



Photo by: MELANIE LIDMAN

## Study: Needs of aging Holocaust survivors to skyrocket

By RUTH EGLASH  
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NGO head says "small print" makes it "impossible" for survivors to understand which state funding or benefits they are entitled to.

The social and economic needs of Israel's Holocaust survivor population are expected to increase dramatically in the next four years, according to a study being released Sunday.

According to the study, undertaken by the Meyers JDC Brookdale Institute on behalf of the Foundation for the Benefit of Holocaust Victims in Israel – the official state body responsible for providing survivors with social welfare benefits and assistance – Israel is currently home to some 208,000 victims of Nazi atrocities – compared to 233,000 in 2009. On average, 12,800 survivors die each year, or 35 per day.

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The study highlighted that by 2015, the need for financial assistance and medical aid by this population will have risen sharply even though the number of survivors will have dropped by 30 percent, to 145,000.

Today, roughly 33% of the country's Holocaust survivors – or 60,000 individuals – are considered "needy."

Their increasing needs are clearly linked to their advanced age, said the researchers, noting that 3% of the survivors are now under the age of 70, 47% are between 70-80, and 50% are over 80.

By 2015, more than two-thirds will be aged 80-plus.

"Our data show that in the coming years, mainly due to aging factors, the needs of Holocaust survivors will greatly increase," said Elazar Stern, the foundation's chairman.

"Awareness of the needs of survivors has increased significantly in recent years, but our job is to make sure that this will be translated in a way that will ensure the needs of all survivors are met in the future."

According to David Silberman, co-founder of the nonprofit organization Aviv Lenitzolei Hashoah (Spring for Holocaust Survivors) and an expert on survivors' rights, the problem facing Holocaust survivors has less to do with a lack of funding than with the difficulty of understanding which state funding or benefits they are entitled to.

His organization estimates that roughly NIS 250 million earmarked to help Holocaust survivors goes unclaimed each year.

The Foundation for the Benefit of Holocaust Victims in Israel says that the number of survivors applying for health and welfare benefits has increased by 160% in the past five years – with some 60,000 people receiving

assistance today, compared to only 23,000 in 2005.

As well as looking at aging, the study examined the health of survivors. Among the medical issues that were most prevalent, the study found that 57% reported suffering from hypertension, 39% had some type of heart disease, 40% suffered from chronic neck and back pain, and 26% had arthritis.

The researchers also found that roughly 10% of survivors are completely reliant on the help of others to perform basic daily tasks and are eligible for National Insurance Institute nursing assistance. That figure is expected to rise to 14% in 2015, and to 25% in 2025, the researchers noted.

In addition, the study also examined the emotional and social conditions of survivors already receiving assistance from the foundation. It found that 40% feel lonely, and a similar percentage find it difficult to leave their homes.

Many survivors also reported a low frequency of going out for cultural enjoyment.

In terms of housing and nutritional conditions, the survey found that about 20% suffer from a lack of winter heating, and 5% suffer from a lack of food.

Ronnie Kalinsky, CEO of the foundation – which last week was among 15 government and non-government organizations that met to improve their cooperation in working with survivors – said it would step up its work with The Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs, as well as with other bodies, to improve the quality of life for survivors in their final years.

“We know what needs to be done to improve their life quality. Unfortunately, we still do not have the funding required to meet all their needs,” Kalinsky said. “We are in a race against time to address this issue and help them cope with the loneliness and hardships resulting from what happened in their past.”

However, Silberman told *The Jerusalem Post* that some new measures end up being more damaging than helpful.

The key to success, he said, lies with assisting the people in navigating the bureaucratic nightmare of obtaining social welfare rights and benefits.

“A lot of things that the government talks about actually mean nothing for the survivors, and only ends up actually hurting them,” he said.

Silberman pointed out that a change in procedure last year to allocate medical aid for survivors via sick funds actually meant that the foundation’s allocation was reduced, and an essential medical equipment subsidy program was cut.



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