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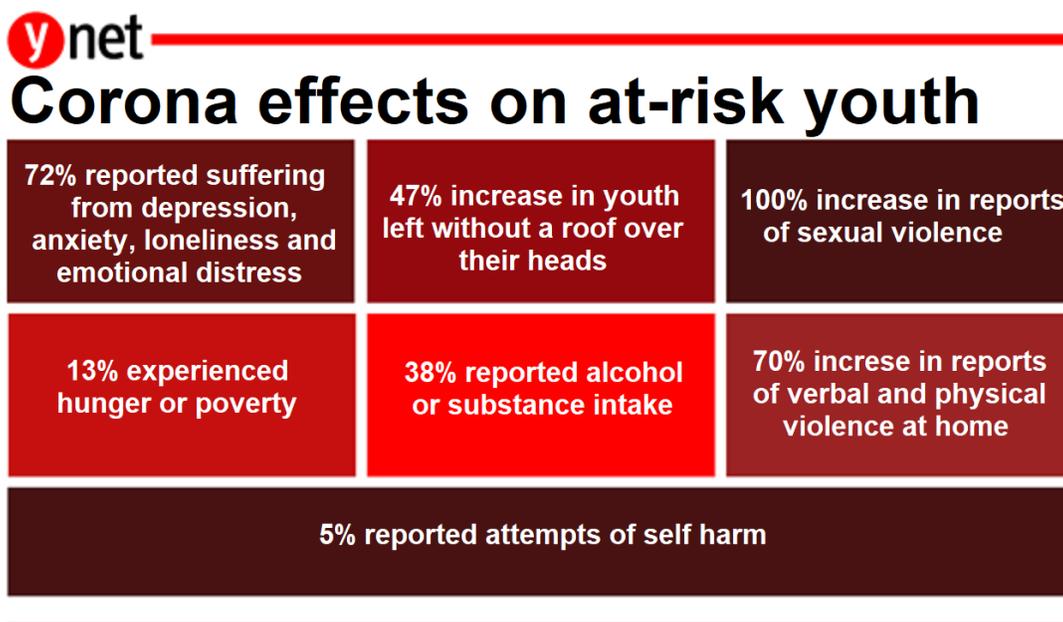
## The invisible pandemic: an increase in at-risk youth who resorted to the streets, to drugs, and alcohol.

ELEM's Corona summary report shows a sharp spike in suicide attempts, eating disorders and deep loneliness, experienced by at risk-youth during the Corona crisis. 43% of these young people reported dealing with anxiety, depression and intense emotional crises, in a capacity that is 4 times greater than in 2019.

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**Given the hardships and getting used to the reality of the Corona, invisible demographics, who are already marginalized, are suffering even more.** The distress of the at-risk youth and young men and women has deepened and gotten more intense, to the point of extreme emergencies. The Corona crisis led many to resort to drugs, alcohol, running to the streets, eating disorders and self harm. Some were left without the support of their families, homeless, they've lost everything.

According to data provided by ELEM, which is based on 4,800 at-risk youth and young people, ages 12-26, 251 youths which were served by ELEM between March and May, found themselves without a roof over their heads, which is a 47% increase compared to last year. 232 tried to harm themselves, 59 developed eating disorders – a 50% increase compared to last year. 145 ran away from home during the social isolation period, and 143 got into altercations with the police.



43% of the youth who turned to ELEM reported experiencing anxiety, depression and emotional crises, (that's 4 times the amount of 2019,) 29% suffered from loneliness (2.25 times more than in 2019,) 23% used alcohol, 15% used drugs, 5% attempted suicide, 13% suffered from hunger, 7% reported verbal and physical violence at home (a 70% increase compared to last year,) and 4% experienced sexual violence (almost twice the amount of 2019.)

Israel's President, Mr. Reuven Rivlin, accepted ELEM's report and said: "The Corona crisis has hit the entire world, but at this time, the invisible demographics are in even greater need. For youth in distress and at-risk, the closure of the welfare and education institutions means an increase of the risk element, sometimes to the point where their lives are in danger. The isolation guidelines can sometimes be dangerous for those whose home isn't, unfortunately, a safe space." The president thanked ELEM and said "you're the guardian angels of the at-risk youth. Always on the field, always willing. You are life-saving."

ELEM Israel president, Ms. Nava Barak, shared: "In order to deal with the crisis we expanded our services and kept meeting the youth on all fronts of operation, while adjusting to the new normal - on the streets, at ELEM's emergency centers, on social media and on Zoom. We didn't give up on a single one. "

#### I was exhausted, hungry and cold

"I wanted to get covid. It's better. Better to die due to Corona than to die on the streets," says Lior, a young woman of 21, from one of ELEM's centers for young women at extreme risk. Ever since she's been through sexual assault a year ago, she finds it hard to be adjusted into routines, and during the Corona crisis she found herself roaming the streets, homeless, hungry, vulnerable and with no means. Only after weeks of hardships she was convinced to go back to ELEM's center for young women at extreme risk. "I felt like I came back home," she says. "I started crying, it was a huge relief."

The social isolation days were especially hard for Liad, a 16.5 years old from Beit Shemesh. He lived on the streets, with no food, confused, lonely and sad, looking for a place to sleep every night over and over again. "I was exhausted, hungry and cold. I was looking for a place to sleep but there were no options, no one would let me in," he recalls.

Liad was born into an Orthodox family, one of ten kids. When he was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade he felt like the religious material he was exposed to at school wasn't for him. After tough arguments with his parents, he found himself roaming the streets for days on end. "Home was full of never-ending arguments" he says. "Fighting, screaming. They took my cell phone, they were ashamed of me. I couldn't stay home like this. After a few days of living on the street, I met ELEM. I saw their Outreach Van more than once before, but one day they approached me and they very quickly made me feel like they were there for me."