

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
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**Contemporary Perception of Identity of Holocaust Survivors
In the Jerusalem Amcha Social Club**

M. A. Thesis in Social Work

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Abstract

This work examines the perception of identity of Holocaust survivors, members of the "Amcha" social-therapeutic club in Jerusalem. The research focuses on the way the survivors perceive themselves, and is based on interviews that took place with a group of survivors from the club.

The literature review reveals that trauma might have a major effect on identity formation. The study analyzes the effect of the Holocaust as a traumatic event on identity formation of its survivors from childhood until the present, from their own point of view. Since the research participants are all "Amcha" social club members, the study also analyzed how membership in the club integrates into their identity perception. The research method is based on qualitative analysis methods, by analyzing the content of interviews held for the sake of this research.

The results of the research show that the survivors referred to two components of identity – "Religious identity & National identity" and "perception of the self". In relation to the two components of identity, it was found that the majority of the research participants experienced a rupture in their sense of identity as a result of the Holocaust trauma. After the war, the survivors were required to rebuild for themselves a new identity, which was established from fragments of their previous identity, as well as new identity components. This new identity is unique to each of the survivors.

The research results raise two major trends. The first is continuity of the identity, and the other emphasizes on the rupture of the identity.

The research analysis attempts to identify a number of identity formation models. The study contributes both to the knowledge and practice fields in both areas. In the knowledge field, it emphasizes the survivor's point of view about themselves, as opposed to most of the research that dealt with the trauma effect on Holocaust survivors. The latter focused on the clinical aspects from a medical and external point of view. In the practice field, this work is relevant mostly to the understanding of the need of part of the survivors to belong to a social group, such as a social therapeutic club, which takes a significant role in their inner world.

This research shows that such a social therapeutic club is unique in the array of social services, by combining belonging to a group of people that share a similar traumatic past on the one hand, and focusing on social activity that is non-therapeutic on the other hand. This understanding may influence decision makers to invest more resources in order to create such social programs for the population of Holocaust survivors, and maybe to create similar programs for other populations with a traumatic background.