

MARITAL QUALITY AMONG COUPLES LIVING UNDER THE THREAT OF FORCED RELOCATION: THE CASE OF FAMILIES IN THE GOLAN HEIGHTS

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This study aims to explore how the long period of uncertainty about possible relocation affects the marital quality of the population in the Golan Heights and what forms of coping with this ongoing stress are used. The results, based on both quantitative and qualitative data, indicate a circular process in which the level of stress generated by the uncertainty varies with marital quality and with other personal and family resources, such as potency and an appreciation of the spouse's ability to cope with the stress. Four ways of coping with the uncertainty were observed in in-depth interviews: fighting, ignoring, postponing, and planning. The results are discussed in terms of their meaning for possible systemic interventions.

Twenty-five years ago N. and M., as a young couple, decided to build their home in a small village in the Golan Heights, an area that was occupied by Israel during the Six Days War in 1967. They followed other young idealistic couples who wanted to change the area from being the target of Syrian threats and attacks on Israel into a civilized area with a high quality of life. At that time, the beginning of the 70s, there was no hint of a possibility for peace between Syria and Israel. Furthermore, there was a broad consensus among almost all parties in Israel that the Golan Heights would remain occupied by Israel under any future agreement. The painful history of many villages, kibbutzim, and cities located in the Upper Galilee under the Golan Heights, which were bombed by the Syrians for many years, affected the collective emotional state of most people in Israel. Therefore, all attempts to settle the area received the support and encouragement of both the government and public opinion.

N. and M. and other young Israeli Jewish couples built houses, raised children, and developed economic resources (agriculture and industry) as well as a system of community services. They turned the Golan Heights into an area that was known for its high quality of life.

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All this has changed since the Madrid Conference in 1991, when negotiations between Israel and Syria under the principle of land for peace began to take place. N. and M., as well as other couples who are mostly in their 40s and 50s, now find themselves and their families living under the threat of forced relocation—a threat that has existed for over seven years and probably will not end soon. This situation also creates uncertainty about whether, when, and how the relocation will be implemented. Questions about future financial, social, and psychological aspects have been raised. All these events created unexpected demands that require adequate resources and resilience of each couple, as the family leaders, in order to cope. However, such demands may create stress, which in turn can be harmful to the quality of the marriage, thereby affecting the resilience of the couple.

The goal of this study was to find out whether the threat of relocation has, in fact, an impact on marital quality among the population of the Golan Heights, what the nature of this impact is, and what resources are used by the couples to cope with the situation effectively. On the basis of the data, we will discuss the possible interventions that might be useful for couples in this kind of uncertain situation.

Stress and Marital Quality

The impact of stress on families has been studied since the 1930s by various disciplines. However, the first work that provided a conceptual framework for viewing the process that families undergo as result of stressful events was proposed by Hill. Hill (1958) developed the concept of ABC-X, in which A is the stressor event, which interacts with B, the family resources and strengths, which interact with C, the meaning that the family gives to the stressor event. These interactions combine to produce X, the level of stress. The main idea behind this concept is that X is affected by the mediating variables and not directly by the stressor events themselves.

The ABC-X concept has been further developed and studied extensively in the last two decades (Boss, 1987, 1988; Boss, McCubbin, & Lester, 1979; Burr & Klein, 1994; Hansen & Johnson, 1979; Lavee, McCubbin & Olson, 1987; McCubbin et al., 1980; McCubbin & Figley, 1983; Williams, 1995).

Some studies have attempted to overcome limitations of the ABC-X model in order to make it more systemic and circular (Burr & Klein, 1994; McCubbin & Patterson, 1982, 1983). McCubbin and Patterson added the systemic idea of a feedback loop that considers the impact of previous stresses and crisis variables on the family's adaptation to stressful events. In further development of their work, Lavee, McCubbin, and Olson (1987) found that previous stressful life events had no direct effect on family well-being, but that they intensified intrafamily strain, which affected marital adjustment negatively. Because marital adjustment was found to be correlated with family well-being, both of them counteract the pileup of demands. It is possible that an accumulation of stressors might lead to a circular process in which a stressor event increases intrafamily strain, which reduces marital adjustment and family well-being and increases the pileup of demands, thereby making the family require more resources, which have been impoverished due to previous strain.

Williams (1995) describes this process as a stress-vulnerability theory of marital quality. According to his model, life events, especially negative ones, demand resources from a couple as well as create some stress that consumes additional resources. This leads to a situation in which most of the resources necessary for maintaining marital quality are absorbed in dealing with the stressor demands. Couples with poor resources or with

difficulties in managing resources would therefore be more vulnerable to damage of their marital quality, especially as stressor events accumulate.

Forced Relocation and Uncertainty as Stressor Events

The stressor event among the families in the Golan Heights is the threat of relocation. Marris (1980) describes relocation as a disruption of life structure. It means transition from a well-known environment to an unknown one and involves changing home, job, and social networks. These changes generate demands related to personal life as well as to the family. Thus, couples have to cope with difficulties related to each of them and to their children as well as to the couple and family as a unit. Most studies of forced relocation involve cases that occurred suddenly as a result of natural disasters, such as fire or earthquake, or as a result of war, which is often sudden and unexpected. In the majority of cases, forced relocation is accompanied by property damage, injury, and loss of personal resources such as social status (Aroain, 1990). Feelings of loss of control and self-confidence, insecurity about the future, frustration, and sorrow about losing friends and ideals are common in situations of forced relocation (Aroain, 1990; Roizblatt & Pilowsky, 1996), as are feelings of mourning for the losses (Raphael, 1983).

The threat of being relocated by force means living under uncertainty, which has been found to be a high and powerful stressor (Breznitz, 1967; Lazarus, 1974; Shalit, 1977). Breznitz (1967) defines uncertainty as a situation in which the degree of confidence that something will happen is equal to the degree of confidence that it will not happen. According to Breznitz, uncertainty includes two elements that have an impact on the level of stress: the first is the probability that the threat will occur, and the second is the length of the uncertainty period. However, he claims that the length of the uncertainty period is crucial to the appearance of threat even if there is a relatively low probability of the threat happening.

In light of these findings, there is a very high probability that people living for a long time under uncertain conditions with a threat of forced relocation will be affected by this stressor. It is assumed that different demands will arise derived from the way in which they perceive their stress. One set of demands relates to instrumental issues, such as looking for another home (Kliot, 1987), another workspace, or even another profession (Jackobson, 1986). A second set of demands relates to affective perspectives, such as losing friends and neighbors, leaving support networks, undermining family stability, and damaging one's own or one's spouse's psychological well-being (Lifton, 1983; Sluzki, 1990, 1992; Stokols, 1978). The third type of demand relates to cognitive perspectives and focuses on the difficulties in planning the future (Tychman, Tychman, Morad, & Melnic, 1978). In order to cope with these unexpected stressor demands, the couple obviously needs resilience (Walsh, 1998). Resilience involves a set of resources that must be organized and utilized so as to overcome the stressful situation.

Couple Resources for Coping with Stress

Resources are defined as a person's or couple's accessible capacities and strengths that help in coping with stress (Ben-Sira, 1993; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). When considering stress that affects the entire family, we have to take into account two different kinds of resources: personal resources and systemic resources. Personal resources are those that are connected to the specific characteristics of each spouse. Such personal resources

include hardiness (Kobasa, 1981), sense of coherence (Antonovsky, 1979), and potency (Ben-Sira, 1993). Potency reflects the ability to keep one's psychological balance in conditions under which other resources lose their effectiveness and is activated after a primeval failure in coping. It is defined as a profound faith in one's own ability and the meaning that this ability has in society. According to Ben-Sira (1993), the sense of potency is developed through life experience. Also included among personal resources are other variables that are not considered to be personality characteristics, but that affect the entire range of reparative resources that a person acquires. For example, education provides an individual with understanding and the ability to analyze life events and serves as a basis for obtaining higher social status (Ben-Sira, 1989; Lev, 1996). One's profession affects the ability of an individual to ensure financial stability and to attain self-fulfillment. Age affects the ability of an individual to find a job, particularly in a capitalistic society (Jackobson, 1986). According to previous studies, education, age, and professional as well as occupational status can be considered personal resources, for they facilitate coping successfully with new demands, especially those related to economic stability (Ben-Sira, 1989; Lev, 1996).

Systemic resources, or in our case, couples' resources, are those that are established within the framework of the partners' relations. They may be instrumental resources, such as property or other financial assets, and therefore could be perceived as part of personal resources as well. They might evolve from the partners' life together, for example, an appreciation of the spouse's coping ability. Wamboldt, Steinglass, & De-Nour (1991) examined couples' effective coping during the waiting period for relocation from Sinai, which was implemented as a result of the peace agreement between Israel and Egypt. The results showed that the more each spouse believed in his or her partner's ability, the lower was the degree of his or her anxiety and the more resources that were made available for issues other than coping with the anxiety. Furthermore, there was a tendency among spouses to believe that both partners shared a similar amount of stress, although the findings indicated differences in their perceptions of the threat of relocation and the stress accompanying it (Pickergill & Beasley, 1991).

In sum, the threat of relocation involves a total change of life, requiring a major adjustment in employment, residence, and family life. Coping with all these demands effectively depends on the accessible resources of the spouses, that is, personal as well as systemic resources. Difficulties in either acquiring the resources or in managing them can cause psychological stress, which in turn can reduce the marital quality that is needed to maintain the stability of the marriage.

On the basis of the evidence of past research, this study is concerned with examining the population of the Golan Heights in relation to three major questions:

1. Does the level of stress vary with marital quality among couples living with ongoing uncertainty in the Golan Heights?
2. Which personal and family resources (potency, age, education, and appreciation of the spouse's coping ability) affect the steadiness of marital quality during a long-term situation of uncertainty, and in what way?
3. Are there specific strategies for coping among the Golan Heights families?

As a framework for analysis in answering these questions, we adopted Williams's model of stress-vulnerability for marital quality (Williams, 1995).

According to this model, the following hypotheses were formed relating to questions 1 and 2:

1. The higher the level of stress, the lower the level of marital quality.
2. (a) The higher the amount and quality of the resources, the lesser the perceived demands of the stressor event;
(b) the higher the degree of perceived demands, the higher the level of stress.

Sample

Data were collected from 106 married couples residing in the Golan Heights. The couples were selected randomly from rural and urban settlements. Data were collected from both spouses among 95 couples, whereas among 11 couples only one spouse agreed to participate.

Men's ages ranged from 36 to 53 (with a mean of 48). Women's ages ranged from 31 to 51 (with a mean of 46). Data on education level show that 25% of the men and 50% of the women had an academic education and degree, 47% of the men were employed in agriculture, and 66% of the women were employed according to their academic education.

There are several different structures of settlements in the Golan Heights: kibbutzim, moshavim, community settlements, and a city. The sample population included participants from all communities. This fact has a special meaning here, because the type of settlement affects the level of financial support as well as social support, both of which are known to be correlated with stress and coping (Hill, 1958; Williams, 1995).

Data Collection

We conducted the survey by administering anonymous questionnaires to the couples in April 1995. The data were collected before the general election to the Israeli parliament in May 1996. In July 1997, we interviewed 10 couples from various settlements in order to understand some of the meaning behind the results as well as to explore how different families maintain their residence in the Golan Heights. Therefore, the study integrates quantitative as well as qualitative approaches to understanding the dynamics at work in this situation.

Measurement Tools

The questionnaire consisted of six parts: demographic questions, the Enrich Scale for measuring the marital quality, the Psychological Equilibrium Scale for studying the level of stress, a potency scale, a demands scale, and a scale that measures appreciation of the spouse's coping ability.

Enrich Scale. The Enrich Scale for measuring marital quality was designed by Olson, Fournier, and Druckman in 1982. Lavee (1995) adopted and validated the questionnaire for the Israeli population. Enrich is a self-report instrument that was designed to assess potential problem areas and strengths of relationships. Accordingly, both spouses are requested to report their attitudes toward themselves and their feelings towards their spouse. Eight areas are assessed: (1) Personality reflects adjustment to the partner and

satisfaction with the spouse's behavior; (2) Communication reflects an individual's feelings and attitudes toward the role of communication in the maintenance of the relationship, (3) Conflict resolution assesses attitudes about relationship conflicts and comfort with the way in which problems are handled; (4) Financial management focuses on attitudes and concerns about the way in which economic issues are managed within the couple's relationship; (5) Leisure activities assess the individual's preferences and the couple's consensus about the use of leisure time and activities; (6) Sexual relationship reflects the individual's feelings and concerns about the role of affection and sexuality in the couple's relationship; (7) Children and marriage reflects a consensus regarding childbearing and child-rearing decisions and satisfaction with the way in which the parental roles are defined; (8) Family and friends assesses feelings and concerns about relationships with relatives, in-laws, and friends.

The original scale included 105 items that assess the areas mentioned above as well as another two areas that were excluded from the Hebrew version: One of them related to religion and the other was a global assessment of marital quality. The Hebrew scale includes 95 items. Each item was rated on 5-point scale ranging from total agreement to total disagreement.

Each area is measured separately, and the sum of the subscale scores is used to measure wife's and husband's self-reports of marital quality. The Enrich Scale has shown good internal consistency and test-retest reliability, as well as construct validity (Fournier, Olson, & Druckman, 1983). Its discriminate validity and concurrent validity have also been established (Fower & Olson, 1989). High levels of validity and reliability were also found in the Hebrew scale (Altus, 1994; Kaydan, 1993; Lavee, 1995).

Psychological Equilibrium Scale. The Psychological Equilibrium Scale was developed by Ben-Sira (1988) in order to evaluate degree of stress. Stress is defined here as a prolonged failure to reestablish emotional homeostasis (Ben-Sira, 1989, 1991). Therefore psychological disequilibrium on the scale indicates a lack of such homeostasis. The scale comprises six physical and emotional conditions that measure emotional homeostasis as based on the Guttman scale. The Psychological Equilibrium Scale is of particular relevance to the issue under study, because it focuses on prolonged disturbance or maintenance of homeostasis. It has been found valid in many studies in differentiating between groups according to their level of stress and has also been applied as an indicator for readjustment. The Cronbach alpha reliability of the scale was .74 for both husbands and wives.

Potency Scale. The Potency Scale, developed by Ben-Sira (1985), measures confidence in both one's own capacities and society, which is perceived as basically ordered, predictable, and meaningful. It has been found valid in many studies (Lev, 1996). There are 19 items, including self-confidence (3), feelings of control (6), feelings of social obligation (5) (the opposite of alienation), and perception of society as ordered and meaningful (5) (the opposite of anomie). There are five categories that indicate the degree of consensus. The Cronbach alpha reliability of the scale was .87 for both husbands and wives.

Demands Scale. The Demands Scale was defined operationally by stimuli directed to a person that have to be handled by using resources. The demands herein investigated are divided into three types: instrumental demands, such as losing one's job and livelihood; affective demands, such as being separated from social support systems and suffering from emotional breakdown; and cognitive demands, such as confusion and

bewilderment concerning the future. There were 23 items rated on a 6-point scale, ranging from do not agree (1) (low intensity demand) to very much agree (6) (high intensity demand). The Cronbach alpha reliability of the scale was .85 for both husbands and wives.

The Appreciation of Spouse's Coping Ability Scale: The Appreciation of Spouse's Coping Ability Scale measures spouses' assessment of each other's degree of success in coping with perceived threats and demands. It includes three dimensions: The first dimension refers to a partner's future emotional responses; the second dimension refers to the partner's future instrumental responses, such as "my partner will not have any problem in finding a new job"; the third dimension refers to the partner's future responses to the mate, such as "My partner will dissolve the marriage." Subjects were asked to describe their feelings and to grade their level of appreciation, ranging from 1 (low appreciation) to 6 (high appreciation). The Cronbach alpha reliability of the scale was .85 for both husbands and wives.

Results

Quantitative analysis. Question 1. Does the level of stress vary with marital quality among couples living with ongoing uncertainty on the Golan Heights? The hypothesis was that the higher the level of stress, the lower the level of marital quality.

Regression analysis was performed on marital quality to assess the extent to which stress influenced it, and recursively, how it influenced the level of stress. Three regressions were performed on wives and husbands separately as well as on the couple as a unit. All the analyses supported the hypothesis.¹ The results are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1			
The Mutual Affect of Stress and Marital Quality			
Marital Quality	Wives	Husbands	Couples
Stress	-.43***	-.39***	-.48***
r ²	.18	.15	.23
*** p < .001			

As shown in Table 1, 18 percent of the variance of marital quality among wives and 15 percent among husbands can be explained by the relationship between marital quality and the existence of stress ($F(1,10) = 22.1, p < .001, r^2 = .18$; $F(1,95) = 17.04, p < .001, r^2 = .15$). If we look at the couple as a unit, 23 percent of the variance of marital quality can be explained by the relationship between these two variables ($F(1,92) = 28.1, p < .001, r^2 = .23$). The regression analysis was performed separately on each of the components of marital quality as defined in the Enrich Scale as well as on the entire scale as a unit. It was found that the existence of stress affects and is affected by each one of the components as well as the entire scale measurement of marital quality. There is a significant difference in marital quality when two groups are

TABLE 2
Relation of Marital Quality to Low and High Levels of Stress (*M* and *SD*)

Marital Quality	Low-Level Stress	High-Level Stress	t-test Values
Wives	3.8 (.49)	3.45 (.60)	3.22**
Husbands	3.69 (.49)	3.40 (.55)	2.65**
Couples	3.61 (.50)	3.25 (.60)	3.14**

** $p < .01$

compared: couples with low levels of stress and couples with high levels of stress. This was true when the results for husbands and wives were analyzed separately and when the couple was analyzed as a unit. The results are presented in Table 2.

These results call special attention to the meaning of stress among couples and families living in the Golan Heights. Because marital quality affects the well-being of the family, the long-term stress that is experienced by the families in the Golan Heights might have a meaningful impact on their well-being (Lavee, et al., 1987).

Question 2. Which personal and family resources (potency, age, education, and appreciation of spouse's coping ability) affect the steadiness of marital quality during a long-term situation of uncertainty, and in what way?

Two hypotheses were related to this question.

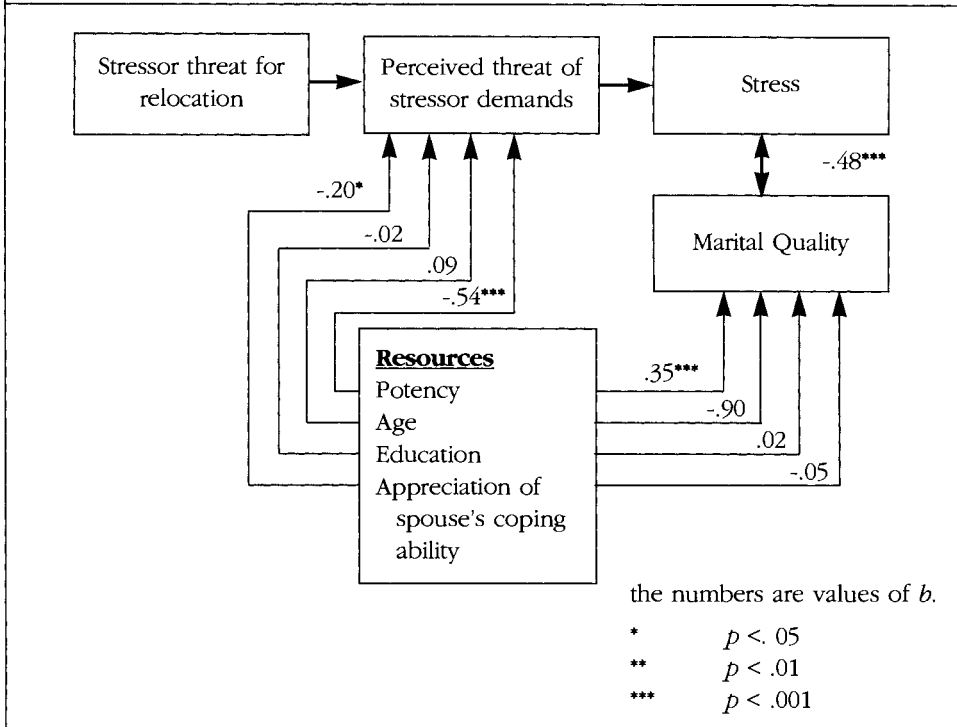
1. The higher the amount and quality of the resources, the less are the perceived demands of the stressor event. Regression analysis was performed on the resources in order to assess the extent to which the perceived demand influenced them. All analyses, jointly of the couple and separately of husbands and wives, supported the hypothesis. The results are presented in Table 3. The regression equation for couples is $F(4,101) = 19.4, p < .001, r^2 = .43$; for wives $F(4,97) = 14.2, p < .001, r^2 = .37$; and for husbands $F(4,90) = 10.5, p < .001, r^2 = .32$. It was found that the sense of potency and an appreciation of the spouse's coping ability had an impact on the perceived threat of

TABLE 3
Relation of Resources to Perceived Demands

Perceived Demands	Wives	Husbands	Couples
Resources	14.2***	10.5***	19.4***
r^2	.37	.32	.43

*** $p < .001$

FIGURE 1
Williams Model: Effect of Resources on Perceived Threat of Stressor Demands on Stress and on Marital Quality Among Couples



stressor demands, whereas age and education did not have an impact on the perceived threat when analyzed separately. The results, as organized according to Williams's model (Williams, 1995), are presented in Figure 1. Therefore a high sense of potency and a high appreciation of the spouse's ability to cope with the stress will reduce the perceived threat of stressor demands.

2. The higher the degree of perceived demands, the higher is the level of stress. Regression analysis was performed on the level of stress in order to assess the extent to which perceived demands influenced it. This hypothesis was accepted when analyzing the couples jointly and also for husbands and wives separately. The regression equation for couples is $F(2, 90) = 11.90, p < .001, r^2 = .21$; for wives: $(b = .58) F(1, 100) = 49.92, p < .001, r^2 = .33$; and for husbands: $(b = .43) F(1, 93) = 20.87, p < .001, r^2 = .18$.

The results illustrate the process by which the level of stress among couples is generated (see Figure 1). The stressor event creates the perceived demands, which are influenced by both shared and personal resources (potency and appreciation of spouse's ability to cope with stress) and affect the level of stress, which in turn affects marital quality. Because personal and couple resources also have a direct impact on marital quality ($r^2 = .35$ for couple, $r^2 = .30$ for wives, and $r^2 = .37$ for husbands), it is possible to assume that investing resources in coping with stress might impoverish the

resources that are regularly invested in creating and maintaining marital quality. Looking at Figure 1, which is based on Williams's model, suggests that one circular hypothesis might be more accurate than a number of linear hypotheses. Thus, the use of resources, marital quality, and the sense of stress vary together, tending to affect each other as well as being affected by each other. This way of understanding the results enables systemic understanding of the process. Yet relating to the different linear hypotheses makes it possible to focus on a smaller segment within the entire interaction system (Minuchin, 1974).

Qualitative Analysis. Question 3: Are there specific strategies for coping among the Golan Heights families? To assess the subjective perception of specific coping strategies among Golan Heights couples, we used qualitative methods. A semistructured interview was devised. The questions focused on three major themes: (a) How do couples account for their decision to settle on the Golan Heights? (b) How do they perceive the possibility of relocation? (c) How do they cope with this possibility in their daily life? Ten couples from different types of settlements were interviewed using this instrument.

Data were content-analyzed according to the three major themes. When accounting for the decision to move to the Golan Heights, three types of accounts were used. One was a financial account, usually expressed as the fulfillment of a goal that could not be achieved otherwise, or ensuring that children's economic dreams are met. "I came to the Golan in order to enhance the finances of my family so that my son won't have any reason to tell me, 'Dad, I need something,' and I wouldn't be able to buy it for him." or "I had a dream of a private house and a farm, which I could not even dream about in the center of Israel."

Another account involved family relationships. Respondents usually sought distance and autonomy from their families of origin in order to develop their own lives and independent nuclear family with clear boundaries. "Coming to the Golan was in a way distancing ourselves from our family of origin. If we had stayed close to our family of origin we could not stay married." "We thought that living in the Golan Heights and having some distance from the family would be good for the children." "We wanted to be independent and to feel that we had achieved things due to our actions and behaviors. We felt that building this settlement would be a good chance for it. In the place they came from D. was very much dependent on his mother, and people related to me not as an individual, but as someone who belongs to her husband's family. I wanted to live in a place where we can concentrate on ourselves and for ourselves without paying the price of being part of an extended family."

The third account for moving to the Golan Heights was related to self-fulfillment, which might be perceived as an ideology. Some families thought of the move as inducing change or being part of a social mission. This was expressed in sentences such as, "We wanted to build something new and to know for ourselves that we built it." "We wanted to influence. We felt that here in the Golan we are part of a change that is being created." "We believed it was a mission to come to the Golan Heights." Political ideology was hardly mentioned as a reason for settling there. One family indicated that they decided to settle in the Golan only after the Israeli parliament accepted the Golan Heights Law, which designated the Golan as part of the State of Israel and not a conquered area. Another family described their childhood as living in the Upper Galilee under the Golan Heights, remembering especially being bombed by the Syrians. It was found that all the

couples had more than one reason for coming to settle in the Golan Heights. Most of the reasons were pragmatic and reflected changes in Israeli society as a whole.

Reactions to relocation varied and are placed along a continuum, with one end representing people who are looking for a reason to leave the Golan and the other end representing people who cannot imagine life anywhere else. This was expressed in the following examples: "Withdrawal from the Golan might be helpful to my desire to leave this place, since I feel very isolated here and I see my experience here as a failure." "We don't have an emotional involvement with the Golan Heights. We found the place as fitting our desires and characters. This is a wild place and I like it, but if there is a chance for peace I do understand that we have to take it." "When I am standing next to the Sea of Galilee and see the lights of the settlements of the Golan Heights, I just don't believe that we can give up the place. But if this is the decision it's God's decision." "When I think about it I feel such pain and sadness that I just close myself and don't think about it."

There are couples who have developed attachments to the place, with life events reinforcing these ties. "Everything here reminds me of my son (who was killed in a car accident), the house, his room, the swing that we built together—it's impossible for me to leave all this." "We are not going to commit suicide if there is withdrawal from the Golan Heights, though it will be very difficult because we are connected to the place, to every tree that we planted here."

Reasons for deciding to live in the Golan Heights were often related to the reaction to relocation in a dynamic fusion. For instance, some families settled there for ideological reasons but were willing to relocate for peace, whereas others came to the Golan for financial reasons but became attached to the land and developed ideological reasons for their resistance to leaving the Golan. We found that the attachment they developed during the years they lived there (or the lack of such attachment) was more influential in attitudes toward relocation than the original reasons for settling.

Four ways of coping with the threat of relocation were identified. First, some cope by fighting against possible relocation. Most of the attempts to resist relocation are made through political activities such as demonstrations, influencing public opinion, forming a party, and so forth. Second, some cope by ignoring the possibility of relocation: "We have so many problems between us that we have to solve them. We don't have the energy to even think about the possibility of relocation." "In our settlement we are living in a bubble; no one is thinking or speaking about the possibility of relocation." A third way of coping was accepting the fact that it might happen but postponing specific activities to adjust to future occurrences: "We believe that if God makes the decision for relocation, He will also give us the strength and the ways to adjust to the new situation." "We have had many crises since we came to the Golan Heights. We have coped with economic and social pressures successfully, so we believe in our strength and skills to cope with the demands that will arise if we are relocated. However, we don't have to think about it today; we will cross that bridge when we come to it." Finally, some coped with relocation by planning for life after relocation: "Whenever we come to Rosh-Pinna (a town nearby), I feel that some day I will live there and I am looking very carefully to see where we can buy a house." "I began to work in a company that provides agricultural services, and the company is located outside of the Golan Heights; besides, I have studied Shiatzu and I am really good at it. My wife's profession is not connected to the Golan, so I am sure that it

won't be difficult to readjust, although it will be very difficult to leave the farm in which I have invested a lot, including emotional energy. I know every tree." "Both of us are academic, so we will be able to adjust; however, I pushed my husband to look for another job because we are getting older."

It appears that those couples who would be willing to leave the Golan Heights for the chance of peace or who want to leave because of personal, financial, or social problems work toward making some plans for the future.

Among the couples who ignore the possibility of relocation, their responses when challenged vary from fighting to planning, but none of them is actually implemented: "Well, we don't think about it, but I guess my husband would like to go back to the kibbutz where he was born and raised, to his extended family." "Since everything here reminds me of my son, I guess I will fight to defend it. I won't let anyone take my house where every corner reminds me of my son. But for the time being we don't think about it."

The four ways of coping that were identified can be related to the fight-or-flight concept of coping. On one extreme of the continuum, the fight position, we can place those couples who fight against the possibility of leaving the Golan Heights and those couples who make plans in case of relocation. Although the direction of activity of these two groups is the opposite, both groups use a fighting mechanism as a way of coping. Their coping style tends to be oriented toward problem solving (Ben Zur & Zeidner, 1996), yet they do not repress emotions. However, the type of emotions expressed by those spouses who choose to fight against the possibility of leaving are different from those of the spouses who accept the possibility of such a decision and plan for it. The first group expresses feelings of anger and rage, which can be viewed as activating their energy for their political resistance activities. The other group expresses the feelings of pain and sadness that usually accompany the situation of loss.

On the other extreme of the fight-or-flight continuum, we find spouses who either ignore the possibility of relocation or accept that it might happen but postpone thinking about it and planning for the future. Although there is a difference in the way they perceive the future, these spouses share a common way of coping with it, that is, flight. It is expressed by an emotionally oriented style of coping, involving withdrawal; they isolate or repress feelings and thoughts that are connected to possible relocation. It seems that although they do nothing about possible relocation, they invest much energy in repressing it and creating a family system that ignores processes occurring in the surrounding social context. It is important to note that repressing and ignoring might be functional to some extent in coping with long-term stress situations. However, it is necessary to assess its intensity and discover whether it hurts the welfare and psychological well-being of the family.

Another issue that must be taken into account is that not all the interviewed couples related to the social system as a resource for help in coping. In case of relocation the coping becomes a family-oriented problem. This is an important finding, because social support is considered to be a significant coping resource, especially because most of the settlements in the Golan Heights have a cooperative basis, like the kibbutzim and moshavim. It is possible that due to the crisis and the changes of the entire union of the kibbutzim and moshavim in Israel the settlements cannot be viewed as resources for coping. Therefore the family remains the most important context for support. This fact

increases and extends the importance of marital quality for couples living in the Golan Heights and defines the family as the focus for any intervention that aims to enhance coping skills.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The intention of this study was to explore how the uncertainty of relocation is experienced and how it affects the marital quality and the type of coping strategies used by the population of the Golan Heights. As was found in previous studies (Burr, 1973; Burr & Klein, 1994; Lavee, et al., 1987), the stress and uncertainty directly affect marital quality among this population.

Marital quality was found to be a major factor influencing families' adaptational outcomes and level of reorganization (Burr, 1973; Lavee, et al., 1987). Adaptation and reorganization seem to be the main goals of the Golan Heights families. They have to adapt to living under uncertainty for a long period of time. Once the option was raised of withdrawing from the Golan Heights as part of the peace agreement, no one could ignore it without investing some psychological energy. Reorganization will be needed in order to adjust to the uncertainty and to cope in case of relocation. The goal of enriching marital quality during this period remains an important challenge for mental health professionals.

On the basis of the findings, the questions for therapists are the following: Who are the couples most in need of help? And what kind of help is needed? Integrating the quantitative and qualitative results indicates that there is a need for further research on different types of coping and on the relationship between stress, marital quality, and type of coping. However, the knowledge acquired in this study suggests that families who need help most are those who choose to avoid thinking about the possibility of relocation for various reasons. By comparing the qualitative analysis of the couples who choose to cope by ignoring with their quantitative analysis, we found that they had a lower level of marital quality than did those using other types of coping. However, due to the small number of couples in the subset interviewed, this can be only the basis for further study.

It seems that in case of actual relocation, the group who copes by fighting and investing most of their energy in the struggle will need help to reorganize or to overcome their disappointment in an unsuccessful fight. For the moment, they are still excited by the fight, which is part of their daily family life. Some help might also be needed in the future for the group that accepts the possibility of relocation but postpones planning for it.

It is important to note that 100% of the families studied thought that it would be useful to give special counseling to the Golan Heights population and that they are expecting the municipal authorities and the government to develop this service. Nevertheless, practical experience shows that most of the people do not like to participate in activities focused on coping with stress and relocation. It seems that interventions related to normal family processes are more attractive, probably because they facilitate the maintenance of regular daily life. This is especially true in the case of families who choose to cope by ignoring. Planning interventions that focus on normal family processes like enriching parenting or marriage might be an effective way to approach these families. The programs might deal with coping either directly by means of questions related to children living under uncertainty or future planning for family members, or indirectly by improving marital

quality and the sense of potency. Enhancing potency and marital quality may help couples feel secure when confronting threatening issues like the possibility of relocation.

However, it is important to understand that options for systemic interventions with couples and families have to be taken into consideration in welfare and mental health services. The results of this study emphasize the impoverishment of marital quality as a result of the uncertainty of relocation and the process of coping with it. Even if this is a very slow process, the threat does exist. Since the two variables that were found to have the most impact on perceived stress and on marital quality were potency and appreciation of the spouse's coping ability, the help should be focused on these two resources. It seems to us that personal and couples' empowerment should be part of the help provided. Empowerment can affect one's sense of potency and the way in which each spouse presents himself or herself to the other, thereby affecting the perception of one's ability to cope.

Because of the political situation, the period of uncertainty in the Golan Heights may last a very long time. There will be times of greater threat of relocation and times of less threat; nevertheless, the threat will not vanish until a final agreement between Israel and Syria has been signed. It is a professional as well as a moral goal to help the population in the Golan Heights to cope with the present and future processes created by the wider political system. Furthermore, because relocation has taken place in various places around the world, the knowledge acquired in the Golan Heights might be applied in other cultures and contexts. Thus, it might be interesting to study what happens in cases of desired relocations as opposed to forced relocations, or how culture variables interact with relocations. It might be useful to see this study as the basis for further development of understanding and intervention with couples in similar stressful situations.

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¹ In this paper we focus on the couple. In other articles we have done deeper and wider analysis of gender differences. See Lev (forthcoming), and Shamaï, (forthcoming).

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