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Israel Sela

The Association of the Deaf in Israel- Tel Aviv, Israel

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A SURVEY OF HEARING IMPAIRED INDIVIDUALS IN THE KIBBUTZ MOVEMENT IN ISRAEL: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Israel Sela, Ph.D.

The Association of the Deaf in Israel

Tel Aviv, Israel

Based on findings of demographic surveys of hearing impaired individuals which have been conducted in various countries (Schein & Delk, 1974; Ries, 1986; Brown, 1986), it appears reasonable to assume that there are more than 100,000 individuals living in Israel today who have some degree of hearing loss. It can be estimated that approximately 6,000 of these are individuals who were born with a hearing impairment, or developed such an impairment during their childhood or before the age of 18 (Sela & Weisel, 1990).

The attention to this population has focused mainly on the provision of special services in such fields as medicine, education, community work, welfare and rehabilitation. Professionals have devoted a great deal of attention to the early detection of hearing impairments and the subsequent development of suitable treatment programs. These often provided language acquisition assistance, training in terms of auditory skills and verbal communication, and guidance and counseling for the parents of hearing impaired children (Meadow, 1980; Moores, 1980).

The Association of the Deaf in Israel, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, the Joint Distribution Committee, and the National Institute of Insurance, recently decided to conduct a comprehensive, pioneering study of the population of adult deaf and hard of hearing individuals in Israel (Sela & Weisel, 1990). The goal of this study is to identify most of the hearing

impaired individuals in Israel and study the special needs of this population. This information is expected to assist in the planning and provision of new services, or the revision and adjustments of existing programs.

Efforts invested in identifying the hearing impaired individuals living in Israel indicated the lack of current data as to the population of deaf and hard of hearing individuals living in kibbutz settlements in Israel.

The kibbutz movement is autonomous and responsible for dealing with its groups of people with "special needs." The movement reported the existence of 600 children and adults up to the age of 30 who suffer from various developmental problems (Margalit et al, 1985). However, it was very difficult to obtain specialized, specific information as to the population of deaf and hearing impaired individuals living in kibbutzim. As a result, the Association of the Deaf in Israel decided to conduct a more detailed study. The first stage of this study involved a comprehensive survey of hearing impaired individuals in the kibbutz movement. The findings of this survey are presented here.

The Survey and its Goals

This survey constitutes the first stage in a process of identifying and studying the population of hearing impaired individuals in the Israeli kibbutz movement.

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The Goals of the Survey

- 1) Identification of the target population.
- 2) Collection of comprehensive, basic demographic data as to hearing disabilities, including the degree of impairment and the age at onset.
- 3) Construction of a concrete proposal for the second stage of the comprehensive study which will be based on the findings of the current survey.

Definitions

There are several methods of defining the population of hearing impaired individuals. It is accepted practice to divide this group into two major subcategories according to the age at onset of the hearing loss or according to the degree and the severity of the hearing loss. The first subcategory consists of individuals born deaf or those who suffered loss of hearing during childhood (until age three, approximately). This group differs significantly from the second group, which includes individuals who suffered hearing loss during adulthood, or even at an advanced age. Individuals who belong to the second group have generally acquired verbal communication skills before having suffered hearing loss. Consequently, they do not require special treatment or assistance for their language acquisition or for personal development as a result of their hearing difficulty or loss. In effect, they belong to the "hearing world."

This study includes all of the people of the kibbutz movement in Israel who have some degree—severe or mild—of hearing loss. The second criterion for including individuals in the study was the age at onset: this study was limited to individuals whose hearing impairment took place before the age of eighteen.

Identification of the Population

In order to identify the population which meets the criteria listed above, contact was initiated with all of the *Kibbutz* and *Moshav Shitufi* settlements (referred to as "settlements" below) in Israel. The *Moshav Shitufi*, like the *kibbutz*, maintains a communal economy, and pays allowances and expenses to each member according to personal need rather than according to the member's economic productivity. The *moshav shitufi*, however, allows members to maintain individual households. All of the settlements were requested to report the existence

of hearing impaired individuals, as defined by the criteria of the study. The list of settlements included in the survey was compiled by the Kibbutz Health Committee, and included the names and addresses of 282 kibbutz and moshav shitufi settlements throughout Israel.

Consequently, the process of identifying the population to be surveyed took place as follows. First, a written request for assistance was addressed to the nurse in charge or the coordinator of special education in each of the 282 kibbutzim mentioned above. The settlements were then classified according to the information provided: (A) Kibbutzim which do not have hearing impaired residents, as defined by the criteria adopted by the study; and (B) Kibbutzim which reported having hearing impaired residents; in these cases data were collected on each individual reported as having met the study's criteria.

The following information was collected at this stage of the study concerning hearing impaired individuals in the kibbutz movement:

- 1) Basic demographic information: age, sex, date of birth, country of birth, and family status.
 - 2) Information as to the severity of hearing loss, the age at onset of the loss, and information regarding other relatives with hearing problems.
- A. All of the Kibbutzim answered our request for information:
- 136 (48%) of the Kibbutzim reported that there were no hearing impaired individuals.
 - 146 (52%) of the Kibbutzim reported the existence of hearing impaired individuals.
 - 282 (100%)—the total number of kibbutz movement settlements in Israel in 1988.
- B. In 146 of the Kibbutzim, 254 people were identified as having hearing impairments with ages at onset between birth and eighteen years.

Findings

The findings below refer to the 254 people who constituted the sample population for this survey. The population surveyed consisted of 141 men (55%) and 113 women (45%).

Most of the individuals (205, or 81%) of the sample population were native-born Israelis; 49

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were born in foreign countries. All of the children and adolescents in the sample population were born in Israel; most of the individuals born abroad are included among the older sections of the population.

The findings of Table 1 indicate clearly that more than half of the hearing impaired individuals living in kibbutz movement settlements are the only hearing impaired individuals living in their

settlements. Approximately one-quarter of the individuals included in the survey live in the same settlement as one other hearing impaired individual. Generally speaking, these individuals are members of the same family—either siblings or other close relatives. In a few rare cases, the hearing impaired individuals in a particular settlement are a married couple.

TABLE 1

**DISTRIBUTION OF SETTLEMENTS ACCORDING TO NUMBER OF
HEARING IMPAIRED INDIVIDUALS PER SETTLEMENT**

Number of Hearing Impaired Individuals Per Settlement	Number of Settlements	Percent
1	82	56.1
2	39	26.7
3	15	10.3
4	4	2.7
5	4	2.7
6	1	0.7
9	1	0.7
Total	146	100.0%

TABLE 2

POPULATION DISTRIBUTION ACCORDING TO FUNCTIONAL AGE GROUPING

Age Grouping	Number	Percentage
1. Pre-schoolers	21	8.0
2. Primary school (Grades 1-8)	69	28.0
3. High school	34	14.0
4. Ages 18-29	41	16.0
5. Ages 30-60	70	28.0
6. Elderly	16	6.0
Total	251	100.0%*

* (Information regarding the age of three individuals was not available)

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Geographic Distribution

In order to receive an exact picture of the geographical distribution of the sample population, the individuals surveyed were grouped according to the classification scheme used by Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics, a government unit which functions as part of the Prime Minister's Office. Israel, according to this classification scheme, is divided up into seven distinct geographic districts.

Age At Onset

Almost one third (74 people) of the group reported that they suffered hearing impairment at birth. Another 119 people, approximately half of the sample population (47%) reported that their hearing impairment dates to their first year of life. Fifty-one individuals (20% of the sample population) reported that their hearing impairment took

place during early childhood (from two to six years of age). In total, 76% of the sample population, consisted of individuals whose hearing impairment dates from birth or early childhood (i.e., from birth to age two).

An examination of the average number of hearing impaired individuals by decade of birth in Table 5 indicates that in the thirty year period from the 1940's to the 1970's, the statistical incidence of hearing impairments in the population studied is unchanged. In other words, approximately 25 hearing impaired individuals were identified in each of the decades between 1940 and 1970. During the ten years between 1970 and 1979, eighty cases of hearing impaired children were reported. This is approximately three times as many cases per decade than in any of the previous decades

TABLE 3
GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION

District	Number of Settlements	Number of HI Individuals
Jerusalem	4	5
Galilee-Northern Israel	71	123
Haifa	14	22
Central Israel	20	42
Southern Israel	34	55
Judaea and Samaria	3	7
Grand Total	146	254

TABLE 4
AGE AT ONSET

Age At Onset	Number	Percentage
From Birth	74	29.1
During the First Year	119	46.9
From Age 2 to 6	51	20.1
From Age 7 to 18	10	3.9
Grand Total	254	100.0%

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reported. The first eight years of the 1980's (from 1980 to 1988) indicate a reduction in the incidence of hearing impaired individuals; however, the number of cases reported is still about twice as high as any of the previous decades before 1970.

Family Status

More than two-thirds of the sample population are unmarried (mostly children and adolescents); approximately half of these are male and half are female. Approximately one-third of the sample consists of married individuals. Most of the married individuals are male. Of all the hearing impaired males in the kibbutz movement, 40% are married; in contrast, only 22% of the hearing impaired females are married.

Degree of Hearing Loss

More than a third of the individuals in the sample defined themselves as having a slight hearing loss (36%). In contrast, more than half of the individuals in the sample population (64%) indicated that they have serious difficulty in hearing (41%) and even deafness (23%). Most of the individuals in the sample population do not have hearing impaired relatives, except for a group of 52 individuals who reported other family members

with some sort of a hearing difficulty or disability. Unfortunately there is no better data available about the degree of loss for other family members.

Analysis of Findings and Conclusions

In sum, all 282 kibbutz and moshav shitufi settlements responded. Of this total, 136 settlements reported that they did not have any hearing impaired residents, as defined by the criteria of this study. A total of 254 individuals were identified who met the study's criteria, and who resided in 146 different settlements. More than half of the sample population were children or adolescents. More than two-thirds of the population consisted of individuals whose hearing impairment was defined as moderate to severe.

Most of the hearing impaired individuals were the only residents of their settlements with hearing impairment; more than half were born in Israel, and most were unmarried. Findings indicate that more hearing impaired men are married than women.

The distribution of hearing impaired individuals in the kibbutz movement is a function of the settlement pattern of the Israeli kibbutz movement. Thus, Northern Israel, including the Galilee

TABLE 5
FREQUENCY BY DECADE OF BIRTH

Decade of Birth	Number	Percentage
1910-1919	9	3.5
1920-1929	8	3.0
1930-1939	17	6.5
1940-1949	28	11.0
1950-1959	29	11.5
1960-1969	31	12.0
1970-1979	80	31.5
1980-1988	49	19.0
Grand Total	254	100.0%

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region, includes most of Israel's kibbutz settlements. As a result, the largest concentration of hearing impaired individuals is located in this area. Southern Israel, including the Negev region, comes next in terms of the number of hearing impaired individuals reported. An insignificant number of individuals were reported as living in Central Israel.

The goal of identifying the hearing impaired population living in the Israeli kibbutz movement was achieved with complete success. The cooperation of the special education teachers, on the one hand, and the health professionals, on the other hand, helped us achieve this complex task.

The findings of this survey indicate a high rate of male as opposed to female subjects. This phenomenon occurs in other countries as well. Neither research nor professional literature provides a definitive explanation for this finding. One of the explanations for this discrepancy is that women, due to the social structures prevalent in certain societies, maintain much less contact with public agencies whose role is to deal with "special needs" individuals than do men. This explanation appears to be invalid as regards the Israeli kibbutz movement.

The age distribution of the sample population is similar to that of comparable studies. Most of the sample population reported that the age at onset occurred between birth and the beginning of elementary education. Similarly, it appears that most of the population is relatively young. This finding is very important in terms of the planning and provision of services for hearing impaired persons in general, as well as for hearing impaired children and adolescents in particular. A small number of settlements reported the existence of several hearing impaired children. These are either siblings, or children of different families. Findings, however, indicate that the vast majority of hearing impaired children in the Israeli kibbutz movement grow up in a total hearing environment. They have little opportunity to develop the social relationships and identifications which characterize many other hearing impaired individuals. At this stage in the study, information is not available as to the nature of the learning institutions in which the hearing impaired kibbutz children are being educated, or the quality of the relationships which these children and adolescents have with other hearing impaired individuals. It is well known that these relationships are very important to the development of a positive sense of personal identity, and

the development of social and other skills.

Examination of the geographical dispersion of the sample population indicates clearly that the frequency of reported cases of hearing impairment is a function of the size and number of kibbutz settlements in a particular geographical area. Thus, since most of the settlements are located in Northern Israel, the reported cases of hearing impairments are highest in the North. Such a high concentration of hearing impaired individuals requires that appropriate services be provided in this part of the country. Thus it is important to conduct a thorough examination of the extent to which the current services being provided meet the needs of the relatively large concentration of hearing impaired individuals in the kibbutz settlements of Northern Israel.

Categorizing the sample population according to birth dates indicates a clear-cut increase in the numbers of hearing impaired individuals reported over the years. There is no satisfactory explanation for the large increase in the number of hearing impaired children between 1970 and 1979.

There are several possible explanations for this phenomenon although the explanations are tentative at best.

1. The low incidence of hearing impairments among the adult and elderly may stem from the fact that this age group, for the most part, was responsible for founding the kibbutz settlements or joining them during their early years. As a result, a selection process took place. Consequently, this age group does not provide an accurate basis for comparison with younger age groups, which were, for the most part, born to families already living in kibbutz settlements.
2. An examination of statistics as to the general growth of the Israeli population indicates a clear-cut growth in the size of Israel's population since the early 1950's. However, a comparison of the reported incidence of hearing impairments in the kibbutz movement with the general growth in Israel's population on a decade by decade basis fails to explain the phenomenal growth in reported incidents of hearing impairment in the 1970's, as indicated in Table 5.
3. Apparently, there is a sound basis for examining this phenomenon in terms of ecological and other social factors, such as epidemics, or the influence of the Yom Kippur War (1973) on the number of births in the general population in Israel.

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An examination of the geographical dispersion of services provided to kibbutz members with special needs indicates clearly that most of these services, as well as most of the programs and professionals, are located in the center of the country. This study indicates, however, that few, if any, hearing impaired kibbutz members live in the center of the country and are able to take advantage of the proximity of these services. An analysis of the geographical dispersion of the sample population, as well as a review of the responses of parents and relatives to the questionnaires distributed during the course of the current survey, reinforces this impression. Many families are required to invest a great deal of time and effort in order to avail themselves of services and professionals located a considerable distance from their settlements. As a result, the hearing impaired individuals as well as their families are often placed in an uncomfortable position in regard to the kibbutz as a whole. It is questionable, therefore, whether hearing impaired individuals living in kibbutz settlements are able to avail themselves of the services being provided, and whether other kibbutz members are able to meet the demands being placed on them by the hearing impaired individuals and their families.

The age at onset of most of the sample population is early childhood. In addition, it is apparent that more than two-thirds of the sample population have moderate to severe hearing impairments or even total deafness. This finding helps define the problem and may assist us in the development of programs which will help hearing impaired individuals cope academically, as well as foster their integration into society and the work place. It is necessary to study this population in depth in order to provide appropriate answers to their social and educational needs. Such answers are expected to enable the hearing impaired individuals to achieve appropriate academic results with the help of their families, the kibbutz and professional assistance. In contrast, the survey's findings do not indicate the degree of social adaptation or the personal identity of the hearing impaired individuals living in Israeli kibbutz settlements.

The fact that this group is relatively young suggests that attention should be paid to the families and relatives of hearing impaired individuals. Hopefully, future research will provide more accurate information as to the feelings of these parents and children. Future research is also needed in order to identify and understand the special needs of the parents of hearing impaired children, and to

examine different approaches to the problem of raising these children in the kibbutz environment.

It appears that even though this preliminary survey provides rudimentary information, it is able to assist researchers in formulating appropriate questions for further study of the sample population. Further research will assist us in answering some of the questions raised above, as well as other questions which will arise as a result of a further refinement of the survey's findings.

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