

The Coronavirus Crisis: A Crisis among Families from Cultural Minority Groups-Intervention and Coping Mechanisms

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Abstract

Background: The covid-19 pandemic challenged life as we knew it. The new reality has caused further problems, adding to previous challenges. Minority families experience additional and unique challenges. **Aim:** The study aims to understand the coping mechanisms of Ethiopian women during the coronavirus in light of the cultural characteristics of the community. **Method:** Via Zoom, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 12 female community members. **Findings:** The study yielded a circle map describing how the women of the community deal with crises and the resilience factors that characterize them as individuals and a community. The map draws its centrality from the community's cultural characteristics since culture is a source of strength and resilience. In the face of a global crisis, a narrative of resilience, strength, and self-efficacy emerges for the first time in the community. The first circle is faith, a belief in God and women's power. The second circle is reaching out to the family, neighbors, and relatives. The third circle is a sense of belonging to the community and pride in belonging. The fourth circle is consultation with sages, the elderly, and kahens. Finally, in the fifth circle, "only if we do not manage ourselves," we look for assistance from community service providers. **Conclusions and Implications:** The cultural characteristics of Ethiopians are sometimes perceived as inhibiting integration and success. Cultural characteristics were an axis of resilience and strength in the coronavirus crisis. The women of the community embraced factors of resilience like faith, a sense of belonging, and mutuality. Inclination to internal sources of power challenges the perception of the community's dependence on the establishment. Commitment and a sense of belonging to

the community are vital anchors that need to be strengthened. Therefore, it is crucial to adopt, during interventions, the community approach, the cultural competency method, and the strength-based practice.

Keywords

Coronavirus Crisis, Stress, Family, Community, Minority Groups, Ethiopians, Coping Mechanisms

1. Introduction

1.1. The Coronavirus Crisis

On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization declared a state of emergency following the outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic. Declaring a state of emergency allows the execution of exceptional measures, including restrictions on movement and crowding, the closure of businesses and borders, and the use of particular resources to deal with the health and severe economic crises accompanying the epidemic (Mehozai, 2021). A pandemic is a pervasive, unavoidable, and invisible threat (Pappas et al., 2009) that renders common coping mechanisms irrelevant. Additionally, a pandemic requires isolation and even quarantine to prevent its spread, measures that disrupt routine conduct, and norms and values that are a source of personal and family resilience and may protect people in a crisis (Sprang & Silman, 2013; Shilstein, 2020). Therefore, one can expect a wide range of adverse emotional reactions to the coronavirus, including an increase in stress levels, symptoms of anxiety and depression, etc. (Shannan-Altman, Abarbanel Canaani, & Suskolni, 2021).

Holmes and Ray (1967) developed a scale containing 43 life events. The scale examines the connection between life events and the new adaptations required from the individual, while each event receives a score. The higher the score of an event, the greater the stress. During the coronavirus, most citizens experienced many stressful events with high scores: dismissal, change in economic status, professional field, living conditions, lifestyle, school, leisure, eating, social activities, and family reunions. Therefore, looking at family units consisting of several family members and calculating the total number of life events they faced during the pandemic, it can be assumed that the family, especially during the closure period, became a stressor.

Apple (2020) argues that the uncertainty stemming from the health crisis, the increasing economic tension, the diminishing personal space, and the grouping of family members together, without appropriate tools to manage conflicts and regulate themselves and their relationships, threaten the mental (and sometimes physical) well-being of family members.

The forced separation between the nuclear family and the extended family, which routinely helps parents and children, disconnects the family from its primary support factors. Goodman's (2021) book "The attention revolution" cites

Brooks, who claims that “During pandemics, the compassion for others diminishes... pandemics not only kill people, but they also kill their feelings of compassion” (Brooks in [Goodman \(2021\)](#), p. 67). According to Brooks, in an epidemic, humans recognize each other as a health threat and shut themselves off, while physical distance becomes emotional distance.

The spread of the virus has led to an almost complete closure of schools worldwide. According to [UNESCO \(2020\)](#), the closure severely impairs students’ learning and social and emotional skills, especially those of low socioeconomic status. Students of low socioeconomic status have fewer opportunities for learning outside of school and experience a digital gap in the absence of distance learning equipment (home computers, tablets, smartphones). Schools in underprivileged areas lack the necessary infrastructure to produce distance-adapted content. Furthermore, with schools’ closure, the responsibility for educating the children falls on the shoulders of the parents. Many parents from low socioeconomic status find it challenging to fulfill this role in times of crisis due to a lack of resources (e.g., physical, mental, and educational). Even during the pandemic, they had to leave their children unattended to provide for them. As a result, behavior patterns that endanger health intensified among the children.

The coronavirus has met in Israel and globally a reality of gender inequality and has intensified it in all dimensions. Simultaneously, it placed an additional burden on women in the labor market since they constitute about 70% of the health and welfare workers, and an extra burden in the home that became the workplace, kindergarten, school, cultural life, and welfare. Women’s “traditional” commitments in the family and house have expanded. At the same time, convergence in the home has led to an escalation in verbal, physical, and sexual violence against women and children ([Herzog, 2021](#); [Presser, 2021](#)).

1.2. Family Function under Extreme Pressure

The discussion of family function in crisis raises the concept of family resilience, referring to its ability to meet life’s challenges. Some families collapse under pressure, while others emerge strengthened and resourceful. Family resilience involves adopting a positive adjustment in the context of severe distress. Family members’ acquired power and resources enable individuals and families to successfully deal with crises, recover and grow stronger ([Walsh, 2003](#)). A close-knit family functions well in emergencies and sees them as a challenge it can deal with and overcome. An organized and stable family with a structured division of roles, flexible conduct, partnership in decision-making, and open communication has more resilience during hardships ([Oren, 2020](#)).

Resilience in a mental context is the ability to recover from difficulties, particularly stressful events, and adapt to changes caused due to these situations ([Pardes & Aroch, 2021](#)). Resilience describes ongoing efforts to deal with everyday distress in general and crises in particular and reflects an ability to maintain a stable balance ([Lahad, 1999](#); [Farhi, 2012](#)). [Kaplan \(2021\)](#) views resilience as energy to preserve hope and meaning, which helps overcome stressful situations.

According to Kaplan, the base of resilience to maintain hope is the material's flexibility and ability to stretch and return to its previous state. In his opinion, the emotional range of women is more flexible and broad than men. Therefore, their mental and emotional flexibility is more potent than men's; hence they are more robust in coping with stressful situations.

The social and community aspects are essential for children (Ronan & Johnston, 2005; Wyman et al., 1992) and particularly vulnerable populations, characterized by low personal resilience and low accessibility to effective real-time interventions. Community resilience refers to a community's ongoing ability to withstand, recover from and support its members (Lau et al., 2008; Xiao et al., 2020). Resilience in crises (e.g., economic crises, pandemics, wars, natural disasters) and recovery depend on communal solidarity, the relationship between relevant community structures, leadership quality, and the level of independence and responsibility of the community's parts. Kutner and Avrahami (2020), who examined the resilience of residents during the coronavirus, found that one of the key components of quality of life is a person's sense of control over his life and ability to shape his future. A sense of security derives from a reality in which an individual's basic needs are guaranteed. As a result, the person can develop resilience in various life circles and cope successfully with unforeseen events. However, in a world devoid of these aspects, a person's condition is characterized by vulnerability, instability, and insecurity (Kimchi, Marciano, & Eshel, 2018).

1.3. Ethiopian Jews in Israel

Ethiopians are the poorest group in the Jewish sector in Israel. 23% of Ethiopian households are poor, another 8% are close to poverty, and 33% are in the lower middle class, compared to only 13% of Jewish households below the poverty line (Ilan, 2019). According to Striar (2021), poverty isolates and excludes communities, deepens their dependence on the establishment, creates multi-dimensional discrimination, reduces the scope of members' civic participation, and impairs the ability to form a shared critical consciousness. People living in poverty tend to gather in specific living environments under economic, sociological, demographic, and urban processes that promote their geographical concentration in a shared space (living in ghettos).

The settlement of Ethiopians in distinct geographical locations was partly the result of their initiative and mainly a plan of the integration system that enabled comfortable mortgages in peripheral areas (Herzog, 1998; Ingdao-Wanda, 2019). However, this initiative came with the price of the disintegration of the extended family into nuclear units absorbed in various localities and remote geographical areas. The cost mainly referred to the loss of support of the extended family and community. It dismantled the natural community organization and caused the loss of the safety net and the undermining of sources of social support. The difficulty is twofold. On the one hand, the support and help of the extended family disappear. On the other hand, the nuclear family has to function as an indepen-

dent unit without role models (Rotter & Hawley, 1998; Bustin, 2008).

Ethiopian families have less access to communications products compared to other families in the population—mainly internet infrastructure (55.2% vs. 74.9%), tablets (15.4% vs. 36.2%), and home computers (70.8% vs. 76.9%) (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020). Hence, during the pandemic, not all children could participate in zoom classes; thus, their integration at the class level was impaired. In addition, school closures have severely damaged students' learning and social skills, especially those from low socioeconomic status, who have fewer opportunities for out-of-school learning, have no distance learning equipment, and experience a digital gap (UNESCO, 2020).

Ethiopian Jews have unique cultural characteristics (Bustin, 2008). 1) A strong belief in the Jewish identity and its preservation throughout the generations. 2) Family and community solidarity and unity. 3) Men's senior position and status in society and family, including a clear division of roles between genders and according to age. 4) Supervisory mechanisms: relying on traditional-religious leadership. 5) Clear cultural codes: the code of honor, respecting the social hierarchy, maintaining confidentiality, humility, modesty, and restraint in expressing emotions.

The move from Ethiopia to Israel and the processes of integration and adaptation came at the cost of undermining the cultural characteristics, especially of men's position and status and the traditional supervisory mechanisms. Yet, families of Ethiopian descent had previously experienced complex challenges due to the difficulties that characterized the aliyah and integration process. The community possesses many forces and tools that afford resilience to its members (Bustin, 2008). Families draw their strength from the extended family and the community. The internal, communal mechanism empowers individuals and families (Mo, 2003). Therefore, this mechanism might sometimes create a sense of introversion and community inwardness (Ingdao-Wanda, 2019).

In conclusion, the coronavirus has changed routine life and altered the habits of the family unit. Closures, forced stays at home, and prolonged stays with the children created challenging situations requiring adaptation to new conditions, coping with difficulties and concerns, changing lifestyles, and adapting to a lengthy stay in one space. Moreover, reality has forced the family to face economic and health threats, uncertainty, and disconnection from support sources. The new reality challenges men and women from the majority groups; nevertheless, it exacerbates and intensifies the challenges of people belonging to cultural minority groups. This paper focuses on Ethiopian families and examines whether cultural characteristics influence the coping styles they adopt. It sheds light on the difficulties and unique challenges immigrant families faced in light of the pandemic and emphasizes society's strengths in overcoming problems. The study's innovation is its research population. It investigates the phenomenon from a female point of view and exhibits women's perspectives and understanding of an unusual situation.

The paper is organized as follows. The following section describes the research

methods, the study's aims, questions, and methodology. In the third section, we present the research findings regarding the research questions and depict the Ethiopian community's collective and personal coping strategies. The final section portrays the discussion and the study's conclusions.

2. Method

2.1. The Purpose of the Study

The paper examines Ethiopians' personal, family, and community resilience in Israel. Ethiopian descents constitute a case study to comprehend the coping mechanisms of minority groups during a global crisis such as the covid-19 pandemic.

2.2. Research Questions

- 1) What unique crises characterized Ethiopian families during the coronavirus pandemic?
- 2) How do families and communities, perceived as weak, cope with a health crisis that affects humanity?

2.3. Methodology

The study researches the Ethiopian community during the coronavirus crisis. It is based on telephone interviews with community members, specifically female community members. We interviewed eleven women of different ages from various occupational fields to compare and map coping mechanisms and community perceptions of females from Ethiopia. The study population included the chairman of an association that deals with cultural integration in different localities, three female students of Ethiopian descent, and seven women from the community. The interviews took place during the coronavirus pandemic between April and June 2021.

2.4. The Participants

The study was based on a sample of eleven Ethiopian-born women who immigrated to Israel between 1990 and 2000. The study population included three young students without children and eight adult women, mothers of children. Four mothers lack formal education and work in basic jobs, while three hold master's degrees. One of the mothers is an academic who serves as the chairperson of an association for intercultural integration. The sample was selected using the snowball method, based on personal acquaintance with several women, who brought more women to be interviewed for the study. All the names in the paper are fictitious due to a desire to maintain the interviewees' privacy. It should be emphasized that a sample in a qualitative-constructive study is not selected by a random-statistical method and will often be too small to generalize to the population (Shkedi, 2003). Therefore, the survey in this study is not a representative sample according to the quantitative-positivist rules.

The study cannot be classified as a comprehensive multi-view representation since it encompasses a small number of women and excludes men and young children. However, the women who participated in this research represent the heterogeneity of the female Ethiopian community in Israel regarding age, education, occupation, marital status, and socioeconomic status.

2.5. Research Tool

The data in the study were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted via Zoom. Some discussions were in Hebrew, some in Amharic and translated by the study editors. At the beginning of each session, we presented the study's purpose and explained the interview's aim and course.

Each interview contained two parts. The first part addressed the interviewee's family, community, and experience in dealing with crises. The second part discussed the community's coping mechanisms in crises and the community's role. In the first part, interviewees were asked how they coped with the pandemic. Who do they turn to for help? What had they learned about themselves and their community? In the second part, interviewees were asked about their community's resilience, their feelings regarding the community, and their sense of community during the crisis.

2.6. Analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim. The analysis process consists of three stages:

In the initial analysis phase, all interviews were continuously read to understand the general context of the presented perceptions to not comprehend data out of context (Dey, 1993). In the second stage, we performed open coding to identify the main idea in each interview's paragraphs (Shimoni, 2016) and mapped the main categories and the connections between the various dialogs. The interviews' analysis revealed several circles describing how women in the community deal with crises and themes defining resilience factors. Finally, the theoretical conceptualization phase included a theoretic translation of the categories as a base for the theoretical explanation (Charmaz, 1983). The categories of coping mechanisms during a crisis were explained, and the theoretical model was constructed.

3. Findings

3.1. Unique Difficulties of Ethiopian Jews in General

3.1.1. Unique Difficulties of Ethiopian Jews during the Coronavirus Pandemic

The coronavirus crisis aggravated the financial situation of the Ethiopians. The community mostly belongs to the poorer strata of society in which the economic damage was particularly severe. Many low-wage workers were furloughed or fired, relying on unemployment benefits lower than their already low wages.

Thus the fluctuation in the workforce had immediate consequences—economic and functional pressure.

“I think that even within the families, there are people who were fired and sit at home. It is not healthy for the family or relationship to be closed at home all day. This creates a lot of tension” (Sarah).

Another interviewee added, “At first, my mother kept working, but they started reducing shifts over time because not many people were needed. I believe she felt economic pressure”.

Communities living in poverty are excluded from numerous fields of society, which leads to the erosion of their social capital. During the covid-19 pandemic, when enrichment programs were canceled, the gaps were not addressed and only grew. According to one interviewee: “... the community does not have enough resources to advance... there are still systemic gaps that have not been addressed, especially in the context of the education system that leaves the community behind, for example, distance learning. The system should provide good tools and not leave them remote”.

The coronavirus has highlighted the economic disparities between Ethiopians and most of the population and emphasized their implications mainly in the educational field.

3.1.2. Housing Density

Families of Ethiopian descent mainly belong to the lower deciles of society and live in relatively small apartments. The housing density among Ethiopian households is 1.3 persons per room, compared with 0.9 among the general population (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 2010). One of the interviewees said: “Mostly, young people and partly young families returned to their parent’s home, out of financial difficulty and since it was not clear what the future holds. However, not everyone could return because there was not enough space. The households were getting crowded. Everyone was at home, and it was annoying, crowded, and unpleasant”.

3.1.3. Family Composition

According to the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics (2020) data, there are 32.4 thousand families in Israel of Ethiopian descent. The percentage of single-parent families is exceptionally high (25%), almost twice the percentage of Jewish and other families (13%). Namely, about 8000 single-parent families functioned during the covid-19 crisis with one parent to whom all family tasks were assigned. Single mothers had to deal with two fronts during the pandemic; if they stayed home with their children and did not work as sole breadwinners, they might lose their income and have difficulty meeting the regular payments. In addition, they had to cook, clean, and educate the children alone. On the other hand, if they continued working, they would have difficulty finding an arrangement for the children since, in light of the social distance provisions, their support circles were taken away, sometimes to the point of complete absence (Isaac

et al., 2020). “During a crisis in Ethiopia, everyone acted like one person... It’s a bit difficult here because of the distance between the families”. Distance is challenging for children and adolescents for whom the elderly have provided learning and support. In the coronavirus crisis, this difficulty stood out among the children and youth who were cut off from their grandparents and lost support.

3.1.4. Frustration Due to the Community’s Image in the Israeli Society

Community members resent their perceived image in Israeli society and its institutions since they do not view themselves as weak and inferior and oppose phenomena such as racism, segregation, and marginalization. The coronavirus crisis underlined to the interviewees the dissonance between the community’s image in the eyes of society, which views it as weak, and the perception of the community as united, strong, and supportive.

We asked the interviewees: “The community is considered a weak community. What do you think of that assumption?” We received clear and painful messages. Oshrat said: “No, not at all, more in the direction of trying to weaken us. The community is strong, and there is warmth and family support, but outside there is an external block that causes an internal block (from the person himself)”. If only they had been aware of the number of talented people in the community, they would have looked at us differently long ago. The community brings something different, so why not enjoy the difference? Rosa argued: “The community is strong and special, the external society does not recognize its strengths, we must work on (exposing the strengths)... the community, in my opinion, is not weak”. Attent claimed: “We are truly not weak... My community is powerful. Too bad society thinks differently. Society needs to know and learn from us good qualities like mutual support, respect for the elderly, etc.”. Bosna maintained: “My community is not as weak as it is portrayed. On the contrary, it is solid despite all the difficulties like the economic situation and more”. A asserted: “Indeed, the community is considered weak. I have only one thing to say about it. You have seen nothing yet. The community to which I belong is strong. The fact that we sit quietly and do not show our strengths, only our weaknesses, is awful”.

3.1.5. Past Traumas Due to the Trip to Sudan

The traumas that the immigrants from Ethiopia underwent during the arduous journey to Israel were not treated in time, leading to mental strain and additional problems that manifested during the coronavirus crisis. Tzaga said, “I’m not good at dealing with crises because I lost my immediate family on the way to Israel, and I still mourn it. So every crisis like this worries me not to lose another family member”.

3.1.6. Digital Barriers and Lack of Communication Tools

The digital barrier is one of the most notable difficulties nowadays among Ethiopians. Without accessibility, the population is excluded from gaining in-

formation and services that can only be obtained digitally (Mano, 2020). Ethiopian families have reduced access to communications tools, internet infrastructure, and home computers. Therefore, not all children had the opportunity to participate in zoom classes, and their integration at the class level was impaired.

Yuni claimed: “Families with children dealt with zoom and the children that stayed home without having any idea how to operate the program”.

Oshrat argued: “The main challenge was facing my little sister’s learning space... my parents could not help because they had to work. My sister felt she could not learn, and in light of our financial situation, my parents could not even buy her a computer to study remotely”.

It is worth mentioning that the coronavirus crisis added to existing problems in the Ethiopian community due to immigration and integration into Israel. For instance, loss of independence, challenging their Jewish identity, the disintegration of values and traditions, life in ghettos, distrust of the government system, and experiences of racism and discrimination.

3.2. How Do Families and Communities, Perceived as Weak Cope with the Crisis that Affected Humanity in the Covid-19 Pandemic?

From all of the above, it seems that the Ethiopian community met the coronavirus crisis while constantly experiencing problems that enabled it to form unique coping patterns. The interviews underline five circles for coping mechanisms with a crisis. These circles were clearly expressed during the coronavirus pandemic: The first circle is a belief in God; The second circle is reaching out to family, neighbors, and relatives; The third circle is a sense of belonging to the community and pride in belongingness; The fourth circle is consulting with sages, the elderly, and kahens; The fifth circle “only if we do not get along on our own and with the strengths of the community” is looking for assistance from service providers in the community. An illustration of the coping patterns observed in this study is presented in **Figure 1**.

3.2.1. The First Circle—Faith

Ethiopians are people of faith. They brought from Ethiopia religious customs they have maintained for generations, and this firm belief accompanies them in daily life and in times of trouble and distress. The faith distinguished the Ethiopian Jews from the general population in Ethiopia and strengthened their uniqueness.

Yshuma argued: “In Ethiopia, when there was a crisis, the first thing the kahens initiated was prayers with mass participation. The whole community left early in the morning, adults and children, women and men, fasting, praying, and asking for requests. Meanwhile, people were strengthening each other and their faith that everything would be ok, expecting from themselves and God. In times of trouble, the Christian neighbors came to ask the Jews for help. They believed that the Jew’s God hears faster”.



Figure 1. The Ethiopian community coping mechanisms with crises.

Malalo said: “Our coping with the crisis was not easy. One of the children was diagnosed with the coronavirus, and we were petrified that we were ill too. But, for God’s sake, we were healthy. We believed we would be fine. In Sudan, we contracted severe diseases and did not die. Hence, we held that we would get through this pandemic”.

A second characteristic that emerges from the interview’s analysis is belief as a source of power. Yshuma maintained: “Mainly, I believe in God, and that is why I was not afraid”.

3.2.2. The Second Circle—Family, Friends, and Relatives

Most societies see the family as a fundamental social institution, a primary source of socialization, an answer to deep needs in the sense of belonging, and a source of emotional and social support. Similarly, Ethiopians cling to each other while emphasizing the significant backing of circles close to the individual. The extended family is a particularly substantial anchor, and mutual aid is considered an essential cultural value and an irreplaceable asset.

Oshrat said: “Everyone would turn to the family—to my great-grandfather, he was a brilliant man, and every problem, idea, question, thought we had, we addressed to him”.

Fanta asserted: “In Ethiopia, because we were isolated, our ties were solid; one

was at the disposal of the other in any situation. We had a robust network, and even the Christians envied us. During the pandemic, families coped well. What was most noticeable is the emotional support for each other”.

Tzaga claimed: “When I struggle, I turn to my immediate family and consult with them because they have gone through numerous crises and have experience and tools to deal. Hence, I lean on them. I have constantly turned to my grandparents since they are smart people and always have solutions”.

Malalo argued: “Basically, we all came together to help each other. Usually, when there are crises, we immediately consult, ask, and find out who needs help and reach out in a respectful and non-embarrassing way. There is a commitment to each other, you never feel alone, and there is always someone by your side”.

Yshuma said: “We always search for those who need help and assist those in need. The young left their daily occupations and enlisted to help their families. For the elderly and families who needed aid, the younger ones went shopping, explained the rules of conduct, and had conversations to ease loneliness. It was wonderful to see it. God will bless them”.

Oshrat added: “My mother mostly turns to her brothers for help. Less to institutional establishments unless her brothers advise her to do so. Her brothers are the only people she trusts”.

Attent claimed: “What helped my family was our close support to each other. No one was left behind. We even aided older Ethiopian neighbors. Thanks to the mutual help in the family, we got through it. Ethiopian families cope better than others because of help and support from family and neighborhood. The community is accustomed to mutual support within the community and the family because our customs highlight helping each other. So we turn to each other within the family and community and do not always need people from the outside. We turn to help family, friends, uncles”.

Help is given sincerely and sometimes in secret. The principle is that everyone helps. When a person is in trouble, he knows that he can trust others, and, in turn, he will help them. There is modeling and imitation of those who helped and influenced; thus, the tradition of mutual help passes down from generation to generation. As Malalo put it: “I have learned from the young and the children that they inherited the heritage of their community. They cared and helped inside the household and even showed interest in other families and helped them”.

The young returned to their parents’ homes during the pandemic due to financial reasons and out of a desire to assist the older parents in coping with the new reality. Many helped with child care, technology (zoom lessons), and logistical assistance. Family and community commitments overcame the pandemic’s anxiety and social distance provisions in this respect. Notably, the adults did not follow the rules and continued to function according to the tradition of meetings, respect, and mutual help to anyone in need.

A stated: “Some people did not understand the severity of the situation. There were times when the morbidity was high, and I continued to see many adults walking around without masks or sitting together in groups. There were things

my community would not give up, no matter what. They would visit people and meet in groups during happy and sad occasions”.

Fanta said: “Younger people during the pandemic showed great responsibility and took a significant part in dealing with the crisis in almost every home. We should thank them”.

Malalo argued: “The families of Ethiopian descent have coped exceptionally well. We have seen that everyone came together, even the WhatsApp groups expanded. Everyone shared their coping mechanisms. I felt how wonderful our community is. I saw many students returning home to help their parents and assist with the little ones. That is commendable; we have someone to rely on”.

Tzaga maintained: “Youth and children at home showed great responsibility and took command of what was happening. They helped us understand things we did not know about the coronavirus. My daughter, a student, returned home to help her brothers and us. I am so proud of her”.

Busana stated: “The young care about their family and community. We all left our schooling behind and moved to help our families and community since they are our top priority. I was excited to see the recruitment of the young. I thought they cared only for their family but, on the contrary, helped everyone”.

The evidence presented in the interviews is consistent with the orientation of the strength-based approach to working with families. The approach argues that if the family is seen as a force, its strengths can be used to solve problems and assist other families. The assistance process between the community’s families indicates the resilience that characterizes the community and the values of mutual help that are assimilated among its members.

3.2.3. The Third Circle—A Sense of Belonging to the Community and Pride in Belongingness

The interviews reveal a clear picture of a community with shared values, including mutual support, respect, and a solid commitment to heritage, namely, “know where you came from”. The interviewees displayed pride in the community and belonging to it while acknowledging its power and virtues.

Fanta said: “Our community is Jegena (a hero). The community has been through a lot and knows how to deal with everything. We have customs and values that must be maintained; they give us the strength to deal with different problems. I love the culture, customs, and strength. The elderly wisdom of life, the youngers’ courage, and the values of mutual support”.

Yshuma claimed: “There is a solid support network; we back each other. Impressive recruitment. Even if something happens in another region, the community strives to help. There is mutual support in the community. This community is strong”.

Tzaga stated: “In the community, mutual support and willingness to help are vital. Unlike volunteering, where you do for the other, the act is circular here. Namely, when one helps the other, he ultimately helps himself. This merit is one of the things we should be proud of in the community; how much the youngsters

care about the community. I have seen young people who came home to aid their families and help their neighbors. It reminds me of the communalism in Ethiopia. Our community has a commitment to each other and cares for one another. There is respect for the elderly and pride in the culture”.

Malalo maintained: “I have discovered that the community is even stronger and has not forgotten its values, most importantly—mutual support. The community is not weak; it is strong. Everyone tries to weaken it, but it does not give up. You never feel alone with a commitment to one another; there is always someone by your side. This community will never let anyone feel lonely. It will always be there. Our children also maintain a sense of community because this is how you deal with problems and succeed”.

Tzaga added: “Ethiopian families endured many difficulties in their lives and can deal with various problems. This community is powerful and supports each other. My mother has endured Sudan’s hardships; nothing will stop her”.

Oshrat argued: “Always in cases of crisis and in general, the community has united. We help each other; there is mutual help most of the time; thus, we usually do not need help from the outside. We, the young people, learned from the adults the value of commitment to the community and family. This time, we also came and began to help people in need. It is obvious that this is the way to act. This is our education, and we must maintain it. The pandemic proved the community’s commitment. Young people looked for the elderly who needed drugs, food, etc. Adults pointed out people who needed help. Were it not for the community, the immigrants to Israel would have broken to pieces after everything they went through in their journey and, more than that, the challenges posed to them by the Israelis”.

Busana said: “As in any crisis, the community is used to mutual support within the community, and no one is left hungry. This is the nature of the community and its uniqueness”.

Malka argued: “My family and the whole community knew how to deal with difficulties. Supporting each other, young and adults, has always been a tradition. They also helped each other this time and did not turn to outside sources. Some young people went out to help Ethiopian adults; no one else could help them. The adults trusted the young Ethiopians because they had an understandable conversation with them. Moreover, they can look at the young Ethiopians as their children because there are basic things in the community that was in Ethiopia and remained here”.

A stated: “The community is warm and supportive. A community that is compassionate and knows how to help when needed. All the community needs is a voice. Everything else will come of its own accord”.

Attent affirmed: “The community believes in giving the other what it has because it is not a community rich in money but rich in values and faith”.

Belonging to a community strengthens a sense of shared destiny, prevents alienation, and acts as a strong defense against crises, disasters, and environmental and social factors that threaten individuals and families. The sense of

community greatly impacts hopes for the future, security, neighborly relations, and a friendly atmosphere. A feeling that everyone is in the same situation and should take care of each other because their quality of life depends on the quality of life of others.

Tzaga, one of the interviewees who recently moved to a distant city and has not yet formed an amicable relationship with the residents, said: “I had a difficult time, my family and I recently moved to the neighborhood, and we do not know the area and people. People were afraid to contract the virus or infect others. So the children and I were locked up at home. I do not like this period. It raises fears and anxieties because I want to be around people and not be closed at home”.

3.2.4. The Fourth Circle—The Sages of the Community, the Elders, the Kahens

Depending on cultural characteristics, the community’s descendants hold on to the wisdom of previous generations clearly and tangibly and draw strength from them. The older sages know how to underline the connections and put things in proportion. They explain, comfort, and reassure. Tshuma maintained: “We turn to kahens or the elderly for advice if necessary. There are also sages to whom we turn for help. When there were crises in Ethiopia, we turned to the kahens and the elderly for help”.

Malalo argued: “When there was a crisis in Ethiopia, we turned to the elderly. If it was not resolved, we turned to the kahens. That is how we have always dealt with crises”.

Yuvi said: “There are individuals who beat themselves (in times of crisis), but as a communal perception—‘Yalpal’—it will pass, but until it passes, it is difficult. There is a deeper understanding. The elders talk about things from history as if they happened yesterday. They unearth the truth from the past and implement it into the present. They hold the wisdom of generations, and that makes it easier”.

Oshrat stated: “My parents believe that first you should try and fix your problems. Then, if you fail, you should consult with the elderly”.

The interviewees testify to using strengths, resources, beliefs, values, knowledge and motivation, social networks, and cultural assets. In addition, they attest to the use of prayers on difficult days and reliance on the family and community for support, resources, and help in times of distress.

3.2.5. The Fifth Circle—Service Providers in the Community

The fifth, the outer circle, is service providers in the community. The interviewees explain that there is a lack of trust in the systems. Therefore few turn to them.

Oshrat claimed: “We do not really trust governmental and institutional factors because, in the past, there have been cases that they spat in Ethiopian Jews’ faces. There is also the difficulty of proficiency in the language and the exhausting bureaucracy”.

Malalo said: “If we need help from the authorities, we turn to our activists to assist us”.

Yshuma stated: “In Israel, we also appeal to people who work with the community”.

Busana argued: “There are few who get help from certain institutional bodies (welfare, the Ministry of Aliyah and Integration). Most of the community does not turn to and is unaware of this resource, mainly the adults due to lack of language skills”.

Four interviewees addressed the lack of trust of community members in the establishment.

Community members’ lack of trust in the organizational environment and service providers is noticeable. This aspect should alert the bodies designated to support and assist the community.

Fanta summarized the five circles: “We usually rely on each other for help, commitment, and care. When we were waiting to immigrate to Israel, there were worse crises, and we did not break. We strongly believe in God and the community’s strengths. When we needed help, we turned to the community’s service providers. They are responsible for helping the community”.

3.3. Personal Coping Strategies

The interviewees’ main characteristic is their belief in their power to overcome difficulties and their ability to put things in proportion as individuals and as a community. People who have experienced problems, crises, and hardships are confident in their strength to cope.

Yuvi, a director of the Friends of Nature Association, which operates community hubs in neighborhoods where most families come from Ethiopia, said: “During the first closure, I was stressing out. I did not understand what was happening, what would happen to the people, and how we would help them as an association. What would we do if people died? So I went to the garden where the elderly farmers work. They saw I was stressed and started saying: “When I was ten, there was a plague in Ethiopia, and people died on the street... it passed, and this will also pass. They gave me proportions. The fact that there was a general crisis helped. They are usually balanced; the wisdom balances them”.

Yshuma claimed: “The pandemic was not easy. I was worried for my children. However, not about myself because I have experience from more challenging events that we prevailed. Ethiopian families have gone through difficulties and can deal with various problems. This community is strong and supports each other”.

Tzaga added: “I found out how strong I am, how wonderful my family is”.

Fanta encountered a unique difficulty during the quarantine since she was not allowed to act according to tradition. “The coronavirus was difficult for me because my daughter was nine months pregnant, and I wanted to be with her and help her, bring her to me... I could not do that, so I was a little frustrated... I found that I am apprehensive and also very creative”.

Malalo stated: “I learned about myself that I am a strong woman, and although I do not know Hebrew, I was able to help my children cope with zoom. Namely, I could ask for help from someone who understands computers, and I organized a quiet corner for my children to learn. I discovered I could manage systems I do not know”.

A second feature that emerged from the interviews’ analysis is belief as a source of strength.

Yshuma: “Mainly, I believe in God, which is why I was not afraid”.

Another coping characteristic is a connection to the familiar, land, and occupational tradition that the “Friends in Nature” association tries to restore. The association builds community gardens designed to connect the elderly to their abilities and skills as farmers in villages in Ethiopia. The gardens were a source of sanity and balance during the closures.

According to the association’s general manager: “The old farmers received a work permit because they were essential, and went to work with gloves and masks in an area of 60 square meters. It was an escape and refuge space. They brought their little grandchildren to the field to allow the parents to work. They came to the garden twice a day. We have noticed that productivity increased compared to before covid-19. What has changed? It turned out that instead of coming to the garden twice a week (because the rest of the time they work as cleaners), they came to work twice a day and made an effort. They also acted wisely in seeding and planting because they suddenly saw yield and economic gain. Once a week, a volunteer came to organize the collection, marketing, and sale of the crop in the locality (through a WhatsApp group), giving the farmers an additional income beyond the food they grew for themselves. At the mental health level, the garden had a great advantage. ‘If it weren’t for the garden, I would go crazy’. Work in the garden allowed people to breathe fresh air and drink coffee with the others”.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The coronavirus pandemic was a global crisis that did not pass over the Israeli population—strong and less resilient. The pressures were multiple and powerful. The pandemic changed life patterns, disrupted routines, and forced humans to locate internal and social resilience factors to face the new daily challenges (Kutner & Avrahami, 2020).

The study focused on Ethiopians’ unique difficulties and coping mechanisms during the pandemic and discussed their resilience as a case study of a minority group coping with the crisis. The community, which primarily holds a low socioeconomic status (Striar, 2021), has encountered new difficulties that added to existing problems and obstacles due to the immigration and integration processes. Density, economic hardship, lack of digital accessibility, family pressures, domestic violence, distance from traditional sources of support, and lack of learning space at home represent the pandemic’s challenges to community members.

The following are the main difficulties as expressed in the study:

1) Economic difficulty and its consequences

Life in general and life in times of crisis are more difficult for a population belonging to the weaker sections of the labor market and those earning low wages. They have higher unemployment rates and experience an almost complete lack of opportunities for part-time or home-based work (Ahdot, 2020). The study exhibits an aggravation of the economic situation in families and among young people who, in the absence of paid work, were required to return and live in their parent's homes despite overcrowding and privacy loss. The schools' closure has led to the cessation of the feeding enterprise and damaged the food security of children supported by the education and welfare systems. Children growing up in a state of food insecurity suffer from cognitive development problems, which are reflected in low academic achievement (UNESCO, 2020).

2) The family system

Most societies view the family as a fundamental social institution, a primary source of socialization, an answer to deep needs in the sense of belonging, and a source of emotional and social support (world family map 2015 in Sorek and Navot (2016)). Ethiopians, whose lives are woven into the extended family and community, have had to adapt to a new reality. A reality that disconnects them from their extended family, distances them from the community, and forces them to face parental authority due to the closure of the education system for all its consequences. We have learned that families have experienced difficulties. Still, we have seen that Ethiopians view the family and community as a source to solve problems. They implement mutual help and support, thus promoting a sense of control and inner faith (Mo, 2003). These features helped them cope with this chaotic period. We have seen that despite the new hardships, community members have demonstrated personal, family, and community resilience. The study presents coping patterns through employing sources of strength as individuals and as a community. The past factors that helped the community in dealing with crises and challenges also helped in this crisis: belief in God, confidence in their power, reliance on the extended family, connection to fundamental values, and assistance from the community and spiritual leaders.

3) Distrust of systems

We learned that even during a crisis, Ethiopians feel a hindrance in contacting professional and systemic bodies. Ethiopians express mistrust in the governmental system: in the police (multiple arrests, violence), the law enforcement system (excessive punishment), the health system (the blood testing event), and the education system. Even when the programs aimed at improving integration into society were good, the message conveyed from the differentiation and labeling reinforced an image of a lack of abilities and presented Ethiopians as having inferior skills and abilities and needing "special treatment,"—which forms the basis of racist perceptions. The disbelief, anger, and frustration are directed toward the establishment due to institutionalized policies in various government ministries, erroneous decisions by decision-makers, and various racist manife-

stations in the public service (Team for the Elimination of Racism, 2016: p. 33). We asked the interviewees, “The community is considered weak; what do you think about it?” And we have received explicit messages consistent with the statements that Ingdao-Wanda (2019) heard before the pandemic regarding negative, labeling, and frustrating experiences.

Due to the negative experiences with systemic factors, unlike most of the Israeli society that pursued external solutions and services (social security, welfare system, income tax), the Ethiopian community came together and looked for internal sources of assistance. Only as a last resort, they chose to turn to external authorities. This insight challenges the perception of the community members’ dependence on the establishment and advises professionals to leverage this comprehension to strengthen the independence and empowerment of the community. In addition, professionals from various disciplines should deal with community members’ lack of trust in them.

4.1. The Coping Strategies of the Community during the Covid-19 Crisis

4.1.1. Identifying Internal Forces

An optimistic picture emerges from the analysis of the findings about the community’s coping strategies with the difficulties they have experienced. First, the interviewees’ great emphasis on coping should be noted, especially compared to their reference to challenges. This aspect is significant and dramatic and does not often transpire in studies about the Ethiopian community in Israel, which present more difficulties and fewer coping mechanisms. The general atmosphere that stands out in the testimonies is the use of strengths and their emphasis. The interviewees often highlight their strengths, their family members’ forces, the community’s power, and overall connection and stress less the difficulties and pathologies. Their testimonies align with the strength-based approach’s orientation for working with individuals, families, and communities. The approach argues that if the community is perceived as a strength, its forces can be used to solve its problems and help others by mobilizing resources, helping neighbors, and providing genuine assistance (Austin, 2005).

The aid process between families in the community attests to the resilience that characterizes the community and the values of mutual help embedded among its people, help that is given genuinely and sometimes in secret. The main principle is that everyone helps each other. When one is in trouble, he knows he can count on others for help, and he, in turn, will help others. Mutual support connects to the concept of the rescued becoming the helper. Corey and Corey (Corey & Corey, 1998) identify this phenomenon as needing to return a favor because others have helped the helper in the present or the past. The ability to ask for help, maintain relationships and support the community and others can produce a sense of strength, inner belief in capabilities, and a feeling of control, especially in uncertainty and pessimism. An atmosphere of connections and

relationships within a community is an essential resource for almost every person, particularly in times of stress, anxiety, or crisis. A sense of community greatly influences hopes for the future, feelings of security, neighborly relations, and a friendly atmosphere. A feeling that everyone experiences the same situation and should take care of each other because their quality of life depends on the life quality of others (Cohen & Phillips, 1997). When residents identify as neighbors, they feel a positive connection and are involved in each other's lives. It can be said that neighborhood social networks are the core of community life and the source of community resilience. According to Breton (2001), the importance and contribution of neighborhood relations to personal and community resilience increase as the neighborhoods are weaker. In strong areas, the residents have external social networks and rely less on local networks. However, in weak neighborhoods, people rely on local networks in times of need and distress. This research found solid evidence for this assumption.

4.1.2. The Importance of Faith

We found evidence of the belief inherent in the community's tradition. Faith is perceived as a personal coping strategy and a community coping mechanism, a faith that provides support in everyday life and in times of crisis. Studies point to the close connection between faith, spirituality, and regular participation in prayers and good health (Shir-Raz, 2018). Prof. Kleinman of Kaplan Hospital claims (ibid.), "faith does not mean only religious or spiritual belief. It also refers to a person's focus on something he believes in, such as faith in God or the existence of something beyond human perception, like mystical elements, aspects that cannot be proven. Nevertheless, these elements can strengthen a person's feeling that there is something 'supernatural' by his side that can help him in times of need. There is a healing effect in any faith". Indeed, it was found that belonging to a religious or spiritual community and participating in prayers and religious ceremonies bring people closer together, create relationships and provide a person with a social support network (Shir-Raz, 2018). Studies show that spiritual and religious beliefs and practices lead to positive mental, physical and social health outcomes (Milner et al., 2020). Thus, papers examining the personal resilience of residents in the Gaza Strip found that religious belief is a positive factor that strengthens the residents. Religion and a connection to God give meaning to suffering (Billing, 2020). Schwartz (2021) maintains that faith is one of the resources that have enormous power. When a person discovers in himself different anchors, such as belief in the existence of a protecting god and faith in the protection and support of a friend or other person, he is given the ability to believe in himself. This resource creates an essential and powerful tool for dealing with uncertainty and anxiety. The literature dealing with multiculturalism and community building emphasizes the meanings of approaches that use strengths and resources, beliefs, values, knowledge and motivation, social networks, and cultural assets. Traditional groups pray on difficult days and stress the role of spirituality and religion in mental health.

4.1.3. The Community Importance

We have seen the great importance that community members attach to the support provided by the extended family and the community. Many groups rely on the family and the community for support, resources, and help in times of distress. Additionally, listening to elders and assisting the family abet a person and sometimes make him align in the face of adversity (Mo, 2003). Ethnographic studies indicate that when communities of immigrants organize, they provide the security networks required for the individual and the family to adapt successfully. Therefore, connecting to these networks is vital to provide for their needs (Padilla, 1997). We note that with the prominent emphasis on family and belonging to the community, there is a clear nod to the method of community work: acting to strengthen and empower the community and, in the process, strengthening the individuals that comprise it (Austin, 2005; Itzhaky & Bustin, 2018; Romi & Getahun, 2009). The traditional community views the individual as an inseparable part of the community; hence, to strengthen the individuals, the community must be empowered to pool and anchor its resources and strengthen its forces (Galbard & Mekonnen, 2019). Thus, recognizing resources and strengths and using them as a lever to reduce gaps and provide tools will create connections within the Israeli society from the point of power and independence rather than weakness and dependence and will advance the community toward integration into Israeli society.

4.1.4. Proximity to Nature

Tiano-Ronen and Shalev (2021) found that being in nature affects the feelings of livelihood, energy, and well-being. The connection to nature helps reduce stress, anxiety, depression, and disturbing thoughts. It contributes to a positive mood and creativity, improves memory and social abilities, and encourages the desire to help others (Gregory et al., 2015). Richardson and Passmore (2021 in Tiano-Ronen & Shalev (2021)) discovered that activity in nature predicts personal well-being and contributes to feelings of happiness and meaning, a decrease in illness, depression, and anxiety, a sense of control, and the creation of better interpersonal relationships. During the coronavirus, perhaps intuitively, and since there were no other opportunities, many turned to activities outside and in nature.

4.2. Recommendations for Intervention among Minority Groups

It is recommended to adopt the community approach, the cultural competence approach, and the strengths-based approach. A community approach involves solving problems while building forces and using community resources (Bustin, 2004; Itzhaky & Bustin, 2018). The cultural competence approach encourages knowing unique cultural groups and adapting the therapeutic interventions to their characteristics to reduce alienation (Zoabi, 2015; Agmon-Shnir & Shemer, 2016). The strengths-based approach recognizes that change processes start from adversities (visible and hidden), but the driving force for change lies in the

strengths. Appreciating the community's forces forms pride, empowers belongingness, and facilitates the ability to connect with its people (Buchbinder, 2012; Saleebey, 1997).

4.3. The Study Limitations

As previously mentioned, the study is based on a (limited) sample of women and does not reflect the human diversity in the community (men, children, community sages). It is possible that following Kaplan's (2021) claim that women are more flexible and have greater resilience, another sample that includes men would have yielded different results. However, the research has the power to illuminate the existing reality of the community's cohesion and solidarity. It reflects its point of view regarding the importance of unity and the contribution of resilience to overcome crises.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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