



**Welfare service users as a result of sexual
abuse according to religious sector**

Ariel Finkelstein
September 2022 | Tishrei 5783



Welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse according to religious sector

Ariel Finkelstein

©

All rights reserved



Ne'emanai Torah Va'Avodah

**Ne'emanai Torah Va'Avodah
Kibbutz Beerot Yitzchak, 6090500, Israel
+972-2-5611761**

Translation: Hannah Katsman

Abstract

In this survey, we present details of the scope of welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse in the municipal authorities in Israel, distributed according to Jewish sector, as of the end of 2020. The distribution of the statistics according to sector was determined according to the type of Jewish educational supervision system under which they study today, or as children (national, national-religious, haredi). Most of the welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse are students in the educational system, aged 3-18, and therefore the data regarding this group is emphasized.

These are the main findings:

General details: The rate of welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse is higher among students in the national-religious system. For every thousand students in the national-religious educational system, 2.39 are welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse. This is higher than in the haredi educational system (1.98), and twice as high as in the national educational system (1.04). Therefore, in 2020, while 19% of the students in the Jewish educational system from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade study in the national-religious system, 29% of the welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse came from that sector. 26% of the students in the Jewish educational system studied in the haredi educational system, while comprising 34% of the welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse.

Gender: The rate of female welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse is higher than the rate of males, but along the religious–secular axis one can see a correlation between the level of religious observance and the percentage of male welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse, especially among children. Among male and female students in the national system (age 3-18) who are welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse, boys make up about a third (31%), while in the national-religious sector, boys make up almost half of welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse (48%), and in the haredi sector boys make up more than half of welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse (53%). Therefore, for every thousand male students in the national-religious

education system, there are 2.3 welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse, compared to 2.07 boys in the haredi system and 0.61 in the national system.

Type of municipality: Among the entire population, one can see a higher rate of welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse living in regional councils (rural settlements), but this is especially noticeable among the national-religious: 40% of welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse that are students or graduates of the national-religious system live in regional councils, while it is estimated that only 24% of students and graduates of this system live in regional councils. Among students and graduates of the national system, 19% of the welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse live in regional councils, while it is estimated that 16% of the students and graduates of the national system live in regional councils. A minority of students and graduates of the haredi educational system live in regional councils, but there as well, one sees a higher rate of welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse living in regional councils in proportion to their numbers in the population.

1. Introduction

In this survey, I will present data on welfare services within the local authorities in Israel (referred to as welfare service users) due to the sexual abuse they experienced, divided according to the type of supervision of the educational system in which they are studying today or studied during their childhood. The survey focuses on the Jewish education system, which contains three types of supervision: national, national-religious, and haredi.¹ The details presented in this survey reflect the situation in the welfare services at the end of 2020, as gathered by the Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs and passed on to the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS).²

This survey focuses on the presentation of a number of central findings regarding the scope of welfare service users in general, and the distribution according to gender and the type of municipality in which they live. **That being said, there is no attempt in this survey to comment on the statistics, nor to explain the factors leading to these findings. Rather, this report seeks to be the first attempt to create a basis for discussion and deeper research on this topic, especially among professionals.** In this context, it's important to emphasize that one must exercise caution when coming to quick causal conclusions based on these findings and the correlations presented. For example, while the survey examines the statistics of welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse, it's completely clear that many of those who have been sexually abused never receive treatment from the welfare services. Therefore, if one finds a lower rate of welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse in one of the sectors, it doesn't necessarily mean that there are fewer victims; It could be that this is a result of under-reporting and a lack of treatment (a phenomenon that may characterize conservative societies) or of a preference for accessing private services outside of the institutional welfare services (despite that in

¹ The secular national *mamlachti* system and the national-religious *mamlachti-dati* system are directly supervised and funded by the education ministry. Schools in the non-Zionist strictly Orthodox haredi system fall under independent private control, while still receiving government funding.

² My thanks to Ms. Iris Matityahu of the Central Bureau of Statistics for her assistance in collecting the statistics.

some situations there is a legal obligation to report). Similarly, it is important to remember that the survey examines a specific point in time, accurate to 2020, such that it does relate to all those who experienced sexual abuse who used the services of the welfare authorities. There definitely exist many who used such services in the past as a result of sexual abuse and completed treatment.³

2. Methodology

A file is opened in each municipality for anyone receiving services from the local welfare department. The file contains details about the circumstances that led to the file being opened, and the type of services received. The file can be designated “family” (needy household) or “individual”, according to the need (i.e. the reason) that led to the opening of the treatment file. Sometimes a secondary need is indicated. The list of criteria is defined and includes 56 reasons for approaching the welfare department. In this survey I seek, as indicated, to choose a single category: “sexually abused”.⁴ In 2013, the Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs began to define sexual abuse as a separate and independent category.⁵ This category includes individuals (and not families) who are treated because of the sexual abuse they experienced.⁶

³ This shows that the length of treatment can influence the findings.

⁴ In the framework of this survey, I also included those for whom “sexual abuse” appeared as a secondary category. At any rate, this was a relatively small minority such that for most of those service users the sexual abuse was the primary category.

⁵ Because this designation of a separate category only occurred in 2013, there is difficulty in presenting a continuous picture on a timeline. It’s important to note that after 2013, one can see a significant jump each year in the number of welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse, which apparently did not occur as a result of an increase in the number of users, rather that the implementation of this change was gradual.

⁶ The statistics collected by the Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs distinguish between service users and those merely listed (known). Service users are those whose clear need has been determined and they are being treated directly, while those “listed” refers to family members of those whose need has been defined (parents, and children under 18), but who have not themselves been defined as in need. From now on I will only relate to those welfare service users for whom the need was defined, i.e. not their family members.

As of the end of 2020, the Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs provided services to 5,466 users as a result of sexual abuse. Of these 4,833, according to the database of the CBS, can be attributed to the educational supervision under which they study or studied.⁷ The CBS lists the educational supervision of those who finished high school from 1989 on, but those older than that (aged 50 and older in 2020) don't appear in these statistics. This is the main reason that 633 additional service users could not be categorized. In addition, some welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse were new immigrants who had not studied in the Israeli educational system, and a limited number of children living in Israel are home-schooled. At any rate, it's important to emphasize that the designation of educational supervision does not indicate the place where the sexual abuse occurred, and one cannot draw conclusions that the welfare service users were abused in the educational system. The only connection is the identification of the educational supervision in which the welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse study or studied.

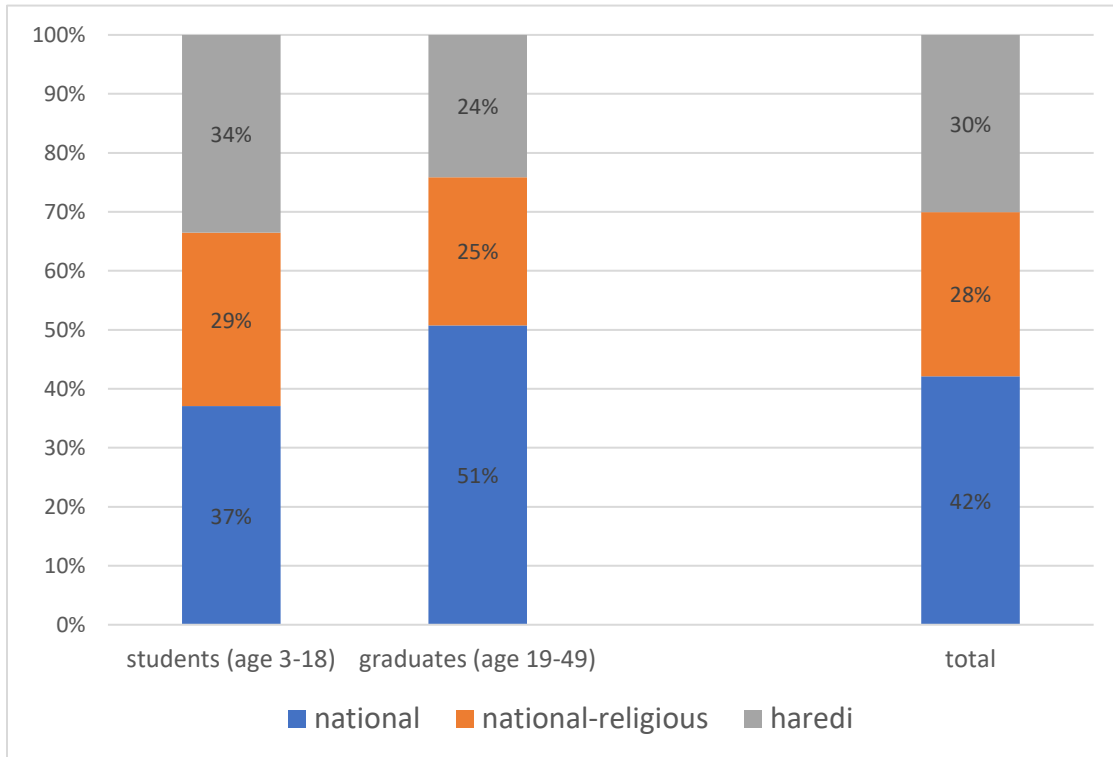
Of the 4833 welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse about whom there is information about where they study or studied, 3065 (63.5%) are aged 3-18, meaning they are current students (either preschool, elementary or high school), and the rest are aged 19-49. Therefore, most of the service users for sexual abuse are currently studying in the education system. The number of welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse among students and graduates of the Arab educational system is only 8%, much lower than their proportion in the population. This is apparently connected to specific characteristics of patterns of reporting in Arab society. At any rate, in this survey I will focus on presenting details of welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse that are students or graduates of the Jewish education system, such that any place in which the word "national" is mentioned, it refers to the Jewish national system.

⁷ This designation was done on the basis of the most recent educational supervision under which each person learned. Therefore, if someone dropped out of the educational system at 15, they appear according to where they studied at 15.

3. General statistics

The following graph illustrates the distribution of welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse, according to educational supervision.

Graph 1. Service users from sex abuse treated by welfare authorities aged 3-49, according to educational authority (Jewish education) and age, 2020.

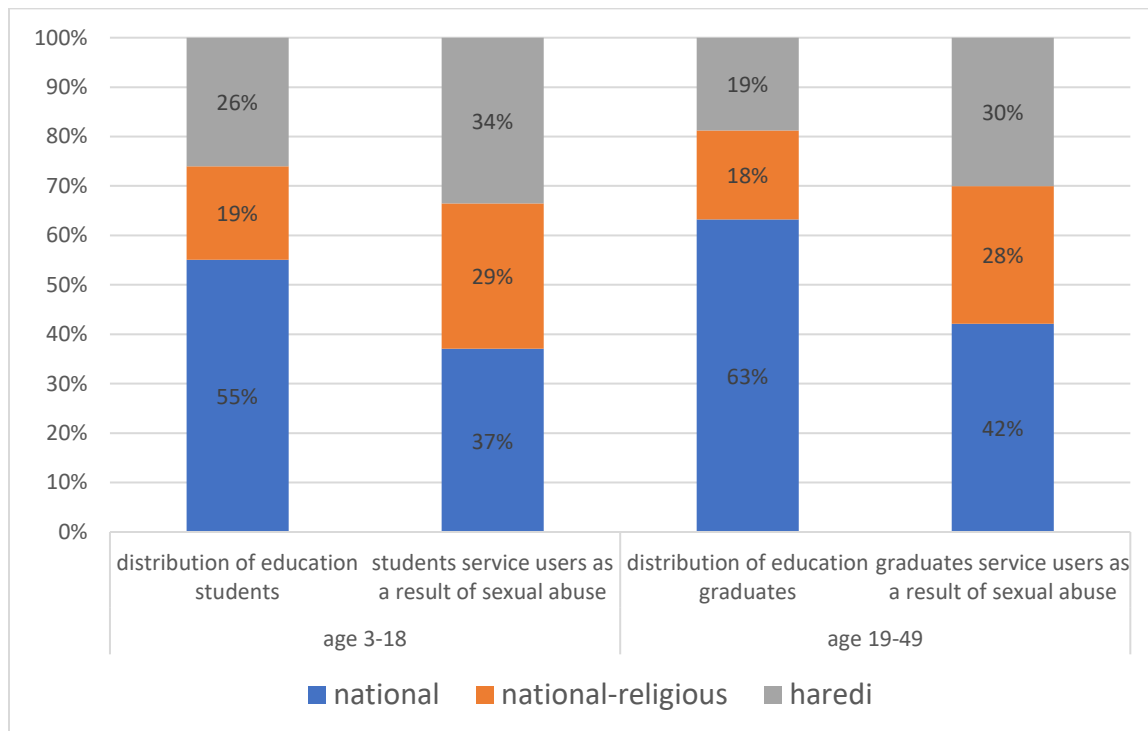


The graph illustrates that among the welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse, 28% are students and graduates of the national-religious education system, 30% are students and graduates of haredi education and 42% are students and graduates of the national education system. Among welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse of school age, one sees a higher rate of welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse in the national-religious and haredi systems (particularly the haredi). The difference between the various age groups is expected in light of the high birth rates within religious, and particularly haredi, society.

A more interesting question regards the scope of welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse within each sector, relative to its size in the population. The following

graph, showing the distribution of welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse relative to the size of the groups of students/graduates in each sector, seeks to answer this question.

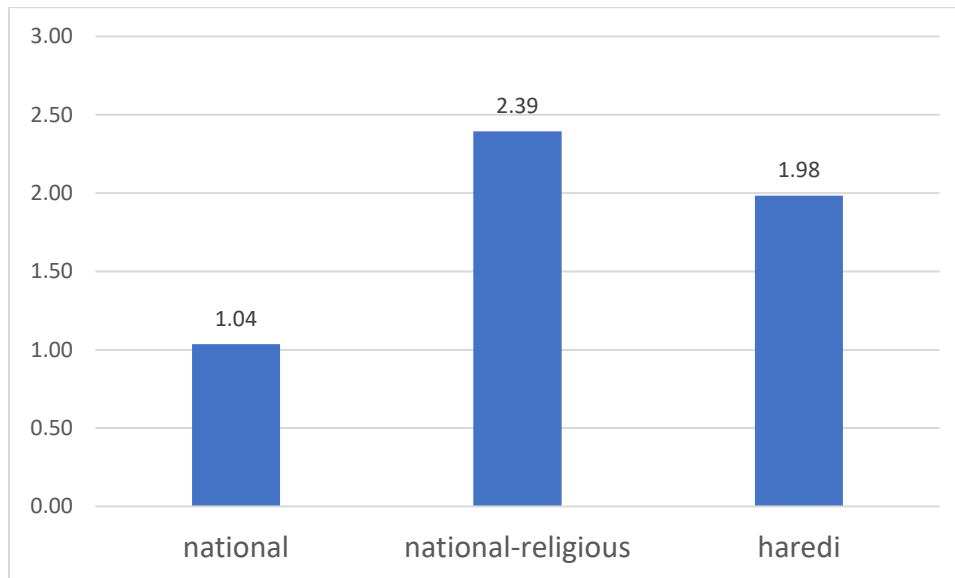
Graph 2. Distribution of welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse, aged 3-49, compared to the distribution of students and graduates of the education system, according to supervision type (Jewish) and age, 2020.



One can see that in both the distribution of the general population (age 3-49), and the distribution of current students (age 3-18), the rate of welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse who are students or graduates of the national-religious or haredi education is much higher than their relative proportion in the population. The especially interesting statistics relate to current students (which as we have said include most of the welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse). The rate of welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse in national-religious students is very high in proportion to their rate in the educational system: in 2020, the national-religious students made up 19% of the students in the Jewish educational system, whereas the rate of national-religious students among the welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse stood at 29%, 1.5 times more than its size among the student population.

Another way to present these statistics is to examine the number of welfare service users for every thousand students, under each type of supervision, as represented in the following graph.⁸

Graph 3. Number of welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse aged 3-18 per 1000 students, according to supervision (Jewish education), 2020



For every thousand students in the national-religious education system there are 2.39 student welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse today (as of 2020), higher than in the haredi education system (1.98) and more than double that of the national system (1.04).

As stated above, one must be wary of drawing causative conclusions from an analysis of the data regarding welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse about the scope of those who actually experienced sexual abuse, since there may be other reasons relating to the level of reporting within each sector.

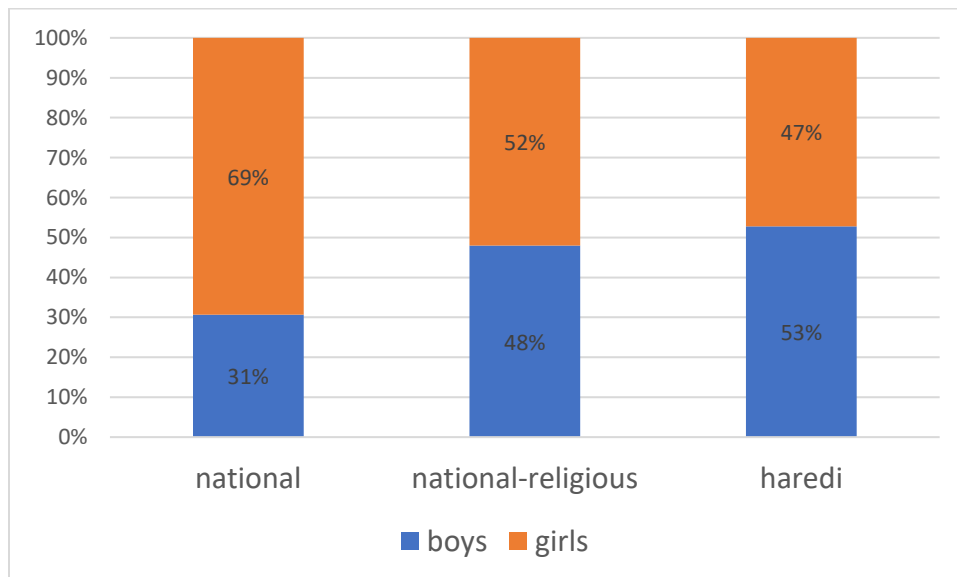
⁸ Statistics on current students in the educational system are based on information appearing in the “wide view” system of the Ministry of Education. The statistics on graduates of the educational system beginning in 1989 are based on a separate file received from the CBS.

4. Gender

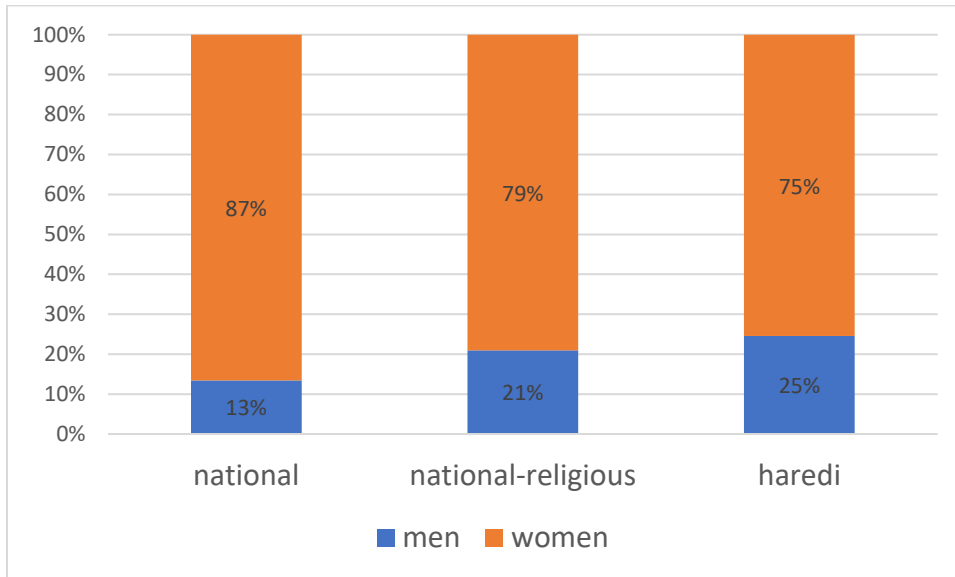
Females make up two-thirds (66%) of the welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse, but there is a significant difference between women and girls. Among the 3-18 age group, girls make up 57% of the welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse, while among those aged 19-49, women make up 82% of the welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse. It's important to clarify that among welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse aged 18 and above, it cannot be known whether they were abused as children or adults, so it's possible that some of these users were abused before the age of 18.

The following two charts represent the distribution of welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse according to type of educational supervision and gender, further divided into two age groups.

Graph 4. Distribution of welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse aged 3-18, according to supervision and gender, 2020.



Graph 5. Distribution of welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse aged 19-49, according to supervision and gender, 2020.

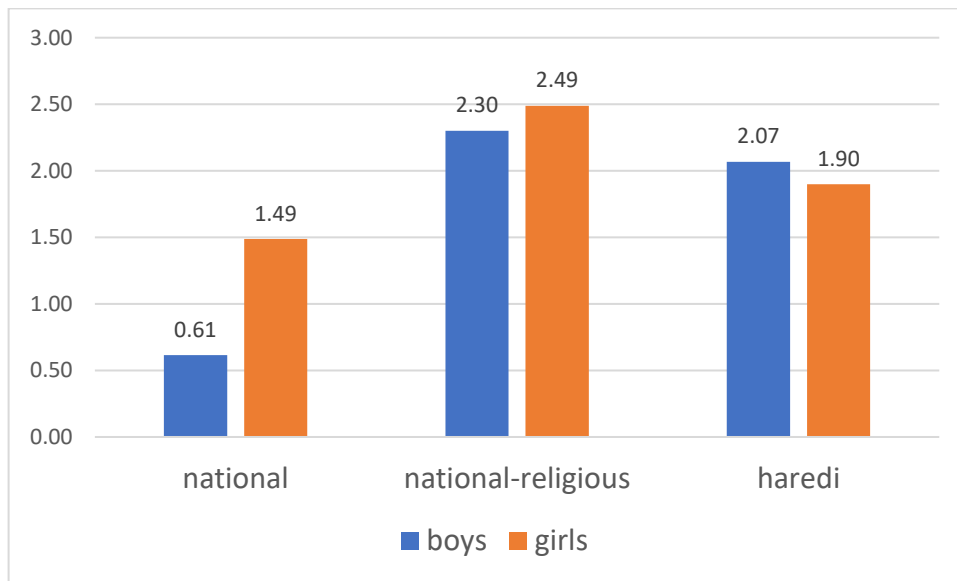


In Graph 4 one can see distinct differences between types of supervision in the gender of students (aged 3-18) who are welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse. Among students under national education supervision, most of the welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse are girls, with the boys representing less than a third (31%) of the service users, while in the national-religious education boys represent almost half of welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse (48%) and in the haredi educational system, boys represent more than half of welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse (53%). In contrast, Graph 5 illustrates that among ages 19-49 women make up a definite majority of welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse in all the sectors, although within this age group as well, there is a slightly higher relative number of men in the haredi and national-religious groups (as stated, it's possible that these are men who were abused as children).

The significance of these findings is that there is a clear correlation between the level of religious observance and the high rate of men among welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse.

The next graph presents the statistics of student welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse, in relation to the number of students under each type of supervision, divided according to gender.

Graph 6. Number of welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse aged 3-18 per 1000 students, according to educational supervision (Jewish) and gender, 2020



The graph illustrates that at the current point in time (end of 2020), the chance of boys in the national-religious system becoming welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse is slightly higher than that of boys in the haredi system, and four times higher than that of boys in the national education system. Therefore, for every thousand boys in the national-religious sector, there are 2.3 welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse compared to 0.61 among boys in the national system. One also finds a higher rate of national-religious female welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse (2.49 per 1000 female students), but the difference compared to those in national education is smaller, while the difference compared to those in haredi education is larger.

5. Type of municipality

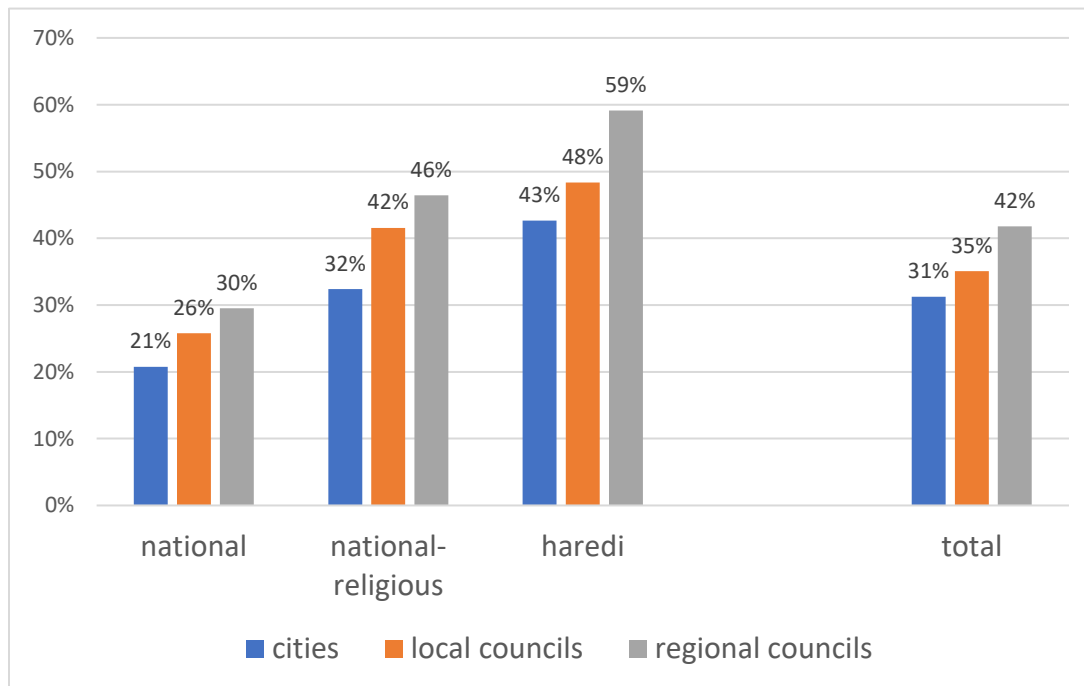
In Israel municipalities are designated according to the degree of urbanity:

- City—an urban municipality, generally with over 20,000 residents
- Local council—a local authority containing a settlement, with an urban, rural or community character and 2000-20,000 residents
- Regional council—a council combining a few villages and communities within a particular geographic area.

An analysis of the CBS file of local authorities for the year 2020 shows that 80% of Jewish residents of Israelis live in cities, 12% in local councils and 8% in regional councils. It's possible to extrapolate from the data that approximately 77% of Jewish children live in cities, 14% in local councils and 9% in regional councils.

An analysis of the statistics distributed according to the municipal status of a locale allows an examination of the correlation between the type of municipality (urban or rural) and the scope and characteristics of welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse. The following graph represents the distribution of welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse according to the municipal status of the locale in which they live.

Graph 7. Distribution of welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse, aged 3-49, according to the supervision and municipal status of the municipality of residence, 2020



In general, one can see in the graph that the rate of welfare users as a result of sexual abuse is higher in regional councils relative to their size in the population as described above, while in cities the situation is reversed. Thus, 22% of the welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse live in regional councils while 12% of the Jewish population lives there, and approximately 14% of children. Among students and graduates of the national-religious education system, the high rate of regional council residents among welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse is glaring: 40% of the population of welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse live within regional councils.

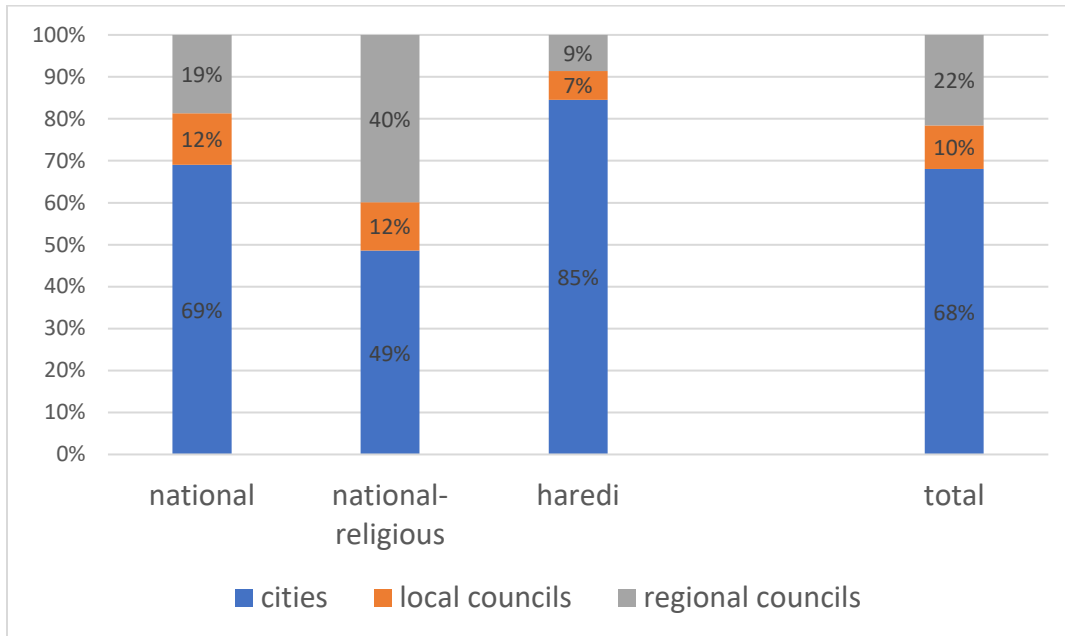
There are no available data on the type of locale in which students and graduates of the national-religious system live (nor regarding students and graduates of the national and haredi systems), but it's possible to get an indication based on the identity of the municipality of the schools in which the students under each type of educational supervision live, since one can assume that most students learn in the municipality in

which they live.⁹ An analysis of the data from 2020 shows that among the national-religious education system, 24% of students study in regional councils, while 16% of students in the national education system and 3% of those in the haredi education system study in regional councils. On the basis of this indication it can be assumed that in the national education system, the rate of welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse living in regional councils is only slightly higher than their relative rate in the population of students and graduates of the national system living in regional councils (19% vs. 16%), while in the national-religious system one can see a tremendous difference: 40% of welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse among students and graduates under this supervision are residents of municipalities within a regional council, compared to the estimate that residents of these regional councils make up 24% of this population. The difference here is so great that even if our estimate is low, a large gap remains.

The following graph represents the data on welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse distributed according to educational supervision and gender.

⁹ This assumption is strengthened in light of a check that I did showing that of all students in the Jewish education system, as of 2020, 77% learn in cities, 14% in regional councils and 9% in local councils. This statistic is identical to the one presented earlier regarding the distribution of the place of residence among children in Israel up to age 17. It is worth noting that the assumption that students learn in the municipality in which they live is largely true for preschool, elementary and junior-high education, on the basis of registration areas customary in Israel and the difficulties placed upon parents who seek to send their children to study in a different municipality. However, in high school there is a phenomenon, especially within national-religious and haredi education, of students not studying in the municipality in which they live, whether because they attend a school with a dormitory or to one in a neighboring municipality. Despite this, it appears that even at these ages most students in the national-religious education system, and certainly in the national system, study in the municipality in which they live, and it appears that high-school-age students constitute a relatively small group of students compared to preschool, elementary and junior-high students. Nevertheless, it is only an indication and it is clear that there will be a certain amount of deviation.

Graph 8: Rate of men among welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse aged 3-49, according to supervision (Jewish education) and municipal status of residence, 2020



The data in this graph show that in every religious sector, as the municipality becomes less urban, the rate of men among welfare service users treated for sexual abuse is higher. In regional councils within the Jewish population 42% of welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse are men (and 65% women), and in the cities 31% of the welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse are men (and 69% women). The statistic that stands out is that among students and graduates of the haredi educational system living in regional councils, 59% of the welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse are men, while 46% among students and graduates of the national-religious system are men.

In light of the fact that few haredim live in regional councils, the statistic regarding national-religious supervision is particularly interesting. Thus, in effect, out of 399 men age 3-49 who live in a regional council and are welfare service users as a result of sexual abuse, 228 (57%) are students/graduates of the national-religious system, compared to 103 (26%) who are students/graduates of the national education system and 68 (17%) who are students/graduates of the haredi education system.