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## Harmonizing Hearts with Many Voices – Analysis of Koolulam, a Mass-Singing Phenomenon, and its Contribution to Resiliency

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### Abstract

Koolulam is a social musical initiative launched in 2017. It is a special kind of mass-singing. The aim of Koolulam is to strengthen the societal fabric through singing in large groups. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study that examines this social musical phenomenon. The first aim of the present study is to examine the profile of the people who attend Koolulam events and their motivation. The second aim is to examine whether the social, emotional and communal characteristics of Koolulam events contain elements that may help strengthen the resilience of individuals in the group. The data were collected through two possible quantitative questionnaires, one of which included two open-ended questions, which were analyzed qualitatively. There were 914 participants, 334 of which completed the questionnaire that contained the open-ended questions. The findings indicate that Koolulam events are perceived as a phenomenon different from other multi-participant events. The shared singing experience at these events has social, emotional, and communal characteristics. This is the only study to our knowledge done on Koolulam events. Findings suggest that singing in a large group in the framework of a Koolulam event has social-communal and emotional characteristics that may strengthen the resilience of the people who attend.

**Keywords:** *Koolulam, mass-singing, public singing, mental resilience, group*

### Introduction

Various studies have indicated that singing in large groups, such as mass-singing and public sing-alongs, has positive outcomes for individuals in the group. It has the capability to release repressed emotions, promote self-expression, increase group cohesion and contribute to mental wellbeing (Camlin et al, 2020; Clift & Camic, 2016; Dingle & Stewart, 2018; Fancourt et al., 2016; Williams et al., 2018). The present study focuses on a new musical phenomenon, Koolulam, which is a mass singing event

that has similar characteristics to a public sing-along, yet contains different characteristics. The word Koolulam is a composite of two Hebrew words: voice (kol) and everyone (koolam). The coined name Koolulam also hints to the Middle Eastern musical technique of ululation, high-pitched undulating sounds that are produced through rapid tongue movements called tongue trills and are typically used by Middle Eastern women to express happiness (Shamash, 2014). In a Koolulam event, people gather to sing together one song in different voice parts. However, the broader objective of Koolulam is to bring together people from all various parts of society and use the power of musical harmony to create harmony in society.

The purpose of the current study is to examine the profile of people who attend Koolulam events and their motives for participating. In addition, we examine whether the socio-communal and emotional characteristics of joint singing in the Koolulam events contain elements that may strengthen resilience of individuals within the group.

## Mass-Singing

Mass-singing is when a large group of people gather to sing together. Throughout history, mass-singing has been conducted by professional choirs with lay people joining the singing. It was used for various purposes, notably for creating social and political change (Clift & Camic, 2016; Kutschke & Norton, 2013; Prescott, 2015; Smith et al., 2017; Wong, 1984). For example, in 1956, 20,000 South African women protested against the regime and expressed their desire for equality through mass-singing (Rojas & Michie, 2013). In 1969, a mass-singing event, conducted by professional choirs, was held in Japan outside a peace conference discussing the Vietnam War to protest against that war (Kutschke & Norton, 2013). In 1988, a silent protest movement arose in Latvia, calling for Latvia's independence. This movement used professional choirs to organize mass-singing events and was instrumental in Latvia's eventual independence (Smidchens, 2014).

Mass song (Gavrilyuk, 2018) was a popular Soviet music genre. The mass songs were written by professional and amateur composers for chorus singing and were intended for the broad masses of the Soviet people. From the 1920s to the 1950s, the term "mass song" was applied to most of the songs written by Soviet composers. However, with the establishment of the term "Soviet song," the term "mass song" was restricted to the genre of chorus songs without accompaniment and with lyrics based on social-political themes, typically performed during various Soviet gatherings such as rallies, demonstrations, and meetings (Gavrilyuk 2018).

Mass-singing creates a sense of unity among people. In Japan, schools customarily sing the anthem in unison to showcase the country's unity. Similarly, at large sports events in the United States, it is customary to sing the national anthem which symbolizes the desire to create unity among all people (Prescott, 2015). During World War II, mass-singing was considered an activity that raised morale and increased the sense of unity among participants (Smith, 2009). In addition, mass-singing is intended to create a sense of personal and community wellbeing (Camlin et al., 2020; Clift & Camic, 2016). Since 2000, 58 singing groups, mostly choirs, have been formed in the UK to create a sense of personal and community wellbeing among the British population (Clift & Camic, 2016). Finally, mass-singing has also been used as a means of government propaganda. For example, mass-singing in China started in the 19th century by Protestant missionaries for propaganda purposes (Smith et al., 2017; Wong, 1984), and in 1939, a choir of 700 singers in China sang patriotic songs to glorify patriotism (Luo, 2014).

## Public Sing-Alongs

Public singing is an informal gathering of a group of people for the purpose of singing together. The group can be small in number, which makes it different from mass-singing. Public singing is not a meticulously organized event. It is a popular event, in which the participants are not required to sing and usually do not have a musi-

cal training background, and the singing is in unison without voice parts. Most of the participants come from a similar cultural background, and the songs for the event are from their culture (Broughton et al., 1999; Eliram, 2006). Sometimes, the song lyrics for such events are printed for distribution or projected on a screen.

Public sing-alongs were commonplace in Europe, where people sang together in the family circle, in educational institutions, at religious events, and in military camps (Shahar, 2016). Public sing-alongs were held at various gatherings and functions, at student and sports associations, in wine houses and beer cellars, at banquets, celebrations and youth movements (Shahar, 2016). From 1925–1933, millions of Americans participated in public sing-alongs that took place in movie theaters. They sang old and new songs (Morgen-Ellis, 2018) while the lyrics were projected on slides. It was a community experience and a way to attract many customers to the cinema (Barton & Trezise, 2019).

During the initial COVID-19 outbreak in Europe, Italy was especially hit hard. Many residents from Napoli to Toscana initiated public singing from their balconies to express their feeling of shared destiny in fighting the pandemic. One of the many video clips posted on Twitter during the pandemic shows a vacant street during night hours while in the background, men and women are heard singing “when Sienna sleeps,” a popular folksong. Accompanying the video clip was the following comment: “People from my hometown to Sienna are singing from their houses to warm their hearts during lockdown” (Ynet, 2020, March 14).

Public singing is also popular in football (soccer) stadiums around the world. Fans feel that by singing together, they can boost the confidence of the players and change the outcome of the game. These songs are well known and popular, as they have been circulating among fans for many years. They have catchy tunes and rhymes, and they are sung very loudly to encourage the team (Marra & Tretta, 2019).

Pubs and bars in Ireland, Scotland, the US and in many other countries, are another platform for people to gather and sing folksongs together. Depending on the country’s culture, the songs are usually accompanied by accordions, guitars, bagpipes, banjos or other instruments, and the words are sometimes printed in booklets and distributed among the participants. The purpose of this singing is to lift the spirits and experience the magic in the act of singing together (Broughton et al., 1999; Kearns, 1998; Washington Revels, 2020).

Public sing-along events had been a Jewish tradition even before the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 (Eliram, 2006). In preparation for the immigration from Europe to the Land of Israel, members of youth movements would gather and sing songs translated into Hebrew, songs of longing for the Land of Israel and songs they grew up with in their parents’ home (Shahar, 2016). This social activity continued after the state of Israel was established as well, when people would gather in *kibbutzim* (collective farms) at the end of a workday and sing together (Marzel, 2016). In 1980, public sing-alongs have become popular in cities as well (Eliram, 2006). However, while in cities, public sing-alongs were usually led by a conductor, in the *kibbutzim*, a conductor was not needed, as such events were organized spontaneously (Camlin et al., 2020; Eliram, 2006; Marzel, 2016; Shahar, 2016). Public sing-alongs of Israeli songs became one of the hallmarks of Israeli society, including Israeli communities living abroad (Marzel, 2016.). Composers would promote their songs at public gatherings and would sing their songs together with the audience. They taught their new songs by repeating the lines of the song with the audience and using songbooks. With the development of mass media, public sing-alongs ceased to be an important tool for disseminating songs, but remained part of the Israeli national experience (Eliram, 2006; Marzel, 2016; Shahar, 2016).

In recent years, new models of public sing-alongs have developed in Israel, attracting younger crowds. One such model is called “singing and drinking,” in which young adults get together to sing, drink beer and dance. The event is usually held outdoors and the singing is usually comprised of contemporary songs, rock songs and Middle-Eastern songs (Eliram, 2006; Shahar, 2016). Another model is called “Candle Youth,”

in which young adults (18+) gather in a circle at city plazas and sing Memorial Day songs. Such events usually occur spontaneously after traumatic events such as terrorist attacks and wars. These events serve as outlets to pain and platforms for mutual support (Eliram, 2006).

The present study focuses on a new musical phenomenon called "Koolulam," a new model of mass-singing that was developed in Israel and has characteristics that are similar to public sing-alongs

## Koolulam

Koolulam is a social musical enterprise that started in Israel in 2017 and its events are held in Israel and around the world (Koolulam, 2021, September, 14; July, 20). It is a type of mass-singing whose purpose is to strengthen society and the connections among individuals through joint singing in large groups. The initiators of Koolulam aspired to show that just as different parts who sing the same song enrich the song, so too, the diverse voices in society enrich society, not divide it (Keshner, 2018, December, 4; Koolulam, 2021, September, 14; Shimshowiz, 2018). Or Taicher, the originator of the idea of Koolulam, found inspiration for this new model from a video that was recorded at an event at the Western Wall (one of the most sacred places for the Jewish people). The video showed over 50,000 Jews praying and singing together the liturgical song "We have sinned before you," a song that is sung before and during the Jewish High Holidays. That video made Taicher wonder about the possible effect of a social prayer sung together by thousands of people, one person to another (Sion, 2018)

Every year, Koolulam organizes dozens of events that attract thousands of people, many of whom have no musical background (Kraft, 2019; Shimshowiz, 2018). At each event, a conductor teaches one song in different parts to create a joint musical composition. The conductor divides the audience into groups, teaches the audience the roles of the different parts, and then all the participants perform the song together. Towards the end of the event, the singing is filmed, and a few days later, the video is uploaded onto social media and YouTube, allowing the participants to relive the experience if they choose to do so.

The songs that are selected for Koolulam events are familiar songs that undergo new vocal and instrumental arrangements. The content of the selected songs express strength, hope and empowerment, and help convey a message of unity. Examples of sentences in songs used are "One love, one heart! Let's get together and feel all right," (Marley, 1984)<sup>1</sup>. "I have love and it will arise and branch out, I have love and it will triumph," (Levi, 1995)<sup>2</sup> and "The wheels turn everyone, and eventually everybody comes out strong" (Tal, 2010).<sup>3</sup>

Koolulam events are similar in their characteristics to public sing-alongs and mass-singing. They all focus on the singing, that is, all the participants sing together at the same time, thus facilitating the creation of unity and a common denominator among them (Eliram, 2006; Marzel, 2016; Shahar, 2016). However, there are differences between Koolulam, public sing-alongs and mass-singing. In public sing-alongs, a variety of songs are sung during the event, while in Koolulam, only one song is sung. In public sing-along there is no singing in different voice parts.

In Koolulam events, the singing is filmed and uploaded onto social media and YouTube to allow participants to revisit the event and relive the experience. In other types of sing-along events, there is no vested interest to film the occasion.

Public sing-alongs and Koolulam also differ in their purpose. The primary purpose of public sing-alongs in Israel is to familiarize the public with songs of the Land of Israel and to create a connection and belonging to the country and the culture. Therefore, in Israel all the songs are in Hebrew and around the world the songs are from the local culture.

In contrast, the main purpose of the Koolulam project is to create social change, so the chosen songs at Koolulam events are not exclusively in Hebrew and all the words of the songs contain hope and strength (Kraft, 2019; Facebook Koolulam 2021, Septem-

ber, 14; Wikipedia Koolulamm 2021, July, 20). In public sing-alongs the group doesn't have to be big, and the events sometimes are spontaneous.

The social change that Koolulam is striving for is bringing more harmony among different sectors of the Israeli society by promoting tolerance and acceptance of others. In the same way that harmonizing a song with different voice parts enriches the song, "harmonizing" different societal sectors and religions will enrich the society. For example, at an event held in Haifa in 2018, 3,000 people came to sing the song "One day" of Matisyahu (2008) in three languages, Hebrew, Arabic and English. This was done to help create tolerance and a connection and better relations between Jews, Muslims and Christians in Israel (Shimshowiz, 2018).

Another example refers to an event that took place in the Tower of David in Jerusalem in 2018, where 800 Jews, Arabs and Christians gathered to sing Bob Marley's (1984) song "One Love" to form connections between the religions, and to help create tolerance and empathy towards each other. The event took place on the last evening of the Ramadan (Shimshowiz, 2018).

Another event took place ahead of Independence Day in Israel in 2018 with the song "On All These" (Shemer, 1981) ("On the honey and on the sting on the bitter and the sweet ... Keep all of these, my good Lord"), a song of thanksgiving for what we have. The event was attended by 11,000 people from all walks of Jewish society, with the goal of connecting the different parts, and creating empathy, tolerance, and unity (Mariv Online, 2018, April 16). In the fall of 2018, an event was held in Jerusalem for children and adults with special needs and their families. The purpose of the event was to show that people with special needs also have a part and role in the community. They have a voice, and it is important that they make it heard. The song they performed was "A great light" (Keshet, 2018).

## The Connection Between Singing in a Large Group and Resilience

Singing songs involves the human body, breathing, rhythm, melody, lyrics, harmony and imagination (Austin, 2008; Clark & Tamplin, 2016; Sokolov, 1987). The human body is the main tool for producing sound while breathing is the life force that nourishes the spiritual fire of the musical self (Baker & Uhlig, 2011; Newham, 1999, 1993; Sokolov, 1987). Inhaling means bringing in, evolving and receiving from the outside. Exhaling means releasing and emptying oneself. Rhythm reflects inner strength and impulse. Melody conveys a current that can liberate blocked emotions and release trapped energy. Harmony supports, reflects, processes musical emotions (Austin, 2008a; Newham, 1999) and helps tie together polarities and conflicts expressed in voices (Newham, 1999). Singing brings the individual into contact with the "self" and connects all the inner forces (Austin 2008a; Baker & Uhlig, 2011; De Backer & Sutton, 2014; Wiess, 2013; Wiess & Ben-Simon, 2020). Furthermore, singing in a large group has additional benefits. It increases group cohesion and contributes to one's mental wellbeing (Camlin et al., 2020; Clift & Camic, 2016; Dingle & Stewart, 2018; Fancourt et al., 2016; Williams et al., 2018). Singing songs as a group has the ability to generate an immediate positive emotional experience; evoke feelings of pleasure, encouragement, belonging, insight; foster empathy with the other; and generate cooperation and relief of emotional and mental stress (Baker & Uhlig, 2011; Camlin et al., 2020; De Backer & Sutton, 2014; Hibben, 1992; Wiess & Bensimon, 2020).

The population in Israel experiences security threats and terrorist attacks on a daily basis. Israelis live in a constant state of stress in addition to normal daily struggles and seek ways to strengthen personal resilience.

There are all kinds of definitions to resilience; however, no consensus on an operational definition exists (Herman, Stewart, Diaz-Granados, 2011). Resilience is considered to be a positive multidimensional umbrella term that describes a range of processes and theories (Bonanno et al., 2015; Nuttman-Shwartz & Green, 2021). An outcome-based definition of resilience sees positive adaptation post-adversity as being central (Vella & Pai, 2019). This orientation regards resilience as a functional or behav-

ioral outcome that can help individuals overcome and recover from a stressful event (Masten, 2001). Stratta et al. (2015) describe resilience as a person's ability to cope with stressful situations and adapt to new circumstances that are created as a result of these situations. This description is one that we relate to. Resilience provides opportunities for individuals to cope with stress through personal skills, social skills, peer support, relational resources (i.e., physical and psychological support from caregivers), and contextual resources (i.e., sense of belonging, educational adhesion, and spirituality (Liebenberg et al., 2012). In order to strengthen resilience, it is important to be connected to others and to develop individual characteristics such as inner strength, coping skills, and optimism (Corzine et al., 2017; Nuttman-Shwartz & Green, 2021). When viewed through an ecological lens, resilience becomes a series of interactions on multiple levels (i.e., individual, family, and community) wherein a person is influenced by and influences their environment.

People with resilience are characterized as having a sense of control over events happening to them, having a sense of involvement and purpose in their daily lives, and having the ability to be flexible and adapt to unexpected changes (Liebenberg & Moore, 2018; Narayanan & Betts, 2014). Various researchers have examined both group and individual resources that create resilience in individuals and enable them to deal effectively with stressful situations. Social qualities such as reciprocity and interpersonal interactions were found to help develop resilience (Braun-Lewenson et al., 2010). Kaplan (2014) found that feelings such as personal security, social support and optimism increase resilience. They further found that faith combined with social cohesion are also resilience factors.

The multidimensional resilience model (Basic PH) was developed by Lahad and Ayalon (Lahad, 1997; Lahad et al., 2013). It claims that every individual has the capability to cope with stressful situations and to strengthen resilience, and that each individual's coping style can be identified. Another way to strengthen resilience is to have social and family support, a sense of belonging and to communicate with others (Lahad, 1997; Lahad et al., 2013).

In light of the literature review, it can be said that group singing such as Koolulam has the potential to evoke positive feelings in participants, encourage cohesion and social support, and increase social interactions (Dingle et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2018), all of which may lead to increased resilience (Lahad et al., 2013). The literature review also shows that Koolulam group singing events, although similar in nature to public sing-alongs and mass-singing events, have characteristics that set them apart. To the best of the authors' knowledge, the present study is the first study to examine Koolulam. The aim of the present study is twofold. Its first aim is to examine the profile of the people who attend Koolulam events and what motivates them to participate. The second aim of this study is to examine whether the social, emotional and communal characteristics of large group singing in the framework of a Koolulam event contain elements that may help strengthen the resilience of the individuals in the group.

## Methods

### Study Participants

The study involved 914 participants of various ages, predominantly women (86%) and mostly academically educated, 61%. Fifty-eight percent of the participants attended a single Koolulam event while 42% attended two events or more. Thirty-six percent of the participants attended an event that took place two weeks before they received the research questionnaire, while 64% attended an event that took place more than half a year before they received the research questionnaire. Of the individuals who received the research questionnaire, only those who attended at least one Koolulam event filled it out. A full list of the background variables is given in Table 1.

## Research Tools

The research tools included an online questionnaire that contained:

1. Demographic questions about the participants such as age, gender, place of residence, education, musical background, connection to singing, etc. The purpose of these questions was to characterize the profile of Koolulam participants.
2. Questions concerning the social-communal characteristics of the event. For example: "With whom did you come to the event?" and "Who did you notice during the event?"
3. Questions that addressed feelings and thoughts about the event. For example, "During the event, I felt ... ", "When I left the event, I felt ... " The possible answers for these questions, were among others: "A sense of belonging" and "calm and peaceful," feelings that connected in the literature to the individual's resilience (Liebenberg et al., 2012; Nuttman-Shwartz & Green, 2021).

The research questionnaire was split in two to shorten its length and encourage participants to cooperate. The demographic questions (questions 1–13) were identical in both questionnaires. Each questionnaire included eight additional closed-ended questions (varying between the versions), which were developed by the researchers based on literature relating to mass-singing and resilience (e.g., Camlin et al., 2020; Clift & Camic, 2016; Lahad et al., 2013). Also, Questionnaire Two included two additional open-ended questions: 1) How is the Koolulam experience similar to your experience at other mass gatherings that you have attended? and 2) How is the Koolulam experience different from your experience at other mass gatherings that you have attended? Questionnaire One was answered by 580 participants and Questionnaire Two was answered by 334 participants.

The two data sets were combined using merge data analysis. Both questionnaires were sent to all participants with the instruction to fill out only one questionnaire. The participants chose what questionnaire to answer. The purpose of the open-ended questions was to better understand the quantitative findings and as a result, gain deeper insights regarding the Koolulam experience.

## Research Process

This study was based on convenience sampling. A Google Forms questionnaire was created and distributed through various online platforms. In August–September of 2019, the Koolulam management posted the questionnaire in their online newsletter and their Instagram. They also sent the questionnaire to a Koolulam mailing list of people who have, at some point, shown interest in the event. In addition, the questionnaire was posted on WhatsApp groups whose members the researchers knew to have participated in Koolulam events. Data analysis began after filled-in questionnaires stopped arriving, about three weeks following the beginning of distribution. The study was approved by the David Yellin College review board; no approval number was provided. Participation was voluntary. Completing the survey implied consent to participate in the research. In the introduction to the surveys, anonymity was promised.

## Data Analysis

The study employed a survey research design, which includes closed-ended questions, with the exception of two open-ended questions. The closed-ended questions were analyzed through descriptive statistical analysis relevant to each research question. The open-ended questions were analyzed through categorical content analysis that is designed to extract themes for inductive inference regarding participants' experiences (Prosser, 2000).

**Table 1**  
Background Variable Distribution of Participants in Koolulam Events (N = 914).

Variable	Values	Participants	%
Gender	Women	786	86
	Men	128	14
Age	30-18	162	17.7
	40-31	157	17.2
	50-41	247	27
	60-51	229	25
	61+	118	12.9
Profession	Private Sector (e.g., Lawyer, Accountant)	409	44.7
	Education	160	17.5
	Public sector	170	18.6
	Student	46	4.9
	Soldier	31	3.4
Education	Academic degree	666	72.8
	Professional license	99	10.8
	Matriculation diploma	115	12.6
	None	28	3.1
Musical background	No musical background	492	53.8
	Music hobbyist	298	32.6
	Works in a profession tangential to music	25	2.7
	Musician	31	3.4
Connection to singing	Singing amateur	527	57.7
	No connection to music	261	28.5
	Singer	17	1.9

## Researchers' Stance

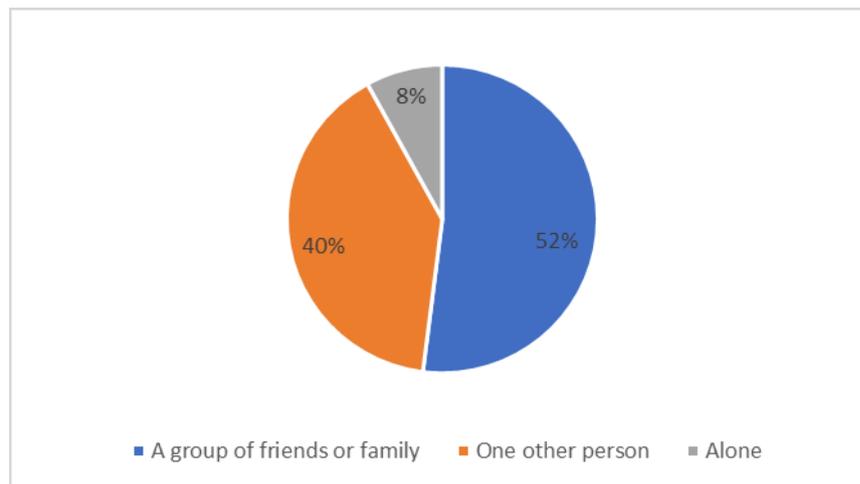
The idea to examine Koolulam as a distinct phenomenon arose from the researchers' personal and professional background. Both researchers are Israeli Jews who are closely familiar with the intense conflicts that exist among various groups in Israeli society, for example, between political right and left, religious and secular Jews, and among the various religious groups residing in Israel: Muslims, Jews and Christians. In addition, one of the researchers is a music therapist who works with music therapy groups and uses songs that convey strength and resilience to bond the group while empowering her clients.

## Results

### Profile of People Attending Koolulam Events

The following is the frequency distribution of background variables:

The profile of the participants in the Koolulam events (Table 1) consisted mainly of women, mostly between the ages of 41 and 60 years old (52%). However, there was a significant percentage of participants aged 40 and under (35%). Most participants had an academic degree (72%), many worked in the private sector (45%) and about 19% work in the public sector (e.g., civil service employees, such as policemen and fire-



**Figure 1**

Distribution of Participants' Responses Regarding the People With Whom They Attended the Event (n = 580).

fighters). It should be noted that only a small percentage of participants had a formal musical background. Most participants viewed music and singing as a hobby.

### The Reasons for Attending a Koolulam Event

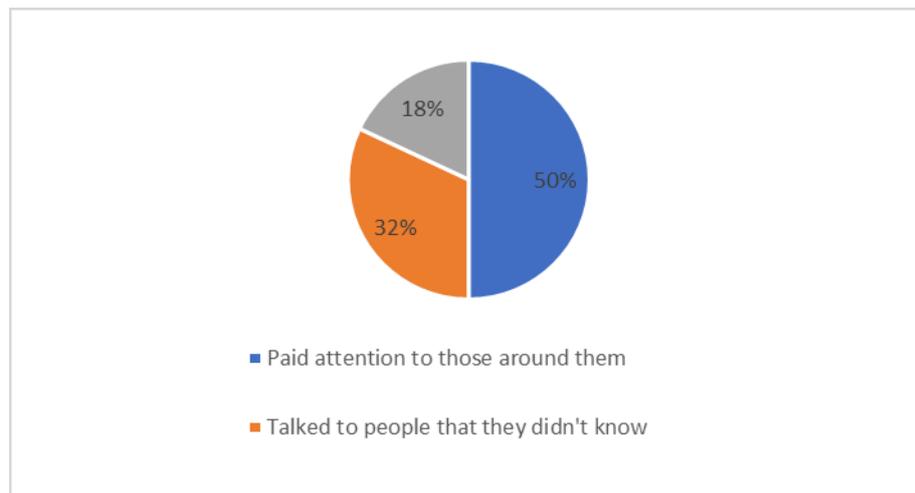
About 50% of the participants stated that they attended the event because they wanted to be part of a multiparticipant event. However, it should be noted that when participants were asked whether Koolulam events are comparable to other multi-participant events, like sports events or music festivals, about 44% claimed that they are not and 38% stated that Koolulam events were completely different from other multi-participant events. In other words, the vast majority of the participants view Koolulam events as a phenomenon that is different from other musical events. One participant stated: "This is not a performance of a famous singer but rather, the focus is on the audience." Another motive for attending the event is the thrill of singing in a large group. One of the participants described it as follows: "It's the power of being part of a crowd that is invested in the same music and is excited about it." Additionally, the qualitative content analysis shows that some attendees came for the purpose of bonding together over a common social goal, as one participant said: "We are a group of people who get together to convey a common idea, experience things together and not stay passively at home," and another participant said: "It is a positive experience shared by many different people with differing opinions and beliefs." Additionally, some participants mentioned the possible contribution of Koolulam to creating social change: "I felt part of a large group and that contributed to conveying a message of change."

### Social-Communal and Emotional Characteristics of Koolulam and Their Possible Contribution to Participants' Resilience

This section will discuss the social-communal and emotional characteristics of Koolulam events and their possible link to the participants' resilience.

#### More in groups, less alone – The people with whom the participants came to the event

An analysis of the participants' responses shows that more participants came to the event with a group of friends or family rather than with only one other person. Only a minority came alone (Figure 1).



**Figure 2**  
Attention to Surroundings During the Koolulam Event (n = 580).

### Participants' Awareness of Their Surroundings

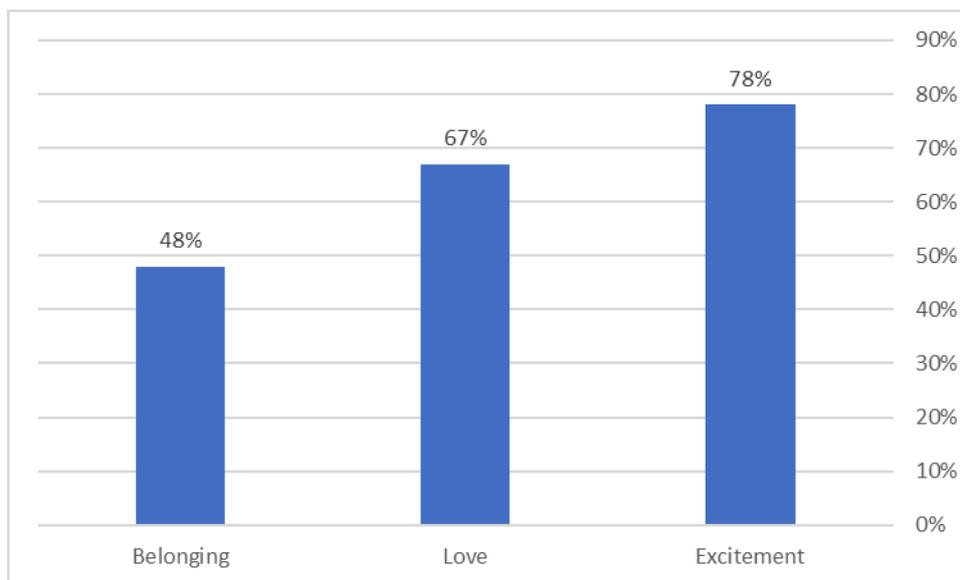
Half of the participants paid attention to the people around them during the Koolulam event, and more than 30% talked to people they did not know. For example, one participant reported: "I came to a Koolulam event, and I didn't know most of the people there. I felt that in order to cooperate with others, I should start looking at other people and even smile, so that's what I did." Some participants pointed out differences in their social interactions and in their awareness of their surroundings when comparing Koolulam events with other multi-participant events. As one participant said: "At music festivals you don't look at anybody else while at Koolulam events, people are intriguing and different. There is more interaction in Koolulam in the active participation, in the mass-singing, the excitement, and the encounter with others." In contrast, there were those who only interacted with the people they came with, but they constituted a relatively small percentage of all participants (Figure 2).

### Feelings During and After the Koolulam Event

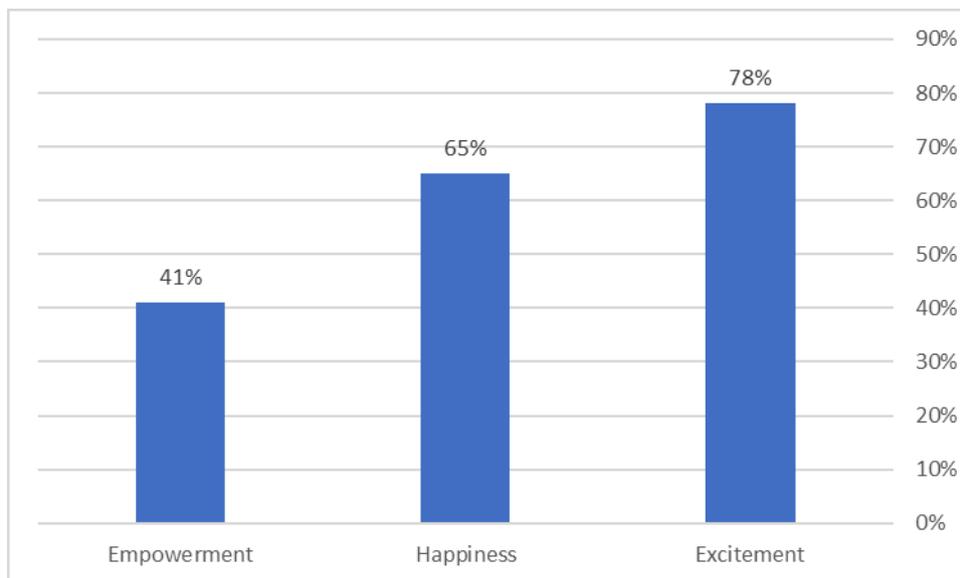
Participants were asked about their feelings during the event. They were instructed to choose emotions from a list and were allowed to choose more than one emotion. The participants' responses indicate that the most common emotions were excitement, love, and sense of belonging (see Figure 3).

Participants were also asked how they felt after the event. They were instructed to choose emotions from a list and were allowed to choose more than one emotion. Their answers show that the common emotions were excitement, happiness and empowerment (see Figure 4).

The participants' feelings following the event were reinforced through their answers to the open-ended questions. Many participants mentioned the sense of empowerment they felt following the joint singing activity, for example, "An empowering atmosphere;" "An empowering positive experience;" and "An empowering experience." Additionally, there were participants who noted that the event contributed to their sense of belonging and created unity among the participants: "It feels like everyone has come to connect and feel a sense of belonging;" "The event gives a sense of belonging;" "An event that inspires unity;" "In Koolulam, people tend to feel unity and uniformity;" "In Koolulam there is unity and a common goal;" "It promotes unity and love;" and "Singing in a large group helps me feel a sense of belonging."



**Figure 3**  
Distribution of Emotions During the Event (n = 580).



**Figure 4**  
Distribution of Emotions After the Event (n = 580).

### Expressions of Empathy and Tolerance Towards Others

When participants were asked the question, "What did you learn from the event," about 37% responded that they had learned to show empathy and tolerance towards others. That is, they learned to accept voices that are different from their own. Reinforcement for this finding can be found in the answers to the open-ended questions. For example, there were participants who referred to the harmonious connection between the voices of the people, a connection that would not have been possible without tolerance and acceptance of every voice heard: "The different voices created harmony and pleasantness that enriched the experience." Manifestations of tolerance and empathy can also be seen from the following examples: "I have learned to be empathetic to the people around me;" "I have learned to accept the other;" and "The event made me look at the people around me and accept their different voices."

Finally, it should be noted that for most participants (64%), the experience was not new. It means that even after a relatively long period, the event still evoked positive feelings among the participants.

The above findings indicate that the shared singing experience at Koolulam events had a social-communal and emotional impact on many of the participants: This was expressed by the participants' desire to be surrounded by people who unite for a common goal, by paying attention to people around them and by making contact with new and unfamiliar people during the event. In addition, the Koolulam event evoked positive feelings such as sense of empowerment, love and belonging, and thus may lead to manifestations of empathy and tolerance towards others. These characteristics of Koolulam events are also mentioned in studies on resilience, which show that positive emotions, involvement, the sense of belonging to a group, and interpersonal communication may strengthen an individual's resilience (Lahad et al., 2013; Seligman, 2018).

## Discussion

The aim of the study was to examine a specific type of mass-singing called Koolulam. The study sought to examine a) the profile of the participants at Koolulam events and their motives for participating; and b) whether the social-communal and emotional characteristics of Koolulam events, which include facilitation of interpersonal interaction, sense of belonging, and experiencing positive emotions, may contribute to personal resilience.

The profile of the participants at Koolulam events is similar to the profile of people who participate in public sing-along events. They are mainly driven by their love of singing and enjoying experiences together (Eliram, 2006; Shahar, 2016). The participants' answers indicate that the vast majority are not professionally engaged in singing or music. Furthermore, about 29% of the participants reported that besides participating in Koolulam events, they had nothing to do with singing. This indicates that it was not only the act of singing that appealed to the participants, but also the group element. A reinforcement of this finding can be seen when examining the motives for attending the event. The findings show that the vast majority of the participants came to the event to experience the excitement that is involved in the act of singing in a large group. Another motive for attending the event was for the purpose of promoting a common social goal. This motive is consistent with one of the known goals of mass-singing, which is creating social change through large group singing (Prescott, 2015; Rojas & Michie, 2013).

Another significant finding is the high percentage of young people under the age of 40 who took part in the event (about 35%). In recent years, the phenomenon of public sing-alongs has become prevalent among young adults, for example, at events such as "singing and drinking" and "candle youth" (Eliram, 2006).

The findings of the current study indicate a growing desire of young adults to take part in group singing activities that are usually associated with older age groups. Taking part in such events is a way for young adults to express a sense of belonging and togetherness, have a pleasurable experience and in some cases, express solidarity, and identify with someone else's pain (Eliram, 2006).

## Characteristics of Koolulam and Their Possible Contribution to Individuals' Resilience

Various studies have found that social-communal resources such as reciprocal relationships and interpersonal interaction may help strengthen personal resilience (Braun-Lewenson et al., 2010). Analysis of the participants' responses shows that Koolulam events have social-communal characteristics of group cohesion and interpersonal relationships. The participants' answers to the question "with whom did you come to the event?" showed that most participants came to the event as part of a group, as opposed to a smaller percentage who came as couples and a much smaller percentage

who came alone. Additionally, most of the participants (more than 80%) noticed and even talked with people around them whom they didn't know. These findings support studies showing that Koolulam may strengthen interpersonal relationships (Sokolov, 1987; Wiess & Bensimon, 2020; ) and group cohesion (Baker & Uhlig, 2011; De Backer & Sutton, 2014), which in turn, were found to contribute to strengthening personal resilience (Lahad et al., 2013; Nuttman-Swart & Green, 2021). Power (2014), in her research exploring vocal intervention to address resilience in female adolescents at-risk for school failure, indicated that singing in a group leads to strengthening resilience as a result of support and connection from others, as well as enhancing positive feelings.

In addition to having social-communal characteristics, Koolulam events also contain emotional characteristics. It has been shown that positive emotions and the sense of belonging to a group may strengthen a person's resilience (Allen et al., 2021; Power, 2014). Analysis of the participants' responses shows that the common emotions that were reported following the event were excitement, joy, empowerment, love and sense of belonging. These findings were reinforced by the answers to the open-ended questions, where the participants often described similar positive feelings and often mentioned the feeling of unity. For example, one participant noted: "When another person comes and sings with me, I raise my voice to match the voice I hear, and this is the secret of the connection among souls." These findings are consistent with studies in the field of music, which found that shared singing evokes positive feelings (Baker & Uhlig, 2011; De Backer & Sutton, 2014; Hibben, 1992; Wiess & Bensimon, 2020; ) such as unity and sense of belonging among members of a group (Austin, 2008b; Baker & Uhlig, 2011; De Backer & Sutton, 2014; Eliram, 2006; Smith, 2009). Similarity can also be found between the emotional characteristics of Koolulam events and the characteristics of Community Music Therapy. This approach focuses on human strengths and resources (Stige, 2002). Community Music Therapy (CoMT) extends the practice of the profession to working outside the therapy room in and with the community, usually with groups (Stige & Aaro, 2012). This approach requires the therapist to be sensitive to social, communal and cultural aspects, and to put an emphasis on the patient's resources and strengths (Ansdell, 2014). Music projects and performances are part of CoMT (Ansdell, 2010, 2014; Elefant, 2010). Koolulam is a social communal musical initiative that occurs as a performance. According to Ansdell (2010, 2014), performance in CoMT creates connections between people and communities, and strengthens positive feelings and personal and community identity (Elefant, 2010). In those musical projects and performances, the people who sang in a group were able to express themselves out loud, which is not always possible for them in life (Ansdell, 2010; Elefant, 2010; Power, 2014). According to the findings of the current study, at Koolulam events (singing in a large group), positive emotions experienced by participants seems to have strengthened their internal resources and identity, as well as their resilience.

This current study also found that Koolulam events may help develop empathy and tolerance towards others. This finding is consistent with previous studies showing that people with resilience have the resources to sympathize and empathize with others to a greater extent than people whose resilience is underdeveloped (Staub & Vollhardt, 2008; Wu et al., 2013). For example, a study conducted among elementary school students in Greece found that altruism can be predicted through resilience resources: the more resilience a child has, the greater his tendency to help others (Leontopoulou, 2010).

## Study Limitations and Future Research

The present study has several limitations. First, because this is a cross-sectional study, it is not possible to study the effect of Koolulam events on the resilience of the participants. It is worth examining this issue in future longitudinal studies. Second, the sampling method that was employed in this study (convenience sampling) limits the generalizability of the study. Future studies should collect data using more representative sampling. Third, data collection was done using self-report questionnaires only,

and therefore, the study is prone to social-desirability bias. Fourth, the questionnaires used in this study were developed by the researchers for the purpose of the study and were not validated elsewhere. Finally, since there are dozens of Koolulam events, some of which were not documented, we were not able to estimate the proportion of study participants.

Regarding further research, in this study, all the participants were Jewish, although it is likely that people from other religions attended Koolulam events as well but chose not to answer the survey. Therefore, future research should include non-Jewish populations as well, so that the results can be generalized to persons from other religions such as Christianity and Islam.

## Conclusions and Contributions of this Research

Although this is the first and only research on Koolulam events, its findings indicate that singing in a large group, in the framework of Koolulam events, has social-communal and emotional characteristics that may strengthen the resilience of the people who attend. It can be said that even one song that is sung in a large group and in different parts promotes harmony among differing parts in the group. Although previous studies have addressed the positive effects of group singing such as public sing-alongs and mass-singing, this is the first study to examine the phenomenon of Koolulam and its possible contribution to the resilience of participants. The results of this study may serve as a basis for further quantitative and qualitative research that will contribute to the knowledge regarding the positive effects of singing in a large group. Applicably, the results of the study may pave the way for developing musical intervention programs led by music therapy professionals specializing in target populations, whose purpose will be to strengthen the resilience of underprivileged communities (e.g., nursing homes and care settings for people with special needs) based on the social-communal and emotional characteristics of Koolulam events.

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## Appendix

The appendices are available at the following link: <https://voices.no/index.php/voices/article/view/3295/3471>

## Notes

1. "One Love-People Get Ready"/Bob Marley & The Wailers
2. "I have love"/Shem-Tov Levy
3. "Strengthened into the world"/Avraham Tal

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