Chapter 15
Children's Perspectives of Risk and Protection

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Abstract Protection of children from risk is a major concern of scholars and practitioners in many countries. However, young children's perspectives on these issues are rarely acknowledged. This chapter addresses Israeli children's perspectives on what places children at risk and what makes them feel protected. The chapter adopts a context-informed perspective that acknowledges hybridity and complexity, while trying to avoid the assumption that cultures are uniform, monolithic, and static. The chapter provides examples from the findings of a qualitative study conducted in Israel. The study included children from diverse populations who differed in their geographical place of living, their cultural background, their religious or secular style of living, and their immigration or local experiences. Children were asked to take photos and draw risk and protection and discuss their drawings and photos in small groups. The analysis is based on children's explanations regarding their choice of photos and drawings. Children's attitudes towards risk and protection indicate their deep understanding of risk factors and, above all, their sense of agency, that is, their ability to act and influence in order to prevent risk or to protect themselves from dangerous circumstances and to create situations of joy and pleasure that enhance their sense of protection. The analysis showed that both perspectives of risk and protection are shaped by the various contexts that form children's worlds. We therefore call for the inclusion of children, their agency, and sense of protection in the discourse of risk. We also highlight the importance of attention to the multiple contexts affecting children's perceptions of risk and protection.

Much attention is given in Western psychological and developmental literature to risks for children's development. However, the cross-cultural literature raises aware-

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ness to differences in risk definitions in diverse groups (Nadan et al. 2018). Children's voices are often missing from these debates. This chapter offers examples from a qualitative study conducted in Israel that aimed to document children's perspectives on what puts children at risk and what makes them feel protected. Due to its very unique human diversity, for years Israel has been a natural laboratory for cultural and contextual studies (Leshem and Roer-Strier 2003). The study included children from diverse groups. Children were asked to take photos and draw pictures of the above and discuss their drawings and photos in small groups. These discussions were analyzed. In this chapter, we discuss children's ability to affect their social worlds by actively preventing risk and promoting protection, a view that emerged from the children's perspectives.

Risk and Protection Discourse in Israel

According to the Statistical Report of the Israel National Council for the Child (2017), "Children in Israel 2017," the number of children in Israel was 2,768,700, and they comprised 33.0% of the population. The population of children in Israel is extremely diverse—about 70% are Jews, 23% Muslims, 1.5% Christians, 1.6% Druze, and 3% were not classified by religion. The aforementioned groups also present considerable diversity. There are Arabs and Jews, religious, ultra-Orthodox, secular, veteran Israelis, and immigrants from various countries living in cities, villages, and settlements, in the center, in the periphery, in the occupied territories, and in Bedouin recognized and unrecognized villages. According to the report, two out of three ultra-Orthodox children live below the poverty line, as do two out of three Arab children. In Jewish society, one in five children is defined as poor. The larger the number of children in a family, the greater the poverty of families. Fifty percent of families with more than four children and 64% of families with more than five children live below the poverty line.

According to the 2017 report, the number of children defined as being at risk was 367,440 children. According to the report, in addition to this group there are children in Israel whose legal status puts them at risk. Some 161,500 children (6% of the children of Israel) do not have full Israeli citizenship, of which (80%) are Arabs, residents of East Jerusalem. The rest are children of legal migrant workers, immigrant children and children of mixed marriages of Israeli citizens and noncitizens, especially Israeli Arabs and Palestinian residents of the occupied territories who have received a type of temporary status. A second group of 48,600 children are those without any legal status, not even residency status, and who have no rights, including the right to education, health and welfare services. These are the children of migrant workers, asylum seekers, infiltrators and those who reside in Israel after their tourist visa has expired.

Of the total number of children and youth at risk in Israel, 31% are in preschool age, 37% are elementary school age and 32% are youth (Navot et al. 2017). The increase in public awareness of the phenomenon of children at risk has led to signif-

icant development in many countries around the world and to an increase in welfare services, protection and treatment of the subject (Benvenisti and Schmidt 2010; Faber and Slutzky 2007). In Israel, the first law on youth care and supervision in 1960 recognizes that children and adolescents may be at risk in their parents' homes and that there are children in need of state protection. Alongside the recognition of providing protection for children, the Youth Law did not take into account the possibility of abuse or malice. The first law explicitly related to this in the context of children was the Penal Code in 1977, which defined the various offenses related to violence and defined the sanctions for them. The International Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1989 (Israel ratified it in 1991), presented a new conception of the child, which includes protection as well as risk. The child is perceived as an autonomous entity, carrying important and essential rights. "It is the obligation of the states to ensure the optimal development of children in all areas, and the primary responsibility for ensuring the development and protection of children rests with the parents, and the state has the duty to assist parents in this task by the means available to them" (Weisblay 2010, p. 5).

In 1991, the Law for the Prevention of Domestic Violence was enacted, and in 2000 the Harassment Law was established to protect children who are at constant risk of domestic violence and to restrict the offender. An amendment to the law required reporting to the authorities. In 2006 a special committee on children at risk was established. The Schmid Committee Report (2006) defines children at risk as "Children and adolescents who live in situations that endanger them in their family and environment, and as a result of their inability to realize their rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child in the following areas: "physical existence, health and development; family affiliation; learning and acquiring life skills; welfare and emotional health; belonging and social participation and protection against others and their own dangerous behaviors" (Schmid Committee Report 2006, p. 67).

The Schmid Committee Report (2006) found that the majority of the services for children at risk in Israel are characterized by uniformity, with very few services tailored to diverse population groups. In 2007, the first stage of implementation of the National Program for Children and Youth at Risk began. This inter-ministerial program was led by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services. The purpose of the program was to change perceptions and ways of dealing with adolescents and children at risk, by strengthening and expanding the services in the community designed for them and their cultural suitability (Sabo-Lal 2017).

Context-Informed Perspective on Risk and Protection

Risk, well-being, and protection of children are socially constructed and depend largely on the contexts in which families live. In Israel, despite more than 10 years of serious efforts for culture-competence training and cultural adaptation of intervention programs, the risk and protection field of knowledge is still largely rooted in universal developmental theories that were formulated based on empirical research and clinical

experience conducted primarily in the West (Roer-Strier & Nadan in preparation). These universal theories are also the source from which professional definitions of risk and protection in Israel are derived. The Israeli risk discourse focuses on the parents and their ability to provide for the needs of the child. However, the perspectives of parents in general and children in particular are missing from the discourse. Although much effort is invested in the Israeli risk discourse, it suffers from a deficit-oriented perspective and context-blindness.

This chapter adopts a context-informed perspective. 'Context-informed perspective' is a term based on the view that human development and behavior and the theories humans form to explain their world are influenced by the many interlocked contexts that surround them: socio-political, historical, economic, cultural, gender, etc. (e.g., Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Roer-Strier 2016). Context-informed research consists of paradigms and methodologies that are applied to address the complexity of the studied phenomenon and include the perspectives of research participants.

The context-informed perspective adopts the views of critical theories that consider structural factors, power relations, and an understanding of socio-political context. This perspective acknowledges hybridity, complexity, and the dynamics of power and change, trying to avoid viewing cultures as uniformed, monolithic, and static. We propose that although our context-informed presentation will entail examples of separate contexts, in fact, these contexts are connected and interrelated. Therefore, while we will present six diverse communities we will not compare them as different cultural groups but highlight the contextual elements apparent in the children's reports such as the political, geographical, and religious contexts.

Other conceptual frameworks that inform this chapter are the notion of resilience (Harvey 2007), strengths perspective (Saleebey 2006), and salutogenic outlook (Braun-Lewensohn and Sagy 2011). These frameworks challenge the deficit nature of the risk discourse, claiming it should take into account protective factors, sense of coherence, and agency of children as well as families and communities. The salutogenic framework, for example, stresses that perceiving events as comprehensible and manageable (known as a sense of coherence) affects dealing with stress. Children with a strong sense of coherence manage stress effectively and show fewer risk-related poor outcomes. These abilities and resources are of great significance to those who plan and adapt interventions and prevention programs across different contexts.

Children's Perspectives

Children's active participation in families, communities, and neighborhoods is motivated by their desire to be participating members of these groups (Hedges and Cullen 2012). Scholars advocate for including children's perspectives in academic, practice and policy related discourses (Ben-Arieh 2005). Researchers also claim that very young children (ages 3–6) not only hold their own views and opinions, but also have the capability to express valuable perspectives regarding their contexts and world

views (Clark and Statham 2005; Dayan and Ziv 2012). This "sociology of child-hood" conceives of children as capable and knowledgeable experts on their own lives (Clark 2004), possessing ideas, perspectives, and interests that are best learned through interactions with them (Clark and Moss 2001; Mayall 2002). This perspective represents a change from classical research with children; while children were previously regarded as dependent, incompetent, and acted upon by others, they are now perceived as social actors (Elden 2013), participants, and even co-researchers (Christensen and Prout 2002; Jones 2004; Lewis and Kellett 2004).

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), developed by the United Nations in 1989, emphasizes children's right to express their views and to influence their own lives (United Nations 1989). The CRC agenda shaped prevention and intervention programs by fostering a realization that children have a right to be consulted, heard, and to appropriately influence the services and facilities provided for them (Lansdown 1994; Woodhouse 2004).

Consequently, both Mayall (2002) and O'Kane (2000) refer to research as being with children instead of *about* or *on* children. Leonard et al. (2011) suggest the term "Child-focused research," pointing out that children have the ability to engage in the process of the construction of meaning in their own lives. Moreover, social scientists began to engage children in projects that explore their experiences, views, and understandings (e.g., Dayan 2007; Moore et al. 2008). In doing so, they were looking for and creating innovative ways to enter children's worlds (e.g., Curtis et al. 2004; Devine 2002; Lightfoot and Sloper 2002; Mulvihill et al. 2000; Shemmings 2000; Sloper and Lightfoot 2003).

Many scholars call attention to the need for the study of resilience and well-being to include the voices of children (Ben-Arieh 2002; Ben-Arieh et al. 2014). In this chapter, we aim to address both risk and protection resilience and agency as manifested in children's perspectives.

Purpose and Procedure of Current Study

Our study was conducted at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem's NEVET Green-house of Context-Informed Research and Training for Children in Need. NEVET's studies apply a context-informed approach to the study of perspectives of risk and protection among parents, children, and professionals from different communities in Israel, utilizing varied qualitative methodologies.

The main research question examined in this study was: What are the perspectives of risk and protection among young children in different neighborhoods in Israel? Data from 420 children aged 3–6 years were collected by twenty-nine graduate students in the school of Social Work and Social Welfare and the graduate program in Early Childhood Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

In the current chapter we explored findings of six MA theses that documented the perspectives of risk and protection of one hundred and sixty-seven young children among very young children in six sub-samples listed below.

In the first group, the children came from immigrant families from Ethiopia (Group A: $n = 30$, 14 boys and 17 girls aged 3–6). The Ethiopian families resided in underprivileged and segregated neighborhoods located in two cities in central Israel. The Ethiopian population is among the poorest in the Jewish sector in Israel.

The second group contained children of immigrant families from the Former Soviet Union (FSU; Group B: FSU $n = 29$, 18 boys and 11 girls aged 3–6). The group included children to both religious and secular families who live in settlements in the occupied territories.

In the third group were children from Haredi Ultra-orthodox families from Jerusalem (Group C: $n = 30$, 18 boys and 13 girls aged 3–6). Haredi families adhere to strict religious laws and live in closed communities.

The fourth group consisted of children of Native Israelis who define themselves as "national- religious" residing in a village in central Israel (Group D: $n = 29$, 10 boys and 19 girls, aged 3–6).

The fifth group included children from four settlement communities residing in the southern Samarian hills of the occupied territories, close to Palestinian villages (Group E: $n = 31$, 17 boys and 14 girls aged 3–6).

In the sixth group were eighteen children from the "Bnei Menashe" community— living in the Negev desert (Group F: $n = 18$, 9 boys and 9 girls aged 4–8). The Bnei Menashe (son of "Menasseh" are an ethnolinguistic group from north-east India. This group claimed, since the late twentieth century, that they descend from one of the Lost Tribes of Israel and have adopted the practice of Judaism. The families regard themselves as religious.

All children interviewed had been born in Israel. The interviews took place in children's preschools and local playgrounds. The researchers contacted different preschools. Letters describing the goals and procedures of the study alongside with letters of consent were sent to parents by the preschool teachers. The teachers collected the signed consents and passed them over to the researchers. Informed consent was also obtained from the children. They were asked to help the researcher understand what places children at risk and what makes them feel protected and safe. After confirming that they understood the purpose and the process of the study, they recorded their agreement on an audiotape. Children's participation was voluntary, and they could withdraw from the study at any stage of the data collection. Moreover, the researchers were instructed to ensure support and counseling for children if needed. In order to encourage the children to present their perspectives about risk and protection, three methods were used: photo elicitation, (Lal et al. 2012), drawings (Dockett et al. 2009; Fleer and Li 2016), and group discussion (Fleer and Li 2016).

The authors are four researchers from the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel, specializing in research on children's perspectives, qualitative and mixed methods research, early childhood studies, and issues of multiculturalism. The study was supported by the Israel Science Foundation (ISF) and approved by the head researcher at the Ministry of Education and by the Hebrew University.

The trained interviewers collected the data in three steps: (1) Inside their preschools and in the outdoor yard, each child was asked to take two photos: first, of 'risk' ("What in your opinion places children at risk (danger)?") and later, of 'pro-

tection' ("What protects (defends) children, what makes children feel safe, secure, or protected?") (or vice versa). Risk and protection were alternated to prevent the order-bias. In the second step, children were asked to choose the best photograph describing 'risk' and the best describing 'protection' and to explain their choice. The explanation took place as part of a group discussion with two or three other children. Presenting to other children sparked a conversation between them and served as a trigger to elaborate and extend their arguments. For the third step, children were asked to draw a picture. The drawing provided the possibility to refer to the elements of risk and protection which were imaginary or to allow those children who could not take photograph at the location to participate. Each child received crayons and a sheet of paper divided into two parts (Einarsdottir 2007) and were asked to draw on one side 'What in your opinion protects children?' and on the other side 'What in your opinion places children at risk?' Sides were alternated. Upon finishing their drawings, children were asked to explain their pictures (e.g., Tay-Lim and Lim 2013). All comments and conversations were recorded and transcribed.

The interviews analyzed for this chapter were conducted in Hebrew. The authors served as the research team and together designed the procedure, guided the interviewers, and were closely involved in data analysis (Liebenberg 2018).

The data from the six groups described above were thematically analyzed. The thematic analysis was based on identifying key codes, categories, and themes (Shkedi 2003). In addition, coding pages were developed that included quotations from the interviewees.

Findings of Children's Perspectives on Risk and Protection

Our main finding in the six groups was that children are well aware of different types of risks. They explored various causes of risk in their environments. They were able not only to explain what puts children at risk and what protects them and prevents risk, but even when risk could not be prevented, children suggested ways to avoid harm. Their statements reflect a great sense of agency, which expresses their understanding and ability to control what is happening. The sense of agency reflected in the findings was the children's ability to act and influence in order to prevent risk or protect themselves from dangerous situations, and their ability to feel joy and pleasure that enhance their sense of protection.

Behavior that Prevents Danger (Risks)

One way to avoid danger is to follow a routine that prevents the possibility of harm. For example, in the context of warm weather of Israel and especially in areas close to the desert, children talked a lot about drinking water. Drinking water in their opinion,

prevents headaches, helps in recovery from illness, and prevents death. The following quotes are some examples:

> So that their head will not hurt, that … that … there will not be very severe situations, for example, as I have a headache now, so … then it is the same thing and … and … that they drink a lot, so won't be bad and painful situations. (Group B, Boy, 5y)

> When you get sick, you drink water and then become healthy. (Group B, Girl, 5y)

> If a person lives without water, then he can die … If you live without water, then he needs at least a bit … a person can live for about two days without water … and if he goes … when you drink water, it helps your body and the body works well. (Group B, Girl, 6y)

Food is also an important part of life's routine that can prevent danger: "If you do not eat food then you will die, and food helps". (Group B, Boy, 6y). Interestingly, many references regarding health and prevention came from the FSU group (Group B). These results coincide with our studies of risk and protection among immigrant parents from FSU. The participating parents also expressed great concerns regarding children's health (Ulitsa et al. 2018). One girl suggested changing your place of residence in order to avoid injury. She said:

> Yesterday I went with my mother to take a book from the library and chose a book with large pictures that explains that there are infections which is very dangerous and unhealthy and I told my mother that maybe we should live in a village because there are no cars that make pollution which enters inside the body because it is a serious problem. (Group D, Girl, 6y)

Girls and boys frequently talked about the danger of falling, such as from a swing or ladder, and describe how to prevent it: "*When you swing, hold your hands, then you cannot fall.*" (Group C, Boy, 5.6y). "*If you do not hold the handlebars of the ladder then you just fall and if you hold them then they do not fall*" (Group D, Girl, 5y). Another way to avoid injury is to move away from the source of danger. For example, to keep away from fire, electricity or water: "*Fire … it is forbidden for children to approach … because fire is very dangerous for children*" (Group B, Girl, 5y), "*You must not touch the fire because then the hand will burn and you cannot touch the oven when mommy prepares [food] and she went for a little while…*" (Group A, Girl, 6y). "*It's dangerous that you should not put your hands in, into electricity, if … if it is a bit torn, the babies must not touch electricity because it can be electrocuted.*" (Group B, Boy, 6y) or to keep away from the sea: "*It's like … a sea … if they will not go there and they will not drown*" (Group B, Girl, 6y). Their awareness of risks and the ways to avoid them is also expressed in their attitude towards obstacles on the road. For example, crossing a road is dangerous and therefore:

> We need to be really small to be in a carriage and to cross only … only with mother … and when mother is not there, you give hand to father, father or mother. There are cars and they drive quickly, and if there is a little boy, they cannot see that he is really small, even when he is [age] three or four and five … so it is allowed to go only with mother or father, and cross the road cautiously. (Group B, Girl, 5y)

Another possible obstacle on the road is a pit. The following conversation between a boy and a girl emphasizes their own perceptions of their ability to choose whether or not they can prevent getting hurt:

Fig. 15.1 Being careful and conscious of danger (Girl, 5 years old, "national-religious" Israelis)

– "*Oh… my drawing is that a boy is keeping a hole ah … he falls into the hole and then he broke his leg. (Group B, Girl, 6y)*
– *Listen. It does not count, falling into pits is your choice… It's like you see a pit, so it's your choice whether you want to go into this pit or not … so it's not risky. They chose risk themselves. This is something that gives danger, but they give it to themselves".* (Group B, Boy, 6y)

Being careful and conscious of danger were also present in children's reports. While walking one may step on dangerous things and therefore must be careful:

"*If the child does not go to the thorns, he will not be scratched and injured in his eyes*" (Group A, Boy, 5.5y), "*If the child walks in a careful manner, he will not be injured by a stone*" (Group A, Boy, 5.5y), "*Do not walk barefoot … we can bleed.*" (Group F, Girl, 5y). "*A bag on the ground because if you can, if you step on it and do not look, you can slip and break your head.*" (Group D, Girl, 5y, see Fig. 15.1).

Children's knowledge of risk factors was also apparent as they listed actions that can cause danger. They often talk about the danger of falling and pointed out that climbing (on installations, windows, trees) is dangerous: A girl photographed a slide and said: "*that you can fall. Here…. There's blood. If you get on this side, and fall*". (Group C, Girl, 5.3y). "*What's dangerous is actually going up on trees because you can fall, and God forbid you break your head or something like that.*" (Group B, Boy, 6y).

Protection from Danger

Children were aware of the dangers surrounding them; they took responsibility and offered active ways to defend themselves against peril. Some of the groups were interviewed during wartime where missile attacks were experienced by the interviewees. Children reported they felt safe in the shelters located at the preschools.

The following example illustrates how in her own home, a girl felt responsible to protect not only herself, but also her father, from incoming missiles:

"*My father does not run to the shelter, he is not afraid, I tell him: 'Come, there's that Voice [siren], but he sits and does not get up*" (Group A, Girl, 5.11y). A similar attempt to protect her father was manifested in another girl's report: "*I tell him [the father] you have to run to the shelter.*" (Group A, Girl, 5.3y)

The house or home was also regarded as a safe place to protect oneself from bombs and other dangers: "*This is the house, and it has a strong wall … If there is an alarm that means that there are bombs outside, then you can enter the house and wait*". (Group B, Boy, 6y). The house was viewed as a safe place for protection from other risks as well. Interestingly, in most cases the children referred to the physical infrastructure of the house and much less frequently to family members who provide protection. If there is a danger of thieves or other strangers', one can hide or lock the door: "*What puts children at risk? If someone steals it [the child]… then he hides. in a safe place.*" (Group B, Girl, 6y).

> It's a house with a door, because if someone wants to do something to the children then the children can go inside and then lock the house and nothing will happen to them, just close the door and lock it. (Group F, Girl, 8y)

A girl who lives in the Negev, a desert area with formidable and feared sandstorms, referred to stormy weather and the necessity to defend herself:

> If there is wind, we can close the door and close all windows. The house protects us because if there is a strong wind then we can close everything that is in the house and the wind will not be there, we won't feel the wind because it is too strong, A strong wind is not good as it swaps away little people. (Group F, Girl, 5y, see Fig. 15.2)

Children reported that joy and pleasant experiences created a sense of elevation and protection. Boys and girls often spoke about joy and fun as protective factors. Joy was derived from various activities and friendships: "C*an I also draw something that makes children happy? so I draw a computer in which we can watch a movie, that*

Fig. 15.2 House as a protective factor (Girl, 5 years old, "Bnei Menashe" community)

makes children happy" (Group E, Boy, 4.9y). "*It's really fun, I went to a swimming pool, every day we made braids like that … and … and we went to a lot to a theater and it was very happy*" (Group B, Girl, 4y). Interestingly, activities that involve movement and sensory stimulation, such as playing on a swing or slide, cause pleasure and are also related to sense of protection: "*I like to rock hard!*" (Group C, Girl, 4.3y). A girl explained why the slide is a protective factor: "*because we can touch it, it's fun and safe*" (Group C, Girl, 5.9 y). Another girl added: "*It is a safe thing, whoever wants to slide down from it, he feels it. He feels the slide. For me it is fun. Something tickles me, it is fun me, fun to me*" (Group C, Girl, 5.9 y) for this girl the fast movement and excitement were recognized as a feeling related to safety. Another sensation that was noted by one child was a pleasant smell. He drew a flower and said: "*to pick and sniff*" (Group C, Boy, 4y).

Some of the children's explanations included symbolic or metaphorical descriptions of what causes elevation of spirit and soul. One girl drew a butterfly and explained: "*When you see the butterfly flying in the sky and feel it, it helps children feel safe. It makes you feel happy*" (Group C, Girl 4y).

Another interesting finding was that in some groups children were more present than adults in the child's sense of safety. When taking a photo, one girl asked some children to hug each other because "*when the friends hug it helps to feel safe*" (Group C, Girl 4y). "*When they play, the children, it protects them and make them happy, it is very happy*" (Group B, Girl, 4y).

Children's sense of agency is also expressed by the presentation of good deeds as a protective factor. An Ultra-Orthodox girl drew a child wearing glasses inside a house and explained: "*I drew glasses … I wanted to draw a child who makes Returning Lost Objects*". She was referring to the mitzvah (one of the commandments in Judaism) of returning a lost object to its owners, a protective act from her prospective: "*But I returned a lost object…the glasses… this is what I want to tell*" (Group C, Girl, 5.6y). Another child reported about feeling safe when doing something good: "*If you do something good to yourself, your heart feels safe*", and elsewhere noted that "*the playground [protects children], there are slides here, here you do good things here, when you do something good, you are safe.*" (Group F, Boy, 6.2y).

When reviewing the above examples our analysis shows that regardless of the contexts, the participating children demonstrated their profound understanding and knowledge of risk and protection as well as their ability to consider the means to prevent risk or maintain a sense of protection. Above all, children seemed to understand their sense of agency; that is, their ability to act and influence in order to prevent risk or protect themselves from dangerous situations and their ability to create feelings of joy and pleasure that enhance their sense of protection. The results reflect children's ability to make an impact, to influence, and have some sort of control, as well as their ability to know the world and change the world as a result of their knowledge (Giddens as cited in Oswell 2013).

In this chapter, framed by theoretical frameworks of resilience (Harvey 2007), strength perspectives, and salutogenic outlooks (Braun-Lewensohn and Sagy 2011; Saleebey 2006), we embraced the notion that risk discourse should take into account protective factors and a sense of coherence and agency of children, as well as of

families and communities. The results illuminate the diverse perspectives that can offer a better understanding of their social worlds.

Influences of Context

In light of the above communalities one should ask what did we learn concerning the influence of the diverse contexts of the six groups that differ in their geographical place of living, their cultural background, their religious or secular style of living, and their immigration or native experiences? Oswell (2013) claims that it makes no sense to frame children's agency in terms of a simple binary, having or not having agency. He argues that children's agency should refer to complex situations in the context of family, health, playgrounds, culture, and politics. Agency is not only about individual experiences, but also the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which the experiences of individuals are formed. Agency is not a fixed trait, property, or capability that resides in the individual, but an action that shifts in relation to the social context. Agentive actions gain their meaning, their consequences, and their continuity from the interplay between individuals and social context (Sairanen and Kumpulainen 2014).

Our results support this argument: Children explored and discussed the opportunities and resources in their social worlds. Those opportunities and resources were external and internal. From children's sense of agency and their understanding of risk and protective factors, we can sketch their divergent contexts that construct their social and mental worlds. Agency may take different forms in different contexts and take into account contextual and cultural differences in meaning-making as well as political and socioeconomic contexts (Vandenbroeck and Bouverne-De Bie 2006).

According to their stories, the participants of this study who live in war zones are familiar with the meaning of missiles, bombs, and shelters. A girl's report of her attempt to protect her father by making him go to a shelter is an example for the importance of considering the political context of Israel. During missile attacks, children sit in shelters in the preschool. The effect of war is felt differently in different areas of Israel and is thus related to the geographic area where it occurs.

Contexts may interact. This interaction may be related to social class, economic ability and geographical context as well as to other resources. This is apparent in the examples of going every day to a swimming pool or to the theater, or even having a computer to watch films. The ecological context is also apparent in some of the groups. Children are affected by the warm weather in Israel, which influences the risk of dehydration if you do not drink water. Both parents and children from FSU (Group B) stressed issues of health and prevention of disease. The cultural literature has related this concern to the hygiene, health, nutrition, and protection against cold weather in the FSU, where the weather is very cold and accompanied by dangers of disease. In the FSU there was constant concern for the health and safety of children in light of the high morbidity (Ispa 1995, 2002).

Another example of contextual influences on children's perceptions comes from the context of religion. Belief in a protective God and adherence to religious laws was seen by the religious participants as a protective factor (Lanzkron 2015). The Ultra-Orthodox girl who tried to return the lost glasses to the owner adheres to religious law as a pathway to promote protection and prevent risk.

Neighborhoods, cities, and rural areas present different environment conditions for risk and protection. We found that children related to flowers, butterflies, the sea, or strong winds as sources of risk or protection. Children also referred to the difference between a village and a city and were very conscious of the dangers of the city, especially cars, busy roads, and pits in the road.

Conclusions

The findings stress the importance of children's voice. They demonstrate the importance of perceiving young children not as simply beings, but more significantly, as doers (Oswell 2013). In addition to the importance of young children's right to participate in society and to express their opinions in matters that affect their lives (Rajala et al. 2016), we call for the inclusion of children in the discourse of risk and protection. This is particularly relevant for the Israeli context but may be of relevance to other countries where the discourse ignores the views of children as well. We argue for the importance of including agency and protection in risk discourse and for recognizing children's sense of agency. We highlight the importance of attention to the multiple contexts affecting the children's perceptions of risk and protection.

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