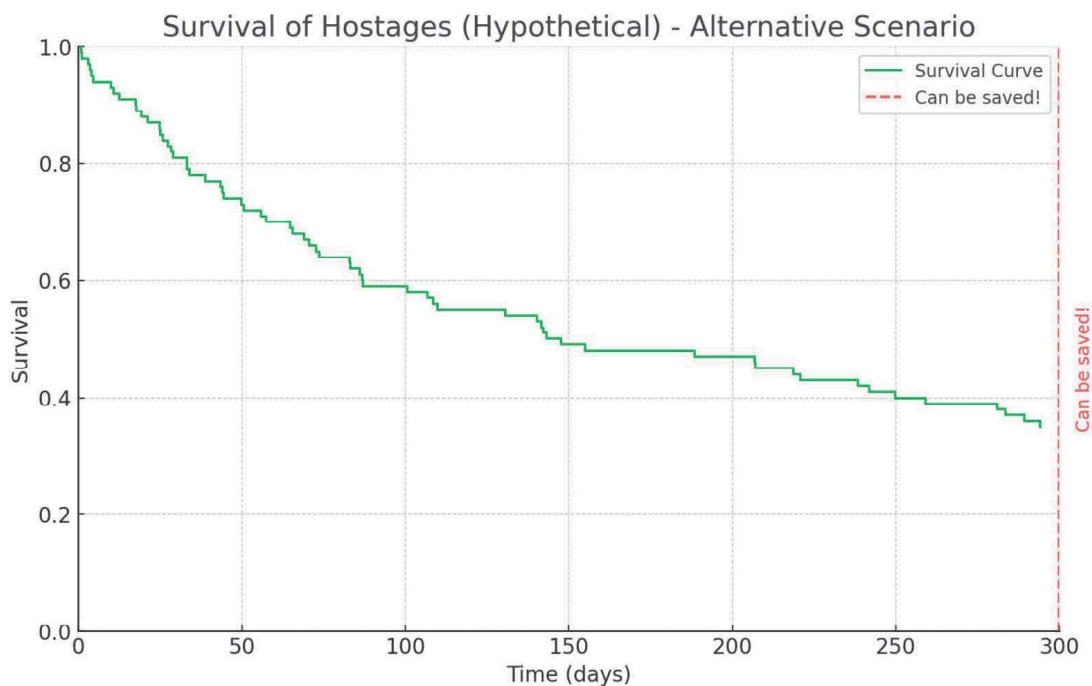
300 days have passed since October 7, 2023, when more than 240 people were brutally kidnapped from their homes and a music festival in South Israel to the Gaza Strip, coincided with a massacre that killed around 1200. As of this writing, following the release of some of the hostages, there are 115 Israeli and non-Israeli hostages still held captive, including the elderly, women, a baby and a toddler. Some are chronically ill and require regular medical care, and some have been injured and need treatment.

The concerns we previously expressed in medical reports from the Hostages and Missing Families Forum's health team are, regrettably, becoming reality. Based on a risk assessment using information provided by released hostages, we have found that those still in captivity face significant health risks. These risks stem from both pre-existing medical conditions and the harsh conditions of their captivity:

- **Chronic illnesses:** Hostages with chronic illnesses face serious health risks due to lack of access to necessary medications and treatments. Conditions like diabetes and cardiovascular disease become critical without proper management, leading to potentially fatal complications.
- **Visual, hearing, and mobility impairments:** The lack of necessary aids such as glasses, hearing aids and mobility aids significantly impair the hostages' ability to function and worsen their physical and mental condition, especially during prolonged stay in conditions without sensory stimulation such as light.
- **Nutrition and digestive problems:** Hostages experience thirst, hunger, severe malnutrition and gastrointestinal problems due to poor nutrition and improper sanitary conditions. Special dietary needs for conditions such as inflammatory bowel disease or celiac disease are not met, leading to worsening symptoms and potentially life-threatening complications.
- **Unique risks for women:** Hostages face additional risks such as sexual violence, which can lead to serious physical and psychological consequences. Issues such as hormonal irregularity and a potential pregnancy without medical treatment further jeopardize their health.
- **Infectious diseases and harsh environmental conditions:** Poor hygiene and living conditions have led to infections and environmental health hazards, including the risk of Polio infection. There is evidence that

hostages contracted skin diseases and respiratory problems exacerbated by captivity conditions, including lack of oxygen, underground.

**How long does a hostage live?** As time passes, fewer hostages survive the harsh conditions of captivity. These conditions include starvation, dehydration, poor sanitation, exposure to infectious diseases, psychological trauma from abuse and isolation, untreated injuries, and lack of sufficient air and light. A theoretical survival graph illustrates the accelerated mortality rate among hostages. As time progresses, the number of survivors decreases sharply, potentially reaching a point where none remain alive.



Graph 1 Visualized using ChatGPT

The immediate release of surviving hostages is crucial to ensure their survival and begin their rehabilitation process. After 300 days in captivity, each additional day could be their last. All hostages are humanitarian cases in imminent danger of death.

Moreover, stress and the ongoing experience of ambiguous loss also harm the health of the families of hostages, leading to an increase in morbidity and mortality. Immediate action to release all hostages is essential to mitigate these grave consequences and facilitate the recovery of agonized family members. These families live in constant fear for the fate of their loved ones, who are enduring inhumane conditions and prolonged uncertainty.

The prolonged captivity and inhumane conditions suffered by the hostages are not only a humanitarian crisis but also a critical health emergency that requires immediate action.

The attached expert report was prepared by leading experts in their fields, who volunteer in the health and resilience teams at the Hostages and Missing Families Forum. The report consists of five chapters providing an in-depth analysis of the critical health, physical, and mental risks faced by hostages held in Gaza for over 300 days. It emphasizes the urgent need for the immediate release of all hostages to prevent further loss of life and facilitate their rehabilitation. The final chapter addresses the detrimental effects on the health of family members. The report's chapters are as follows:

### **1) Physical and Psychological Implications:**

**In his article, Dr. Amir Blumenfeld**, former head of the trauma branch in the Israeli Medical Corps, emphasizes the serious health risks involved in prolonged captivity in closed spaces. A prolonged stay under conditions of captivity in a tunnel can cause significant physical and psychological effects. The consequences on physical health include damage to the various body systems, starting with the cardiovascular system, the respiratory system, the digestive system, the skeleton and muscles, the metabolic and hormonal balance, and more. In terms of psychological consequences, long-term incarceration may exacerbate mental distress, including higher rates of depression, anxiety, and mood disorders/changes. It is worth noting that some of these problems were found in the hostages who were returned as part of the first deal, and it is reasonable to estimate that the situation of those who remained in captivity worsened during the 250 days that have passed since the first transaction.

The physical and psychological consequences worsen as the time of captivity and stay in the tunnel increases. 300 days, which is 10 months, is an extremely long period of time, and it can be said with high certainty that everyone who was captured and remains alive is now suffering from various diseases and symptoms that will worsen to the point of endangering their lives, if they are not released from captivity soon.

### **2) Physiological Aspects and Their Effect on the Medical Condition:**

**Prof. Yuval Heled**, former Chief Physiologist in the Israeli Medical Corps, focuses on the serious physiological and medical aspects of captivity. The harsh conditions, including malnutrition, untreated injuries and poor sanitation, severely impair the physical health of the hostages. Prof. Heled emphasizes issues such as hunger, dehydration, exposure to infectious diseases and

physical deterioration as a result of inadequate medical care. Lack of adequate care exacerbates these health problems, leading to increased mortality and serious long-term health consequences.

### **3) Hostages, Elderly and Vulnerable:**

**Prof. Mark Clarfield**, a geriatric expert, emphasizes the special vulnerability of elderly hostages, who are at higher risk due to existing chronic conditions and the physical and psychological stress of captivity. Some of the hostages are elderly (over the age of 65), and some are even over the age of 80. The vast majority of elderly hostages suffer from chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, heart disease, type 2 diabetes and respiratory diseases. Neglect of medical care has serious consequences, As illustrated by cases such as Alma Avraham, 84, who was released in critical condition after 50 days in captivity, and Aryeh Zalmanovich (Zalman), who died in captivity. Elderly hostages face complex risks due to their poor health and need for special care. Lack of access to necessary medical care during captivity can worsen health and increase the risk of death. Urgent measures are required to address the specific needs of elderly hostages and ensure their survival and well-being.

### **4) Prolonged Psychological Trauma and Its Impact on Mental Health:**

**Prof. Ilana Kremer, Prof. Ofrit Shapira-Berman, Maya Shachar and Dr. Ran Peled**, mental health experts from the Resilience team of the families' forum, study the deep psychological trauma experienced by hostages and their families after 300 days of captivity. The constant threat to their lives and physical integrity, combined with the harsh conditions of captivity, creates an enormous emotional load. Hostages suffer from a constant disturbed rollercoaster of emotions, oscillating between fleeting hope and deep despair. The conditions of captivity – characterized by misinformation, hunger, poor hygiene and neglected injuries – intensify this agitation. For families, the ongoing anxiety and distress of their loved ones exacerbates their psychological suffering. This situation leads to an erosion of hope and trust, and severely harms both hostages and their families. The article highlights the critical need for immediate and effective interventions to address and support these difficult mental health challenges.

### **5) Psychological Trauma, Ambiguous Loss and Mental and Physical Health of Family Members:**

**Dr. Einat Yehene**, a rehabilitation psychologist, delves into the psychological trauma of the abduction event and its implications for the health of the families of the hostages. The prolonged state of "ambiguous loss" causes anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder in various family circles. The

families suffer from severe functional impairments, health neglect, and the outbreak of chronic diseases due to the ongoing traumatic stress and uncertainty regarding the fate of their loved ones. Dr. Yehene's research, conducted in collaboration with Prof. Hagai Levine, highlights the severe impacts on physical and mental health and the urgent need for comprehensive support services. The ongoing stress and lack of closure have a profound impact on the daily functioning, health and overall well-being of families.

### **Conclusion and recommendations:**

The combined insights of the writers illuminate different and complementary angles that illustrate how critical and life-threatening the situation of the hostages is. Each passing day exacerbates their suffering and increases the risk of irreversible damage or death. The report calls for immediate action to release the hostages in order to prevent further losses and begin their rehabilitation, as well as to return the fallen and murdered for burial. Only in this way will the families be able to reach closure and begin rehabilitation.

The health risks described in this report highlight the urgent need for intervention to address the severe physical and psychological effects of prolonged captivity. The international community, humanitarian organizations, and relevant authorities should prioritize the immediate release and treatment of these hostages to mitigate the severe impact of their continued captivity.

### **Israeli decision-makers must not deny the proven fact that the hostages not only suffer indescribably but also die in captivity.**

In conclusion, the health of the hostages is deteriorating rapidly under the current conditions, and they are in imminent danger of death. Immediate action is needed to bring about their immediate release and bring them back to life. The return of all the hostages, the living to rehabilitation and the murdered to burial, is essential in order to leave the twilight zone and enable rehabilitation for the families and for Israel as a whole.

### **Prof. Hagai Levine,**

Head of the Health team, Hostages and Missing Families forum

### **For more information:**

[Summary of an International Webinar on Hostages' Health](#)

[Previous reports of the health Team at the hostages and missing – Families forum](#)

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## 1) 300 Days in Captivity – Physical and Mental Consequences

**Dr. Amir Blumenfeld, former head of the trauma branch of the Medical Corps**

When people are imprisoned in a tunnel under conditions of captivity, they may experience various physical and psychological effects. The physical and psychological consequences worsen as the time spent in captivity and the stay in the tunnel lengthened. 300 days, which is 10 months, is a particularly long period and it can be said with high certainty that **everyone who was captured** and survived is now suffering from various diseases and phenomena that will worsen to the point of endangering his life, if he is not released from captivity soon.

As mentioned, prolonged stay in captivity conditions in the tunnel may cause significant physical and psychological effects. The consequences for physical health include damage to various body systems ranging from the cardiovascular system, respiratory system, digestive system, skeleton and muscles, metabolic and hormonal balance and more. In terms of mental consequences, long-term incarceration can exacerbate mental distress, including higher rates of depression, anxiety, and mood disorders/alterations.

It should be noted that some of the problems described below were found among the hostages who were returned as part of the first transaction, and it is logical to estimate that the situation of those who remained in captivity worsened during the 250 days that have passed since the first transaction.

### **Effects on physical health:**

Prolonged stay in captivity conditions in the tunnel may lead to damage to various body systems:

- **Cardiovascular and metabolic changes:** Prolonged confinement can affect the cardiovascular system, causing **changes in heart rate and blood pressure**. Decreased cardiopulmonary fitness: Lack of exercise weakens the heart muscle and reduces lung capacity, so cardiopulmonary fitness decreases. *Studies examining the effect of confinement on cardiovascular parameters and the potential risks associated with decreased physical activity and changes in stress levels*

*have shown that cardiac output, decreased heart muscle mass, and changes in blood pressure regulation may occur. Blood volume and vascular function may also be affected.*

- **Respiratory system:** Limited ventilation and poor air quality in the tunnel can lead to respiratory problems, including **irritation of the airways** or **worsening of existing conditions**.
- **Gastrointestinal tract:** Changes in eating patterns and stress can cause digestive problems such as **constipation or diarrhea**. Poor sanitary conditions can cause **infectious diseases of the digestive system**. Lack of food and an unbalanced economy can lead to significant and extreme weight loss.
- **Changes in the musculoskeletal system:** Prolonged confinement can cause muscle thinning, decreased bone density, and joint stiffness.
- **Immune suppression:** Studies have shown prolonged suppression of the immune system during long-term isolation and confinement, which can increase the risk of infections and diseases such as gastrointestinal, respiratory, and skin infections.
- **Hormonal changes:** Isolation and confinement can disrupt hormonal regulation and lead to changes in the level of stress hormones (such as cortisol), reproductive hormones, and metabolic hormones. The damage to metabolic hormones can cause changes in **glucose** metabolism, **lipid profiles, and insulin sensitivity**. In addition, changes in light exposure and circadian cycles can affect the secretion of hormones such as **melatonin** and cortisol.

### **Mental and emotional consequences**

Prolonged isolation and incarceration can have significant mental consequences resulting from the conditions of captivity:

Decreased sensory stimuli: The absence of significant reduction of sensory stimuli can cause hallucinations, disorientation and anxiety. Social isolation: The lack of human interaction can cause loneliness, depression and cognitive decline. Cognitive dysfunction: Abilities related to memory, concentration and problem solving may be impaired. And of course, a difficult experience such as captivity can lead to the development of **post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**, which is expressed in severe and prolonged emotional distress, which harms the captive and his immediate environment.

### **Decreased physical fitness**

Limited space and lack of exercise can cause **a decrease in muscle strength, cardiopulmonary fitness, and overall physical endurance**. Prolonged

inactivity can lead to **muscle depletion, decreased bone density** and deterioration in overall physical fitness.

**Sensory impairment:**

Over time, people may experience impaired senses due to a lack of external stimuli. This impairment can lead to decreased sensory perception and increased sensitivity when exposed to stimuli outside the tunnel.

*It is important to note that **these reactions may vary between individuals, and are influenced by factors such as the specific conditions of incarceration, personal resilience, and personal coping ability.** In **addition**, the age of the captives, their previous medical condition and the lack of required drug treatment, have a significant impact on their medical condition and chances of survival. It should be remembered that some of the captives suffered physical and sexual injuries during the abduction or captivity, which also worsen the health of the hostages.*

*Finally, it should be remembered that some of these physiological changes may be reversible if people are released from captivity, integrate into routines, and return to regular physical activity and social interactions. The longer their release is delayed, the less likely they are to heal and recover.*

**2) Hostages in Gaza – Physiological and Medical Aspects**

**Prof. Yuval Heled, PhD, Expert in Physiology, Former Chief Physiologist, Israel Medical Corps**

For the past ten months, Israeli hostages—our families, friends, and helpless acquaintances—have been held hostage by the Hamas terror organization in Gaza. They are being held in harsh conditions, in an area of destruction and fighting. Some are wounded, and all at this stage can be considered sick/ill! Unlike prisoners of war, the abductees in Gaza are being held as hostages without receiving any medical treatment, supervision or connection with the outside world as they deserve by the international humanitarian law. This is therefore a war crime, a part of a humanitarian crime, a terrorist act ongoing for about ten months. Moreover, the fact that the hostages are not held under any humanitarian supervision, expose them to conditions and risks which are much harsher and dangerous than those of prisoners of war, as evidenced by past cases. This ongoing humanitarian crime harms our parents, sons, daughters, brothers, and sisters, which is not sufficiently addressed, nationally or internationally.



The following is a professional opinion stating that the physical condition of the hostages is deteriorating rapidly, and their immediate failure to rescue may lead to their death for medical reasons. If Hamas bullets (or stray bullets from our forces) do not kill them, they will die of disease. The opinion is based on a variety of studies and relevant case studies dealing with prolonged captivity, cases of starvation, prolonged stay in dark conditions, prolonged immobility, violence, rape, and terrorism. The opinion is also based on cases of returnees from Gaza that have already been documented, indicating extremely difficult physical and mental conditions in Hamas captivity and a life-threatening poor medical condition.

**Prolonged immobility** – Prolonged movement restriction conditions have been linked to physiological damage to all body systems, a decrease in muscle and bone mass (to the point of irreversible disability), impaired mental state, and, as documented in the cases of some returnees, the formation of dangerous blood clots that can obstruct blood flow to vital systems (including the heart, lungs, and brain), necrosis, and death.

**Complications of injuries** – Various injuries sustained during the abduction event and/or throughout the months of abduction may be complicated by a decrease in the body's defense mechanisms, especially since, as far as is known, the hostages do not receive medication. In light of this, even a relatively minor injury can become complicated quickly, particularly due to poor hygiene and a weakened immune system.

**Mental state** – Being held captive by a violent terrorist organization, especially after experiencing the trauma of abduction and the direct testimony to the murder of relatives and friends, are risk factors for severe and irreversible psychological trauma that will damage the physiological balance mechanisms and accelerate deterioration in general physical condition. Numerous studies directly link prolonged captivity and/or being a hostage as significant risk factors for acute and future mental illness, post-trauma, functional difficulties, and shortened life expectancy.

**Sexual abuse** – Beyond the traumatic mental event of sexual abuse, there is a significant risk of trauma injuries and infections in the genital system, leading to complications and multi-systemic failure, potentially causing death.

**Lack of exposure to light** – Prolonged stay in dark conditions, particularly with a lack of vitamins A and C from food, impairs vision mechanisms, spatial vision, and motor coordination, potentially leading to irreversible disability. Combined with poor nutrition and lack of movement, prolonged exposure to darkness increases the risk of hallucinations and mental disorders. Lack of sun exposure causes a significant and dangerous decrease in vitamin D, affecting bone

health and other metabolic functions. Exposure to prolonged darkness also disrupts the body's circadian rhythm and overall health.

**Environment** – Gaza has increasingly poor sanitary conditions. Bodies under rubble, sewage in the streets, and the proliferation of rodents and insects all contribute to an increased risk of infectious diseases and epidemics, posing a threat to the weakened and helpless hostages. The recent Polio disease outbreak in Gaza is surely unfortunate evidence. The prolonged stay in tunnels, high humidity, and heat, without sufficient ventilation, adds to the mental and physiological stress, increasing the risk of heat injuries, dehydration, and environmentally dependent diseases.

**Poor hygiene** – The need to hide the hostages and prevent their discovery and rescue forces the Hamas terrorist organization to keep them under harsh conditions. This includes poor sanitation, inability to shower, drinking unclean water, incontinence, filthy toilets, contaminated utensils, not changing clothes and underwear, lack of hygiene products for women, lack of soap, and more. Combined with a prolonged decline in physiological and immune function, this greatly increases the risk of a variety of diseases and exacerbation of existing conditions, leading to irreversible damage and even death.

**Conclusion** – The terrible tragedy that began on October 7 continues and worsens for the hostages under Hamas control in Gaza for the past ten months. The health risks they face are extremely high, and time works against them rapidly. It can be explicitly stated that there is great concern that our hostages in Gaza are in a state of slow dying. While the situation might still be reversible, under the current conditions, this may not be the case for long. **Urgency** - The rescue of the hostages is urgent, urgent!

### 3) The clock is ticking, and the adult hostages have no time

#### **Prof. A. Mark Clarfield, Geriatrics Specialist**

To understand situation of older hostages in general, one needs to realise that even among those who are relatively healthy for their age, they are not as robust as younger people. Especially after age 80, loss of muscle mass, deficits with vision and hearing and other "normal" degenerative changes are common. Most older people require glasses for proper vision and many use hearing aids. It is likely that most older hostages are now without these aids. In addition, many older persons often suffer from various diseases and disabilities. Heart and joint disease are common as is cognitive decline. In such people, these developments result in a loss of clinical reserve, even in those who do not exhibit any particular comorbidity. In addition to normal ageing changes, there

is a frequent superimposition of age-related diseases (e.g. diabetes, cardiac and neurological disorders, orthopedic conditions and cognitive decline [in its severe form "dementia"]).

For proper treatment, all these older persons require a steady supply of relevant medications and ongoing clinical supervision. Discontinuing these abruptly, is a recipe for disaster. Despite Israeli and international efforts to provide medications for those with chronic medical conditions, there is absolutely no evidence that these lifesaving drugs have reached those in need.

Superimposed on these stressors, older persons will be even more sensitive to the difficult conditions of underground captivity. For example, lack of sunlight which will cause vit D deficiency. Restricted ability to move, poor nutrition and the dank humid air in the tunnels will adversely affect those with less reserve. And yet, it is unwise to sell older people short - even those who have been through so much. All of these older folk had accomplished one major feat before being kidnapped: until then at least they had survived premature death, despite everything. Despite this "survivor advantage" it can easily be overwhelmed by the terrible conditions under which these older hostages are being incarcerated. It will be a miracle if any survive. For those still alive, the clock is ticking ever faster.

#### **4) What happens to the soul after 300 days in captivity?**

**Prof. Ilana Kramer, Prof. Ofrit Shapira-Berman, Maya Shahar and Dr. Ran Peled, Mental Health Experts, Resilience team, Hostages' Families forum Headquarters**

Trauma is etched in the psyche and is associated with a short-term mental response. However, under certain conditions, it becomes constant, painful and unbearable. Our dear hostages have been experiencing many traumas since 7.10, and they are massive and prolonged - starting with the events of 7.10, which are exceptional in their intensity, and throughout the torture of captivity in the long time that has passed since then. The most dangerous component of the psyche is the threat to life and bodily integrity. In such a constant threat, the hostages have been there for 300 days.

At the outset, the mental mechanisms may provide resilience and resilience against severe and lasting mental damage. However, the interplay between trauma and resilience mechanisms is eroded even more intensely (to put it mildly) under conditions of tangible threat such as war and conditions of captivity. These conditions create, among other things, an "emotional rollercoaster" that ranges from hope to despair.

The conditions of captivity, as far as we know, contain the receipt of deceptive and shocking information, conditions of starvation, suffocation and poor hygiene, and certainly also accompanying physical morbidity and neglected injuries. Under these conditions, there is likely to be a 'weakening of hope' and a 'shattering of trust' by someone looking to free them from the hell they are experiencing. On a mental level, there is nothing worse. Hope and trust are among the most important foundations of the human spirit and our resilience in the face of difficult and traumatic life events. They are the fuel that drives the human psyche. Without them, we are nothing more than a dead animal. The erosion of these factors leads a person to accept a terrible fate that dooms him to death, mental or physical, slow and agonizing.

We must remember that the daughters and families of the hostages also underwent tremendous trauma themselves on 7 October. A central part of it was the extreme concern for their loved ones, those who were kidnapped alive or dead. Many times, they themselves even accompanied the moments of terror of their loved ones. This in itself is an unbearable trauma, which immediately turned into terror over the fate of loved ones at the hands of a bitter and cruel enemy.

Since then, most family members have been involved, to one degree or another, in a powerful, emotional, difficult and exhausting struggle to return their loved ones. The immense and ongoing worry, feelings of isolation, helplessness and rage are an enormous burden on the soul, which can injure it. After 300 such days, containing extreme worry coupled with a growing sense of helplessness, mental burnout is likely to injure more and more.

The cry of struggle can take power, but it has additional potential. In a situation in which the words and actions of the family members are effective and fall on attentive ears, when they have an echo, when there is another who hears, there is enough to charge their souls with a measure of strength.

For the sake of the hostages, first and foremost, but also for the sake of their relatives, we must do everything in our power so that they know that their cry is heard, that we are doing everything possible for the release of the hostages. Immediately. Without any delay. We must be of the opinion that every additional second may be punishable by another fracture of life, perhaps even death. Mental or physical.

## 5) 300 Days in Captivity: The Lasting Health Effects on Hostages' Families

**Dr. Einat Yehene, specialist-supervisor rehabilitation psychologist, Hostages and Missing Families Forum**

It has been 300 days since the terrible trauma of October 7. The families are still in a state of "ambiguous loss" – a complex and agonizing reality with no certainty regarding the fate of their abducted loved ones. This situation, which has been going on for ten months, imposes a heavy mental burden and significantly adversely affects the physical and mental health of the families of the hostages in their various circles. ***While all eyes are on the well-being and health of the hostages themselves, the health of the families is also important.***

An in-depth qualitative study conducted between April and June 2024 by Dr. Einat Yehene and Prof. Hagai Levine, in which 18 family members of hostages of varying degrees of kinship participated, revealed the complexity of coping with the ambiguous loss. The study, based on in-depth interviews, presents a worrying picture of significant functional, mental and physical difficulties stemming from the ongoing uncertainty, traumatic stress and the relentless struggle to return the hostages.

Among the families of the hostages, a number of situations of ambiguous loss were identified, including a lack of indication of the abductee's condition, an indication of death without burial, and a sign of life with ambiguity regarding its updating and significance. Each of these situations poses unique psychological challenges for the families and the different circles of kinship.

The trauma of abduction dramatically disrupts the overall functioning of the families. Many of them are in a situation known as the "tunnel effect", in which they focus all their efforts and attention on the single task of returning their loved ones, while significantly neglecting other areas of life. Family, marital and parenting roles are marginalized, with all energy directed to the struggle for the return of the hostages.

In the area of employment, the situation is particularly serious. Many of the family members have not worked at all since the day of the abduction, and those who recently returned to work do so part-time and find it difficult to function continuously. Difficulty concentrating, inability to commit to long-term tasks, and a feeling of detachment from daily reality interfere with the ability to maintain a normal work routine.

The physical health of family members is significantly impaired due to neglect of basic health habits and ongoing medical monitoring. They report chronic sleep difficulties, eating disorders, the onset or worsening of chronic and nervous diseases, and an increase in harmful behaviors such as increased smoking and various addictions. Previous medical problems, as well as new ones that arise as a result of the ongoing situation, are often not treated in time, due to impartiality, neglect and lack of self-legitimacy, which leads to a worsening of their general state of health.

The mental health of family members is severely and worryingly affected. A high prevalence of anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms is observed in many of them. These symptoms include components of intrusiveness and hyper-arousal, which make normal daily functioning difficult. Extreme emotional fluctuations between despair and hope are frequent, and any new information or rumor about the status of the hostages or the possibility of a release deal triggers severe stress reactions.

In conclusion, research and clinical experience indicate that the ambiguous state of loss in which the families of hostages find themselves is one of the most excruciating. For 300 days now, uncertainty has frozen their lives and led to various functional and health distresses. This situation highlights the urgent need to make health services accessible and provide comprehensive support in a variety of areas. As time passes, the challenges intensify and require ongoing monitoring and systemic attention. Only in this way can families be helped to cope with the harsh reality and maintain their health and functioning alongside continued efforts to return the hostages. **In this context, the return of the dead for burial is also of crucial importance to the health of families who need closure in order to begin their rehabilitation.**