

## OCTOBER 7 WAR – A YEAR IN REVIEW

### "SWORDS OF THE SOUL"

## ERAN – EMOTIONAL FIRST AID



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## "Swords of the Soul – A Year in Review of the October 7 War"

BY ERAN'S CHAIRMAN AND CEO

The "Iron Swords" war in which the State of Israel has been engaged in the past year is the most difficult and complex period we have known as a country, a period that has affected and continues to have a profound impact on the mental well-being of all Israeli citizens. This was following the COVID-19 crisis, in which we experienced lockdowns, quarantines and uncertainty that left a significant mark on our mental health.

With the outbreak of war on Black Saturday a year ago, ERAN faced enormous, unprecedented challenges which were not experienced since its establishment in 1971. During the first six months of the war, we responded and assisted over 172,000 calls, an average of about 33,000 calls a month, of which about 44,000 were received in the first month of the war. Anxiety and trauma related calls recorded an alarming 950% increase in the first six months of the war. Recorded as well was a 125% increase in distress calls among youth in the first weeks of the war.

**Now, one year into the war, the number of distress calls has exceeded 315,000 from all parts of the Israeli society.**

The depth of the emotional distresses we encountered this year among youth and children should deprive the entire Israeli society of sleep as they are the next generation of the State of Israel. This is the generation that was affected by the coronavirus, and today they are IDF soldiers. This year, the intensity of the distress in calls to ERAN crossed sectors and populations. Even now, a year after the disaster, the mental tsunami we entered is just beginning. We continue to see its effects on the soul, and we believe that we will continue to see these effects for years to come. The coming years will require extensive investments in infrastructure and scope of our services at ERAN.

ERAN services, which in many cases constitute a first aid for the soul, must continue to always be available and accessible to Israeli citizens. **For this to happen the state must enter to a partnership with us.** At the national level, alongside the great challenges, the past year has also brought unprecedented opportunities. Public awareness of the importance of mental health has increased significantly, and there is a growing recognition, albeit insufficient, among decision makers of the need to invest more resources in this area, as we fought and warned against at the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis in 2020.

The second year of the outbreak of the war should be a turning point in the mental health of Israeli citizens. Combined action by the various bodies is required to invest additional resources in coping with emotional distress alongside fighting public stigma and strengthening community resilience damaged in the war. ERAN works and invests its utmost efforts in reaching every segment of the population and raising awareness of seeking mental health help.

The difficult year that we've all been through is a reminder that mental health is a precious resource that must be carefully guarded and nurtured. We must continue to work together to build a healthier society, where each one of us can get the help, we deserve.

**Shuki Oren, ERAN Chairman    David Koren, ERAN CEO**



Emotional First Aid in Israel  
In memory of Dr. Aryeh &  
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עמותה לעזרה ראשונה  
נפשית בטלפון ובאינטרנט  
ע"ש ד"ר אריה ומריה  
(בזסלני ער.)

**SUMMARY - ONE YEAR OF THE WAR ON OUR HOME AND SOUL.**

On October 7, 2023, Israel experienced the worst traumatic events in its history, which cast a dark and threatening shadow over Israeli society. On the same day, the ERAN hotline was flooded with **3,500** distress calls, a **500% increase from the daily average**. Every call was a heartbreaking cry, a personal story of trauma, loss and vulnerability. ERAN volunteers, together with the organization's staff, have since dealt with huge waves of pain and suffering, providing supportive and even life-saving emergency response.

On dark nights, when alarm sirens pierce the sky and the fear from terror takes over, ERAN becomes the lifeline for hundreds of thousands of frightened Israelis. In times of crisis, when the country's foundations tremble, ERAN volunteers stand at the forefront, ready to listen, reassure and provide a supportive shoulder for anyone who needs it.

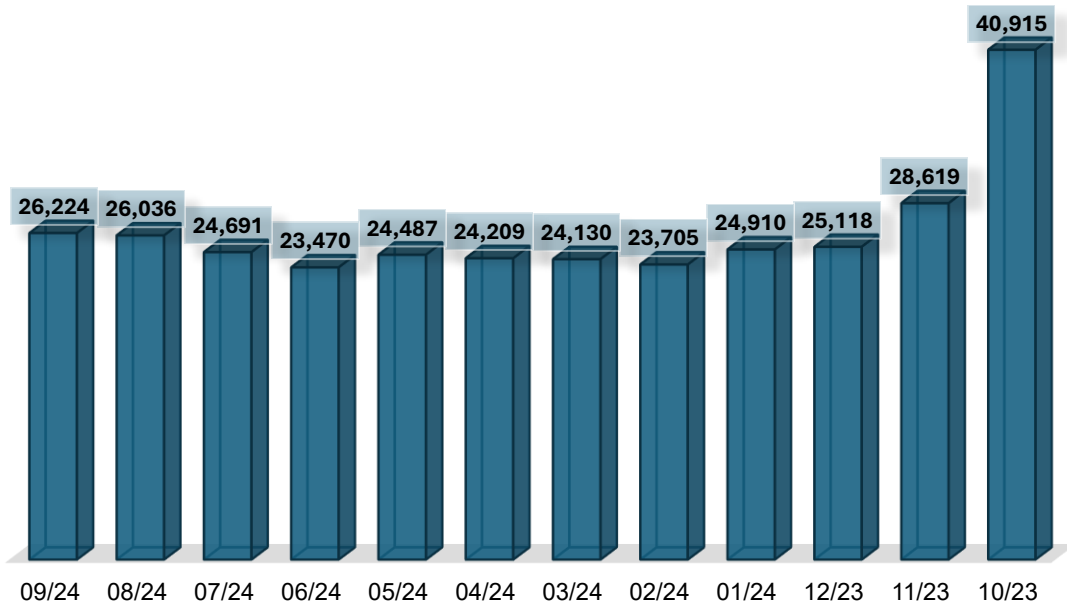
**Scope of distress calls**

During the year of the "Iron Swords" War, ERAN operated a variety of anonymous dedicated assistance services and telephone helplines, including the national hotline operating 24/7 for the entire population of Israel, a special response line for soldiers and their families, a mental health helpline for Holocaust survivors, a helpline in Arabic, a hotline for the ultra-Orthodox population, a professional mental health assistance service for new immigrants (in cooperation with the Ministry for new immigrants) in five languages, a dedicated assistance service for mothers and fathers after childbirth, a line for doctors and medical teams (in cooperation with Clalit Health Services), a life-saving emergency line (in cooperation with Israel Railways), a mental health response line for the parties survivors and a national resilience hotline in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, the Social Security administration and the Israeli Trauma Coalition. Alongside the helplines, online responses are provided through chat, WhatsApp, text messages, forum and e-mail.

During the year of the Iron Sword War, ERAN received **316,514** distress calls, which were answered by 1,671 volunteers. **41%** of the calls were received from men and **59%** from women.



## DISTRESS CALLS BY MONTH



## BREAKDOWN OF THE CALLS BY CONTENT

First month 7.10.23- 06.11.23	6 months 7.10.23- 06.04.24	First Year 7.10.23- 06.10.24	Reason for the call
17.00%	31.00%	29.30%	Emotional pain, depression, acute emotional distress
13.00%	26.50%	29.10%	Loneliness
60.00%	19.50%	16.80%	Anxiety, Trauma, Loss
7.00%	16.00%	18.20%	Interpersonal relationships (parenting, social relationships, Intimacy)
1.00%	2.00%	2.60%	Employment/Economic Distress
2.00%	4.00%	4.00%	Violence, Sexual abuse
100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	Total

## BREAKDOWN OF THE CALLERS' AGE

7.10.23-6.11.23	7.10.23-30.3.24	7.10.23-06.10.24	Age Range
19%	22%	19%	Up to 24
20%	25%	20%	25-35
21%	17%	15%	36-49
25%	19%	30%	50-64
12%	13%	11%	65-75
3%	4%	4%	76+
	100%	100%	Total

The data describes the calls to ERAN at three points in time: the first month of the war, 6 months and in first year, with changes in the reasons for as for the call as follows:



**Anxiety, trauma and loss:** peaked in the first month (60%) and decreased significantly to an annual average of 16.8%. The decline can indicate partial recovery and gradual adaptation to the new situation, while receiving emotional support.



**Loneliness and emotional pain:** an increase from 13% and 17% in the first month and an increase to about 29% of calls on an annual average. The increase indicates ongoing mental effects and deep loneliness among the population.



**Interpersonal relationships:** An increase from 7% in the first month to about 18% on an annual average may indicate ongoing pressures on personal relationships due to the unusual situation.



**Economic distress:** A slight increase from 1% to an annual average of 2.6%, indicating lasting but less central economic effects on people seeking mental health help.

In the first month of the war, calls in the category of anxiety, trauma and loss (48%) were significantly higher than other categories, indicating a strong and immediate impact of the difficult events on Israeli society. The initial response to stressful and trauma situations is reflected in a significant increase in reports of anxiety and loss, when society is under immediate threat and an increase in emotional distress, which has led to many high distresses calls for emotional support.

As time passed, calls related to anxiety and trauma declined – from 60% to 19% in the first 6 months and to about 17% at the end of the first year. This decline may be the result of a certain emotional adjustment of society, as Israeli society begins to adapt and rehabilitate itself after the initial distress. At the same time, the effects of war and trauma are sometimes delayed and may manifest themselves in various ways and in diverse and long-term distresses.

On the other hand, the loneliness and emotional pain related calls have increased – from 13% and 17% initially to 26% and 31% in the 6 months and remained high at the end of the year (about 29%). This indicates the ongoing and long-term impact of the war on mental well-being, manifested, among other things, in a stable sense of distress and intense loneliness among many, as they continue to cope with the ongoing psychological consequences of the situation.

### An examination of the data shows significant changes in calls to ERAN among two age groups:

#### 1. Up to 24 years old

- An increase from 19% in the first month to 22% in the 6 months of the year and stabilization at 19% on an annual average for the first year. The increase indicates the impact of the situation on young people, who are more vulnerable mentally and socially during times of uncertainty and stress. The subsequent decline may indicate resilience or some adaptation to the new situation.

## 2. Ages 50-64

- A decrease from 25% in the first month to 19% in the first 6 months, followed by a sharp increase to 30% on average for the first year. The initial decline may be the result of better adaptability at the beginning of the situation, but the resurgence indicates that the prolonged crisis has begun to have a deeper impact on the mental and physical health of this age group, including content such as economics and health that were damaged during the crisis.

The other age groups did not show significant changes, or the changes were relatively small, suggesting relative stability in their responses to the situation.



## CALLS FROM POPULATIONS IN DISTRESS



### Soldiers, reservists and their families: Over 40,000 calls

During wartime, soldiers are exposed to extreme experiences of trauma and loss, which can leave a deep imprint on their psyche. The battles, the violence, the loss of friends are just some of the challenges they must face. These distresses may manifest themselves in a wide range of symptoms, such as anxiety, depression, difficulty sleeping, difficulty in making connections, and anger.

The need for emotional support for soldiers in times of war is critical. However, many of them find it difficult to seek help, out of fear of social reservations, fear of being considered weak, or fear of repercussions on their military service. Therefore, the existence of anonymous support, which allows soldiers to reveal their innermost feelings, without fear of judgment, is essential. Such a safe space can be a turning point for many soldiers and help them cope with the implications of their service.

**The sharp transitions between routine and emergency are a major challenge for reservists, who need to adapt quickly to the changing demands of military service, while trying to maintain stability in their personal lives.**



### Children and adolescents: about 58,000 calls

Children and adolescents turned to ERAN during the war mainly around content dealing with anxiety, trauma and loss. More than 40% of their calls dealt with these. About a third of the calls dealt with difficulties around relationships and feelings of loneliness. 20% of the calls dealt with emotional pain, depression and acute emotional distress.

**Every fifth call during the war year came from children and adolescents.**



**Parents: About 50,000 calls**

In wartime, when life is subjected to uncertainty and stress, parents face unique challenges. The fear for their children's safety, the need to explain complex events, and the stress of maintaining a routine under difficult circumstances place a heavy emotional burden on parents. Parents' calls to ERAN's helplines reflect their need for support, guidance and reliable information to help them cope with the complex situation. Most of all, they are looking for an empathetic ear, strategies for calming the children, effective ways to explain what is happening to their children, recommendations for coping with anxiety and stress, and emotional support to cope with their personal difficulties inside and outside the family unit.

Available and accessible 24/7, the support helps parents feel less alone, receive tools for coping with the situation, and provide their children with the safe space they need.



**Evacuees: About 15,000 calls**

The evacuees from their homes experience a deep existential crisis during the war. The forced displacement, the fear of the future, the uncertainty and lack of control, together with the disconnection from the familiar routine, shake their world. Calls to the hotline attest to their need for empathic listening and connection to resources and hope. The connection to strength and resilience will help them rebuild their lives and cope with the emotional and practical challenges facing them.



**Holocaust survivors: about 10,000 calls**

During wartime, Holocaust survivors sometimes experience renewed trauma, flooding painful memories of the past. The security escalation, the loud noises, and the bad news may bring them back to the camps and the loss they experienced. Holocaust survivors' calls to the hotline reflect their deep need for emotional support, listening and connecting with people who will understand the complexity of the trauma they carry. They share their anxiety, depression and intense loneliness. In addition, they worry about their family members and the younger generation and fear that history will repeat itself. The hotline is a safe place for them to share their feelings and connect with a supportive community.

## EXAMPLES OF CALLS

- The spouse of a reservist called in tears. Her partner hasn't been available for hours and she's worried out of her mind.
- A mother of four calls in a panic after a long barrage and the echoes of interceptions thundering in the background. The husband has been in reserve duty for months now and she feels on the verge of drowning.
- A reservist returns to a reality that has changed. The business collapsed, and his wife announced that she wanted to separate. "Sometimes I think it's a shame I wasn't killed in Gaza," he shares painfully.
- The mother of a soldier who returned after a long period of time shares her concern that she thinks he suffers from PTSD. He's not the same boy I knew, she says. The nights are not nights, sleep is not sleep, and he is unwilling to receive help.
- A woman evacuated from the north for almost a year, **living** an impossible life **first** in a hotel and now in a tiny apartment. **She has** one child with special needs and a one-year-old baby. Her husband has already been called up for three rounds of reserve duty. She feels that she and her children are transparent.
- A reservist calls with a sense of panic that he is "losing it." The first time I turn to you and ask for help, he says almost in a whisper. He lost many friends and was exposed to harsh sights that will stay with him for the rest of his life. Today, when he returned from a mission, he found himself shaking nonstop. He is unable to function and afraid to disappoint his commander and mates.
- The father of a combat soldier shares the intense distress he has experienced for a long time. He tries to be optimistic and support his wife, who goes crazy with worry, but inside he feels that he can't bear the tension and constant fear from a knock on the door.
- An evacuee post-traumatic from a previous war, returned from reserve duty and was unable to free himself from the flashbacks from the battles. He thinks the medication isn't helping him anymore and he feels on the verge of exploding.
- A man calls concerning his wife's threat that if he returns to reserve duty again, she will not be able to continue living. He identifies depression that has gotten worse ever since the birth of their second daughter and consults on how to act. He, too, has been very worried since the birth. Having watched the tv broadcast about the lookout female soldiers, he doesn't know how parents can protect their children in this country.
- A 17-year-old girl in a panic attack calls from the safe room. Together with the volunteer, she breathes until she feels calmer. "From a happy, happy child, I became sad, and I cry all the time," she shares. The family physician recommended medication, but she is unsure about it. She thanks the ERAN volunteers who are always here for her.
- A 14-year-old boy feels lonely. His father stayed in the South because of work and his mother and sister are with him in the center of Israel in a new environment. The separation from his friends is difficult for him and he does not have the energy for studies or making other connections. Lately, he hasn't been going to school at all. He spends most of the day in bed or playing computer games.

## SUMMARY BY ERAN'S NATIONAL PROFESSIONAL DIRECTOR

The data speaks for itself indicating that the war has caused a fierce storm in our psyche. The anxiety, trauma, loss and loneliness have permeated every corner of our lives, leaving a deep imprint on us.

Stormy waves seemed to sweep us deep into a sea of distress, leaving us struggling to find stable ground.

The data indicates an alarming increase in mental distress, manifested not only in anxiety and fear, but also in deep loneliness and ongoing emotional pain. War has affected and continues to affect every aspect of our lives – our relationships, our sense of security and the way we perceive the world and ourselves in it. It raises difficult questions about the meaning of our lives and our future in the Israeli society.

**The data highlights the need for an accessible and long-term mental health support system, especially considering that responses to trauma can be delayed.**

However, the calls also reflect the strength and fortitude of the ERAN callers and the fact that the seeds of resilience are found in all of us from young to old. ERAN's volunteers and staff are a response of humanity and compassion in times of unimaginable cruelty and fighting.

The war's anniversary effect is a reminder that time passes, but the mental implications and difficult memories remain. This year, and every year anew, we are required to deal with all the traumatic events we experienced during the war. Special sensitivity is required during these periods, since emotional wounds that have begun to heal may also open, and the pain may return with greater intensity. At this time, we must be attentive to each other, support one another, and remember that no one should be left alone in the struggle for the soul.

In wartime, the family unit becomes the most important safe space for children and adolescents. The open sharing and preparation for talking about feelings, concerns, thoughts and experiences allow children to understand that they are not alone, and that their reactions are natural and understandable. Parents, as the significant adults in their children's lives, can help them process the intense emotions that arise by listening and being close. A stable routine, along with perceptiveness to signs of distress and the need for support, are the order of the day.



### Recommendations for coping

- **We will open our hearts:** we will talk about what we feel, without fear and without shame. Sharing and listening are the key to recovery.
- **We will support each other:** we will be there for each other; we will listen to one another, and we will lend a supportive shoulder. Our community is a huge source of strength.
- **We will ask for help:** Don't be afraid to ask for emotional first aid and/or professional assistance. Mental health therapy can help us cope with difficulties and even grow from the trauma.
- **Nurture our connections:** Strengthening family and social ties is essential for a sense of belonging and alleviating feelings of loneliness.
- **Take care of ourselves:** Set aside time for self-preservation, activities that make us happy and give us a sense of meaning, respite and rest.

Shiri Daniels PhD

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We need your support

