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"טלע מרכז טיוע לעולה במשבר טל - 28580"					



Hadar Cohen

Family members outside the Amara residence yesterday in Rishon Letzion.

Ten years, 28 deaths: Ethiopian community sees another domestic murder-suicide

By Yaniv Kubovich
and Revital Blumenfeld

A man stabbed his wife to death late Monday night and hanged himself while two of the couple's three children were locked in a room in their Rishon Letzion apartment.

The couple, Lawaka Amara, 37, and his wife, Yeshi Amara, 32, had immigrated to Israel from Ethiopia five years ago. They were found dead after a neighbor called the police yesterday morning to report two children crying for help in her building in the largely Ethiopian neighborhood of Ramat Eliyahu.

According to the initial investigation, the couple began arguing during the night. The two older children, ages 10 and 12, were locked in a room

while the youngest child, 5, was apparently taken to a relative's home earlier that evening.

Some time before dawn, Lawaka Amara stabbed his wife to death with a kitchen knife and then hanged himself. Both husband and wife worked in a large supermarket in the Rishon area.

Mira Shaham, head of the Rishon Letzion welfare office, said the children would probably stay with Lawaka Amara's parents for the coming days, "but we're still looking into the best solution for them in their terrible situation."

The welfare authorities said the family had received the same financial assistance as all Ethiopian immigrants during their first two years in the country, and that there

had been no reports of violence. The Amaras are the third family in Rishon Letzion in which the husband murdered the wife, Shaham said.

"We are very aware of the warning signs," Shaham said. "When women report to us or the moment we see something, we immediately begin a process with the woman so she can take care of herself. And we sometimes also begin treating the men. One of the problems is that people keep things bottled up inside."

Shaham, who has been at her post for 15 years, says the welfare office has a team of 11 people who speak Amharic to maintain lines of communication with families. "The right thing to do is to call on the community and its leaders to encourage people to turn to

the welfare authorities, who can help them," she said.

Hundreds of people from the Ethiopian community gathered yesterday outside the apartment building where the Amara family lived. An uncle said the children had tried to reach him over the Internet while they were locked in the room, but failed.

A female relative said, referring to Yeshi Amara, that "she never said anything to us about violence, she never said she was afraid of him. There were difficulties, as there are with all new immigrants from Ethiopia. But this is simply a shock."

Natan Getahon, who works with the Rishon Letzion welfare services as a mediator for the Ethiopian community, said a big problem was

that community members in trouble don't seek the help of a traditional community leader the way they used to. "The next incident is only a matter of time," he said.

The Knesset Immigrant Absorption Committee announced that it would hold an emergency session next week to discuss the issue. "Again and again we hear shocking stories about the destruction of families and the loss of life because of violence and murder ... We mustn't accept this terrible situation," MK Shlomo Molla (Kadima) said.

Molla, an Ethiopian-Israeli, said ministries did not understand that Ethiopian immigrants needed special assistance not only while they live

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in absorption centers for the initial two years or so after they make aliyah, but after they move to their permanent homes as well.

Molla said no such help was forthcoming, which means families were living "with long-term idleness, which leads to a lack of involvement in society, degeneration and frustration. This often leads to cases of family violence."

Yeshi Amara is the third Ethiopian woman to be murdered by her husband in the past two months. Two weeks ago a man apparently beat his wife to death with a rock in their home in Safed. The couple's 13-year-old son was in their apartment during the attack.

About a month ago, a man murdered his ex-wife in Kiryat Arba in the West Bank and then committed suicide. In that case, the authorities were aware that the husband had used violence against his wife.

The police declined a request from Haaretz for statistics on such murders in the Ethiopian community. "The police do not usually catalogue murders according to ethnic community, but according to the offense," police spokesman Ami Ben-David said.

However, according to the nonprofit group Sela, which provides assistance to new immigrants who have experienced tragedies, there have been seven cases of husbands murdering their wives among Ethiopian-Israelis in the last seven years, and 28 such murders over the past decade. There have been 70 documented cases of verbal abuse and physical violence over the past decade. In some cases the women have been severely injured.

"In Ethiopia there was violence, but not bloodshed. The men called it 'educating the woman' and the community accepted it as long as it did not end in murder," said Micha Feldman, head of the Ethiopian unit at Sela for the past 20 years.

Feldman said that in Ethiopia the village elders and the extended family acted as mediators, but that "in Israel this does not exist. The elders don't have status and the men's status has also gone down, while women have grown stronger."

The problem families are often relatively new in the country, and the murders usually occur after they leave the absorption center for their permanent homes, Feldman said. She said that when the authorities intervene and serve the husband with a restraining order "he has nowhere to go. He has to go back to his parents, 'humiliated like a little boy,' as they put it, and in the end they go back and murder her."

Feldman said a framework should be established

for such men that allows them to keep their dignity. Efrat Yardai, spokeswoman for the Israel Association for Ethiopian Jews, agrees and says there are not enough Amharic speakers in government agencies to communicate with women who "get up the courage to approach the authorities "The murders won't stop until this essential help is provided."

David Baharat, director of Mercaz Higui, a group that assists Ethiopian schoolchildren, says some rabbinic courts use traditional mediators to help divorcing Ethiopian couples, but the government does not recognize them formally.

"They are even willing to volunteer," he said. Baharat says welfare and other officials need more training to get to know the Ethiopian culture "to give them the tools to prevent the crises that lead to murder and suicide."



Yeshi Amara