The article discusses the question:

What are the implications of a divided socio-political relationship in the form of an ongoing national conflict in which small and diverse national groups operate, whose formation and goals are not by choice, upon relationships, intergroup contact, mutual perceptions and interactions within the group?

 In other words, the study in the article examines group dynamics and experiences such as: Balance of power; mutual trust; perception of the other group’s members, perceptions of justice and fairness versus feelings of discrimination – in regular, unorganized interactions not held in a laboratory or study groups, rather but in a natural workplace context where interactions take place regularly (in which full cooperation is required in order to carry out tasks).

Additionally, the article defines and demonstrates a group of innovative studies that examine group contact in natural situations - in reality, unlike most studies that examined these relationships in optimal conditions and in organized meetings.

<Editing paragraph will appear here>

Findings

The findings of the interviews show that feelings of discrimination and perceptions of unfairness constitute a dominant part in shaping the relationships between members of the staff of different nationalities. These dimensions are expressed in several ways and will be presented in three central themes.

1) Discrimination and unfairness: Not ideal but commonplace

2) The refusal of Jewish patients to receive treatment from Arab caregivers.

3) “I’m the victim”. Who is the strongest: participant attitude about their **victimize perceptions**

1) Discrimination and unfairness: Not ideal but commonplace

The interviewees feel that work procedures and the organization do not allow for discrimination against the workers. Therefore, they note that there is a sense of equality and fairness towards all workers (Jews and Arabs alike). In practice, their examples show a different story that reveals a gap between the feeling that equality exists and the actual state of equality.

Sharoni[[1]](#footnote-1), a veteran nurse in the ward’s staff, was asked about the issue of fairness and equality among the workers in the ward. She claimed that "equality comes from above [from the hospital administration]… everyone is equal in my eyes. I care about everyone… there has to be equality… and I think that's the way it should be, there's no such thing as caring about one person and not another”.

During the interview, Roni described a conflict between two nurses in the ward (one immigrated to Israel from the former Soviet Union and the other was a Muslim Arab). She said that the Muslim worker was denounced by the shift supervisor while the worker from the former USSR received support and was not asked to follow the procedures, as the Arab workers was asked:

“[An argument] was sparked between two women, one of them a Russian Christian ... but she really loves the country (Israel), she is very objective in these things, and one is an Arab with a hijab. She watched the television and there was a shooting incident, a child was injured in Gaza by the soldiers. The Russian said, "Really, how can we, how can we do such a thing?" And the Arab woman attacked her: “Sure, you are murdering children”.

, אף אחד לא צריך להביא אותן לכאן. .... אני לא מסכימה. את לא יכולה לבוא להאשים בצורה כזו.. כל כך בטוחה בעצמך כשאת גרה וחיה במקום שאת מגנה אותו ואת תוקפת אותו ואת מכנה אותו במלים מאד לא נעימות". אמרתי לה: "תשמעי, היא (העובדת שהיגרה מברית המועצות לשעבר) לא מוכנה לוותר לך, היא רוצה להביא את זה למנהלת הסיעוד, ואני תומכת בה. "היא (העובדת המוסלמית) ביקשה לדבר ובכתה מאד. היא לא רוצה לעזוב את המחלקה .... אמרתי לה: "תשמעי, מצפים מבן אדם לקצת היגיון, גם אם יש לך דעות לא להביע אותן. ואל תתחילי להאשים צד מסוים".

There was a commotion, and the worker from the former USSR was terribly hurt and wept. The next day I spoke to the lady (the Arab worker)... You know, she knows how to turn the whole thing around, all the information, to blame everyone else. I told her: “Everyone works together here. I do not want politics or political opinions.” Besides, “You tell this woman that she has no connection to Judaism and is so loyal to the place that she appreciates what she didn’t have in Russia and she says thank God about what she has here… So she (the Muslim worker) said, “I did not mean it”. I said, “Keep your opinions to yourself, no one should bring them here... I don’t agree. You can’t blame in such a way... so sure of yourself when you live in a place where you condemn him and attack him and you call him very unpleasant words. I told her “Listen, she (the worker who immigrated from the former Soviet Union), wants to raise the issue with the nursing director, and I support her.” She (the Muslim worker) wanted to talk and wept a lot, she did not want to leave the ward. I told her, “listen, you expect a person to have some sense, even if you have opinions do not express them. And do not start accusing one side”.

Mohammed, a knowledgeable and experienced nurse, reinforces the gap in perception regarding inequality between Jews and Arabs in the hospital. Muhammad angrily describes the unfair situation vis-à-vis places of worship for Jews and Muslims in the hospital. The hospital has a synagogue where Jews can pray. Muslims, on the other hand, have no place to pray.

“They did renovations next to the emergency room… **they left the synagogue in the place**, they did not make another room for the Muslims to pray. Jesus, where do we live? We live in a democratic state, at least, that's what they call it. So consider the other side.

“If consideration was given to culture, at least they would build something, a small room for the Muslim population to pray in instead of going to pray on the grass outside the hospital, and finding a corner in each ward to pray in. And when there’s a free space for two minutes, to bring out a small carpet and pray… There’s no shortage of rooms. No shortage. Even a shed [would suffice], they don’t need a room. They need a shed and a sign which way is Mecca so that they’ll sit facing that way. But that too doesn’t exist.”

Muhammad raised another issue regarding the inequality between Jews and Arabs. He said that the observance of the customs of different religions is not the same and this leads to conflicts and lack of consideration among the workers:

“During my Ramadhan no one takes any account of me… You (the Jews) come here, eat, drink, it doesn’t bother anyone that I’m fasting… [But] on Passover I cannot put a pita in my mouth, which is my main staple, and I don’t eat other things. This is my food. My food is based on bread, so they (the Jews) forbid me to bring bread into the workplace for a week because it is your holiday… when you force, me as a Jew, you are the majority here, not to eat bread during Passover, and you eat whenever you want during Ramadan when I fast for a month eat… it creates conflicts, he does not consider me on his holiday, I will not consider him on his holiday.

2. Refusal of Jewish patients to receive treatment from Arab medical workers

The first theme described relates to the gap between the perception of equality and the workers’ fairness and their actual behavior. Their story shows that perception and behavior are different and even contradictory. The interviewees’ story highlighted another aspect of the phenomenon of discrimination. This aspect, described only by the Jewish interviewees, referred to the situation in which caregiver’s (nurse/physician) Arab affiliation triggers racism which is expressed in a reluctance to receive medical treatment from staff members of this origin.

Ruth and Dafna illustrate the unwillingness of Jewish patients to receive treatment from doctors of Arab origin:

Ruth referred to the situation in which patients protested that an Arab doctor would take care of them: “when an Arab doctor arrived, there were some unpleasant responses, there were some who told me, “What happened, they no longer have work for themselves? Why do we have to accept an Arab?” I told them: “She is a good doctor, she is a certified doctor, she is a doctor who has a distinction certificate.” Why were they anti? Because of the religious thing, the racist thing, like because she was an Arab, because they did not know her.

Dafna referred to another case in which she suggested to her colleague that an Arab doctor at the hospital examine her. The colleague, whose brother was killed in a military operation, refused to receive treatment from the doctor in light of his background.

“A nurse in one of the wards, her brother was killed, doesn’t matter which war… she needed to be checked by a neurologist, and the neurologist was an Arab ... So I suggested to her, I said to her, “Doctor X [of Arab origin] is ready to check you”, she told me, “No, I can’t accept that, I'm not prepared for an Arab doctor to examine me.” It was close to an incident in which a family member, her brother, died. So it does affect [things].”

The interviewees’ stories show that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict highlights and intensifies fear of, and recoiling from, the other group to the point of refusing to receive treatment from people associated with it, even if the therapist is considered a senior, leading physician in their field.

3. “Strong and vulnerable” / “I am the victim”. **Who is the strongest: participant attitude about their victimize** perceptions

Israel is defined as a Jewish state with a majority of Jews living alongside an Arab minority. In contrast to the country’s overall situation, in medical teams, Jews do not always constitute a numerical majority, but they still feel and behave in the team as befits a dominant majority. The third theme relates to another aspect of discrimination and unfairness, expressed in a sense of victimhood. Victimhood is described by interviewees from both national groups. Each group views itself as a victim in a different way. Jewish workers refer to feelings of fear of claims of racism. According to them, they are expected to give up on various issues at work, in order to maintain proper working relations. The concession required of them leads to resentment, a sense of deprivation and frustration. The Arab minority group, on the other hand, feels discriminated against because of their affiliation with this group. Therefore, they are unable **to act like a group of the Jewish majority**, and here too, it creates frustration and unfairness that mars the team dynamic. In both cases, this element creates tension and conflicts between the different groups within the medical team.

Fatima, a Muslim nurse, explains why Jews and Arabs in the ward cannot behave in the same way: “There are some… you know, some have a stronger personality, so they do speak out. And then they solve the problems. “You will not speak with us like this, work is work, friends are friends, but you cannot treat me like this” (Characterises Jews) Why? They’re not scared, like, I'll tell you one situation. I have one member of the team that is a Sabra [native] Jew. She is not afraid, she called the chief nurse a “liar”. I couldn’t do that, for example, as an Arab, it's hard for me to go tell her because I know my head would roll tomorrow.

In contrast, Shira, a Jewish nurse, presents a completely different picture. For her, there is a tendency to accuse Jewish workers of racism against Arab workers. Therefore, she and her Jewish friends were frequently forced to give up on things, and thereby avoid such accusations. The following quote illustrates these arguments:

“For a Muslim worker… because she is too (the shift supervisor is a Muslim worker), who she sees shirking from work and she is angry, then she is freely angry. However, I can’t allow myself to be angry with him. I know that he’ll immediately say that it’s discrimination, “that you're angry with me because...” I have to be careful with everyone… “It is expected that we as Jews will accept all of them, as they are. That we are like hosts. That’s how I feel... that we seem to have all the rights and we are sort of accepting them. This is very general. After all, they feel discriminated against. Not all of them, it’s like that generally, in the Jewish state, in a Jewish hospital. And we seem to need to fold somewhere.

Interviewer: Do you feel that you're folding?

A. Nothing terrible. Yeah, a little bit, a little… They feel that they are being discriminated against and we have to support the fact that they are being discriminated against. Especially my supervisor, I feel that she is very afraid that they will say that they are being discriminated against. If, for example, there are differences of opinion during a shift, there is a preference to take the Arabs’ side… It's a little maddening... once more they get their holidays, let’s say Ramadan, sometimes they take the whole month. And like this year it was in August, and together with Rosh Hashanah, we had a lot of bickering. Yes, we worked on the holiday. They did not come on their holiday. None of them came on their holiday. And we do come... Our supervisor also does not expect them to come and we are expected to come. Even sometimes on a holiday. It's really annoying. But I still do not hurl accusations at anyone… I don’t blame them for it. What do they demand? They just get backup, so why not take it. I would also take…

Iris reinforces Shira's feelings and says, “Below the surface, I think, the Arabs have slight feelings of inferiority, and on this basis they often push and say," I deserve it because I come from a place that you prefer less, so give it me.” They often take advantage of the fact that they are Arabs in order to advance their interests, to say, “Oh, you do not give me because I'm an Arab,” so they want to prove to him, “Here, we are giving you [what you want]”.

Ruth felt that the Arab team members felt that they were being discriminated against even when it had no basis in reality. “From my point of view… once there was a really funny scene even with discrimination. Once we had a parking lot close to the hospital… And I came a minute before someone I work with who is a Christian (Arab). I was allowed to enter and she was not allowed to enter because there was no room. The whole shift, and I'm in a pretty good relationship with her, I kept on hearing that did not they let her in because she is an Arab woman, that's why they did not let her put the car in."

The story told in this theme illustrates the complexity of the concept of power. The majority group (of Jewish workers) felt that belonging to this group was a weak point for them. They are expected to give up various things to the minority group during the course of their work in order to avoid slander about alleged discrimination. They portray themselves as victims of a situation that they feel discriminates against them. Workers who are part of the Arab minority group also see themselves as victims. They claim that they do not have rights equal to those enjoyed by the majority group and are unable to speak as freely as the group of Jewish workers. The two groups do not feel comfortable in this situation and perceive the other side as being in a position of strength and having a stronger position in the workplace.

1. Fictional name [↑](#footnote-ref-1)