

The Family in Israel: Between Tradition and Modernity

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ABSTRACT. This article provides a review of family patterns and lifestyles within Israeli society consisting of trends in marriage, divorce and fertility, dating, mate selection, marital relationships, and marital dissolution. Additional topics consist of parenting and the place and role of children in families, elderly and their families, gender issues, division of labor, power in families, and the impact of stress on Israeli families. Major trends are presented and analyzed by adopting a hybrid comparative perspective: a *vertical* perspective, which examines changes in family patterns over the past five decades, and a *horizontal* perspective, which examines different family patterns among various socioethnic groups. This analysis indicates that the family is being pulled in opposite directions by two main forces: one that prods the family toward greater modernization and Westernization, while the other acts to strengthen traditional values. Despite some convergence among different socioethnic groups, marked differences are prevalent within these groups in every aspect of family life, thus maintaining a vast diversity in family patterns and lifestyles. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2003 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

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INTRODUCTION

Israel is a small country marked by cultural diversity, shaped by massive waves of immigration from more than seventy countries around the world. It is a country with a mix of Jewish and Arab populations and is characterized by many languages, traditional family patterns existing alongside modern lifestyles. It is a nation influenced by Western culture existing together with a Middle-Eastern heritage, including values and practices ranging from highly orthodox religious perspectives to secular ways of life. A review of families in Israel, therefore, must consider the great *diversity within* this society—the uniqueness of various family lifestyles within different ethnic and religious groups.

In discussing major trends and patterns of families in Israel, a hybrid comparative perspective is adopted: a *vertical* perspective, which analyzes changes in family patterns over the past five decades (that is, since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948), and a *horizontal* perspective, which examines different family patterns in Israel at the present time. These two lines of analysis highlight the changes of the past five decades: Israelis are marrying later, divorcing more, and on the average having a smaller number of children, but different groups have been experiencing these processes at different paces. On the whole, however, the family in Israel continues to be strong, central, and more stable than in most industrialized countries. Before taking up both lines of analysis, a brief description is provided on the characteristics of the country and its people.

The population of Israel is about 6,500,000, of which about 80% are Jewish and the rest are non-Jewish, primarily Arabs (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2001). It has always been characterized by a rapid rate of increase, and the demographic composition of the Jewish population has been changing continually as a consequence of many large waves of immigrants. Modern Jewish settlement began in the latter part of the nineteenth century, coinciding with the massive emigration of Jews from Eastern Europe to the United States, the British Commonwealth, and Latin America. With the rise of Nazism in the 1930s, another large wave of immigration developed from Europe. In 1948, when the State of Israel was established, the population was 873,000. Over the last fifty years, there has been a six-fold increase in the population, with the result being a nation having a wide variety of cultures, lifestyles, and family patterns (see Table 1).

The Jewish majority today is composed of two main ethnic clusters: “Orientals” or *Sepharadim* (Spanish) and the *Ashkenazim*. Members of the first group (i.e., *Sepharadim*), or their ancestors, originated from the Near East, North Africa, Yemen, Ethiopia, the Balkans, Iran, Iraq, India, and the

TABLE 1. Immigration to Israel by Continent of Origin and by Period of Immigration, 1919-2000 (In Thousands)

Period	Continent of Origin					Total
	Asia	Africa	Europe	America/ Oceania	Unknown/ Other	
<i>Before the Establishment of the State of Israel</i>						
1919-1948 ^a	40.9	4.0	377.4	7.8	52.8	482.9
<i>After the Establishment of Israel</i>						
1949-1959	266.1	226.0	337.0	13.7	15.3	858.1
1960-1969	43.3	152.6	140.6	34.9	2.5	373.9
1970-1979	30.8	19.0	215.3	80.4	0.8	346.3
1980-1989	13.5	23.4	72.0	44.5	0.4	153.8
1990-2000	52.1	46.9	876.2	40.6	0.6	1,016.4
Total	446.7	471.9	2018.5	221.9	72.4	3231.4
Percent	13.82%	14.60%	62.47%	6.87%	2.24%	100%

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics (2001). *Statistical Abstract of Israel*, No. 52, Table 4.2.

Note: ^aStatistics of immigration by continent not available before 1919.

Muslim republics of the former Soviet Union. The second group, or the *Ashkenazim*, originate in the American or European continents. At present, 33.5% of the Jewish population are Asian-African born or children of Asian-African origin; 40% are European-American born or children of American-European origin; and 26.5% were born in Israel to Israeli-born parents (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2001). The Arab population itself is composed of several religious groups—primarily Moslems (81.6%), Christians (9.4%), and Druze (8.7%).

Despite this diversity, the predominant form of the family in Israel is the traditional nuclear family composed of a mother, a father, and their biological children. The overwhelming majority of couples have children (2.7, on the average), and the majority (about 75%) remain married for the entire life cycle. Only 10% of the households are composed of a single parent and her or his

children. Nearly all families live in separate households but remain in close contact with their extended families. However, in a little more than 7% of the households, consisting primarily of newcomers from the former Soviet Union and Arab families, the family lives either with other relatives or the household consists of two or more families (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2001).

It is important to note that these numbers do not reflect variations among sociocultural groups in Israel, such as Jews and Arabs, nor do they reflect changes over time. Therefore, the following section examines some of the more salient variations across time and between groups, focusing primarily on three important family aspects: marriage, divorce, and fertility.

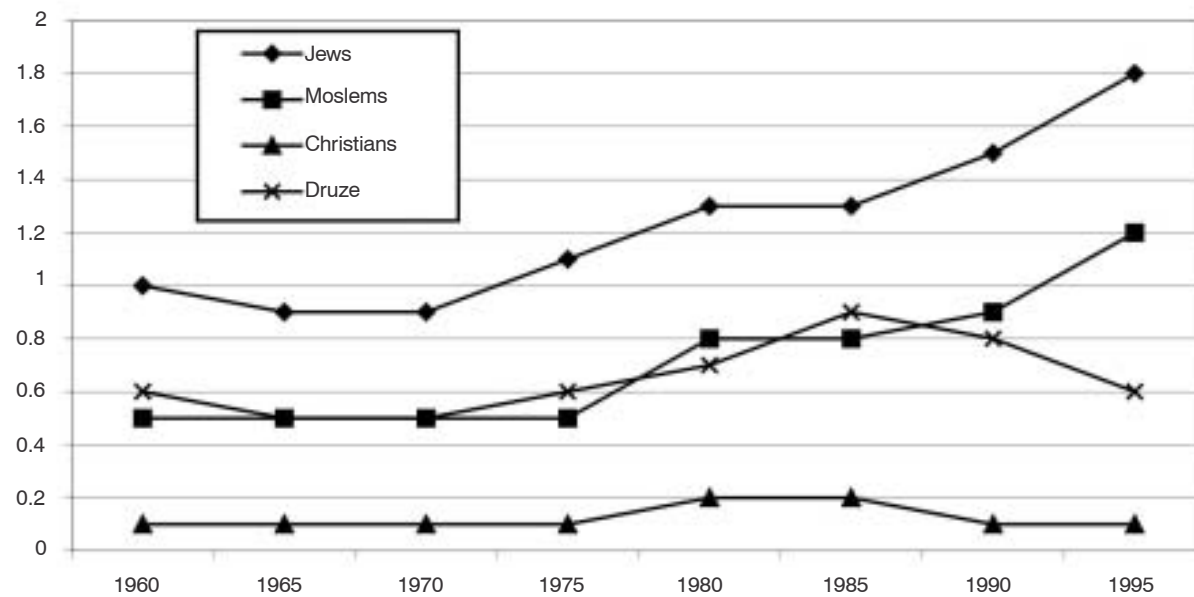
Trends in Marriage, Divorce, and Fertility

Marriage in Israel is almost universal and has not changed much over time. Among all population groups, men and women alike, less than 3% are never married by the time they are 50 years old (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2001). However, the average age at marriage is rising, and there are indications that the marriage rate is expected to decline. This is illustrated by periodic indices of the marriage likelihood, which can provide estimated future rates of marriage, if the current behavior of men and women continues. Specifically, the likelihood of marriage for Jewish men and women by the end of their fertility period has decreased from 98.4 in the 1970s to 80.1% for men and 82.5% for women in the 1990s. Among Arab men and women, these likelihood indices remain above 90% (DellaPergola, 1993).

Couples are getting married later today than in the 1960s. In the early 1960s, the average age at marriage was 26.4 and 22.0 for Jewish men and women, respectively, and 23.5 and 19.7 for Moslem men and women. In the 1990s, the age at marriage for Jewish men and women was 26.8 and 24.2, respectively. In the Arab population, men and women marry today about a year and a half later than did those in the 1960s and the average ages are 25 and 21 for men and women, respectively. Thus, in the Jewish population the average age difference between men and women has declined over the past three decades from 4.4 years to 2.6 years, whereas for Moslems it has remained at about 4 years.

Divorce rates have risen in all groups in the past three decades within Israel. As Figure 1 shows, the crude rate of divorce (per 1,000 population) increased from 0.9 and 0.5 for Jews and Moslems, respectively, in the 1970s to 1.8 and 1.2 in the mid-1990s. Interestingly, the crude divorce rate and divorce/marriage ratio for Moslems in the mid-1990s resembles those of the Jewish population in Israel in the 1970s (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2001). The difference between Jews and Moslems is best reflected in the divorce/marriage ratio,

FIGURE 1. Divorce Rates by Religious Groups: 1960-1995



Source: Central Bureau of Statistics (1998). *Statistical Abstract of Israel*, 1998, Table 3.1 (pp. 3.5-3.9).
 Note: Divorce rate is per 1,000 persons of the average permanent population.

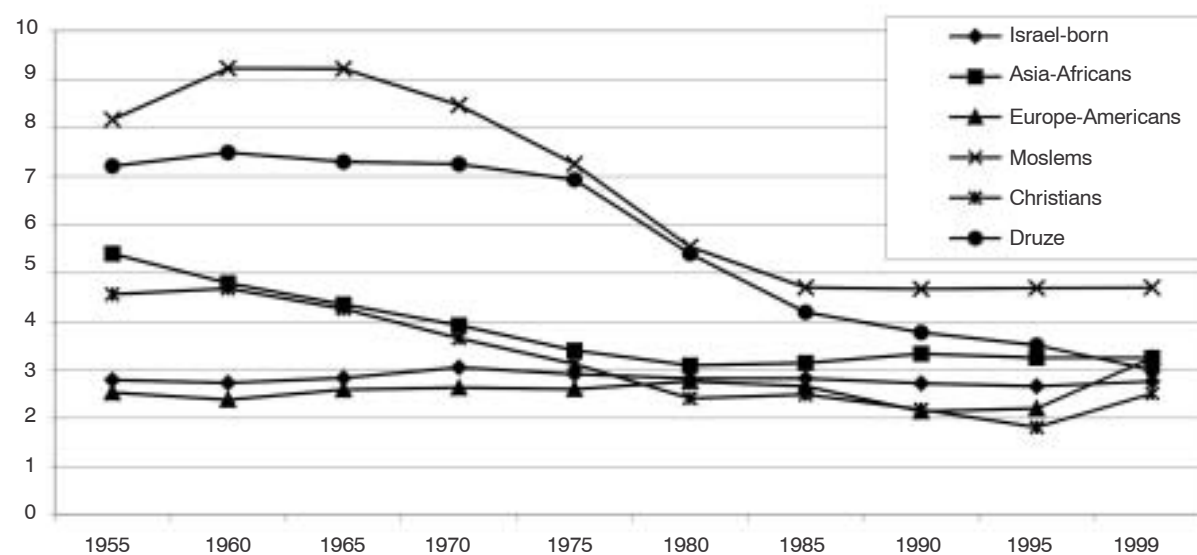
which indicates the number of divorces per number of marriages in a given year. In 1995, the divorce/marriage ratio for Jewish couples was 30%, whereas for Moslems it was 11%. These figures point to a slow decline in marital stability, especially since the mid-1980s (Katz & Peres, 1995). However, the divorce rates are still significantly lower than it is in most industrialized countries.

Examination of changes in fertility patterns across the fifty-year period of Israeli statehood points to an interesting double process of convergence: one between the two main Jewish ethnic groups—Sephardic and Ashkenazi, and the second between Israel's two major religious groups—Jews and Moslems (see Figure 2). Historically, Jewish women of Sephardic (Asian-African) and Ashkenazi (European-American) origins have been differentiated in their fertility rates—high among women of Asian-African origin (5.4 in the mid-1950s) and low among women of European-American origin (2.5). During the next thirty years, however, the total fertility rate of women of Asian-African origin has dramatically dropped, while it increased slightly among both Israeli-born and women of European-American origin. In 1985, the fertility rate for Jewish women of Asian-African origin was 3.1, whereas for European-American and Israeli-born women it was 2.8. Ethnic exogamy, an important component in the ethnic-integration process, has had an effect on this convergence (Eisenbach, 1992). Consequently, a rather uniform Jewish Israeli fertility pattern at 2.6 children has emerged (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2001). It should be noted, however, that this birth pattern is not uniform among all Jewish groups in Israel. It is significantly higher among ultra-orthodox women and lowest among secular and highly educated women of Ashkenazi origin (Peritz & Baras, 1992).

Changes in fertility rates over the years are also seen among Moslem, Christian and Druze families. The birth patterns of Arab women are shaped most significantly by education and other indicators of traditionalism (Peritz & Baras, 1992). Most of the changes in fertility rates occurred during the first 30 years following the establishment of the State of Israel (1950-1980) and have stabilized thereafter. All these groups now have considerably fewer children than they had four decades ago. Notably, Moslems have the highest fertility rate (4.7) whereas Christian Arabs have the lowest fertility rate of the total population (2.5).

Despite the changes, the fertility rate in Israel, among both Jews and non-Jews, is still higher than other developed countries such as the United States with a fertility rate of 2.07 children/woman (Central Intelligence Agency, 1998), and in Europe where rates range from 1.2 children/woman in Italy to 1.9 in Ireland (Eurostat, 1997).

FIGURE 2. Total Fertility Rates^a by Religious and Jewish-Origin Groups: 1955-1999



Source: Central Bureau of Statistics (2001). *Statistical Abstract of Israel No. 52*, Tables 3.12-3.13.

Note: ^aTotal fertility rate is the average number of children a woman is expected to bear during her lifetime.

COUPLE FORMATION AND MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS

One of the unique features of marriage and divorce in Israel is the religious legal system that regulates marital and family status. Since the passage of the Marital Status Law of 1953, all matters of marriage and divorce have been delegated to the religious courts of the various communities—rabbinical courts for Jews, Shari’a courts for Muslims, and corresponding institutions for adherents of other religions, including Christians and Druze.

The law also makes divorce harder to obtain, especially for women, since the husband signs a writ of divorce (the *Get*) and the wife is the one who receives it. It is harder to force a husband to sign the writ than to force the wife to accept it. In response to pressures brought by women’s organizations, a double system of courts has been established. All issues of property division and child custody may be adjudicated in either a civil court or a rabbinical court, but the writ of divorce remains solely under the authority of the religious court. To prevent the possibility of adjudication of a given case in two courts simultaneously, the law states that whenever one spouse brings suit against the other in a given legal system, all proceedings must continue in that system. Since the civil courts are generally viewed as more favorable to women and the rabbinical courts more favorable to men, it is in each spouse’s interest to be the first to file suit in the court of his or her preference. (For more details about the laws and the duality of the legal system, see Rosen-Zvi, 1990, and Sharshovski, 1993.)

The Muslim courts also contend with a dual legal system comprised of religious law and unofficial custom. The choice between custom law, and between different customs (ancient customs that predate Islamic law and recent more liberal ones), is made at the discretion of the Shari’a court. One ancient pre-Islamic custom that has gained acceptance in Islam allows a husband to divorce his wife by so proclaiming three times before witnesses, with no further procedures necessary. Thus, the interrelationship of custom and religious law and the need to apply discretion in such cases is one of the main difficulties that the Shari’a courts face (Laish, 1975).

Dating and Mate Selection

For most Israeli Jews, dating begins during adolescence within peer social groups located in high schools, institutions of higher education, and as part of youth movements. Military service is one of the main avenues of acquaintance, with service being compulsory for men (three years) and for women (18-24 months) beginning at age eighteen. After a period of acquaintance that is usually brief, young people introduce their intended spouses to parents and

friends. Normative experiences include shared entertainment, meals in the family setting, and, at times, staying overnight in the home of the boyfriend's or girlfriend's parents.

Two other patterns of mate selection also are common, albeit in a much smaller proportion: arranged marriages within the ultra-orthodox population and semi-arranged marriages among Arabs. Dating is not accepted within the ultra-orthodox community. The bride's purity is of utmost importance and the family is interested in their daughter's marriage at the earliest age permissible (17 years). Men, too, are expected to marry at an early age because marriage is the only permissible avenue for a sexual outlet. Marriages are arranged by parents, often with the assistance of traditional "matchmakers." Couples meet only a few times before marriage and only in the presence of their families. Usually, the parents' selection is accepted by the couple, though they may exercise veto power (Safir, 1991).

In Arab society, the process of selecting a marital partner is determined by key members of both families, even though the tradition of arranged marriages is rapidly disappearing (Haj-Yahia, 1995). Traditionally, the groom's parents selected an appropriate bride for their son and proposed a "marriage transaction" to the bride's parents. Only after parents on both sides agreed to the match would their sons and daughters be informed about what had been arranged. Today, this tradition remains only a framework for mate selection and parents rarely force their children to marry a partner against their will (Avitzur, 1987). Many young men and women choose their own mates from individuals they have known in their village. However, because dating may be prohibited, they must arrange to meet outside the village. When they decide to marry, the groom's parents are expected to speak to the prospective bride's parents in order "to ask for her hand." Both partners announce their engagement as soon as they receive the consent of their families. Arab women, however, cannot marry without the consent of their parents and even the consent of their brothers and other relatives.

Cohabitation

Israeli attitudes toward cohabitation are changing. Today, nearly 63% of Jewish Israelis believe that "it is better for a couple who plan to get married to live together first," and more than 60% approve of cohabitation even if the couple does not plan to get married (Steier, Oren, Elias, & Lewin-Epstein, 1998). These attitudes are considerably more prevalent among younger people (age 35 or less) than among people aged 56 or over (about 70% and 44%, respectively). Cohabitation, as a prelude to formal marriage, is widespread among young Jewish couples, especially those who are more secular and edu-

cated. This living arrangement, however, is rare among less-educated Jewish couples and is not practiced among orthodox Jews or Arabs.

Although no official statistics are available, evidence from a representative sample of 2,000 Jewish respondents indicated that 26% had lived with their present marital spouse before marriage, and 19% reported that they had lived together with a partner whom they did not end up marrying (Katz, 2001). The study indicated that cohabitation is associated with a younger age, higher education, and a secular orientation. Cohabitation, however, is not perceived to be an alternative to formal marriage. In most cases, couples formalize their relationship after several years, especially when they wish to have children.

Marriage: Attitudes and Customs

The large majority of people have a favorable attitude toward marriage and eventually more than 95% of men and women get married at some time in their lives. Furthermore, most young couples in Israel accept the set of religious laws and rules and enter into formal (religious) marriages. Only a negligible minority of Jewish men and women (but not Christian or Moslem Arabs) prefer a legal nonreligious marital contract, and even fewer prefer to forfeit formal marriage and remain in cohabitation as a permanent lifestyle.

The values that people hold regarding marriage and marital relationships can be inferred from the perceived components of marital quality. Lavee (1997) found that both husbands and wives associated healthy marital relationships with love (i.e., a sense of bonding, caring, and feeling of unity and companionship), mutual understanding, respect, and trust between the partners, followed by satisfactory sexual relationships, cooperation, communication and compatibility (that is, similar mentality, worldview and character, as well as mutual leisure and social interests). Similar ingredients of marital satisfaction were found by Sharlin (1996).

Little data exists on marriage values among Arab couples. A comparative study of various ethnic/religious groups in Israel (Lavee, 1995) has shown that marital satisfaction varies positively with the degree of traditionalism: the more traditional the community, the higher the perceived quality of the relationship. Thus, Druze couples, who hold the most traditional family values and lifestyle, report the highest level of marital quality, followed by Moslems, Christian Arabs, and Jews. The differences among these groups remained even after controlling for educational level, economic situation, level of religiosity, and number of children. Furthermore, Katz, Lavee and Azaiza (1998) found that among Arab couples, marital satisfaction was highest among rural Moslems and lowest among women in a mixed Arab-Jewish urban community.

Marital Dissolution

The majority of people (nearly 63%) believe that divorce is the best solution for couples who are unable to resolve their conflicts. Only a minority believe that couples should stay together even if they don't get along (Steier et al., 1998). This attitude toward divorce, however, depends on whether the couple have children. Whereas only about 8% believe that conflictual couples should stay together when they don't have children, more than 26% believe that when there are children involved, the parents should stay together, even if they don't get along. In regard to these beliefs, more conservative values are held by men as compared to women, and by older persons (age 56 or over) as compared to the young (age 35 or less) (Steier et al., 1998).

In a follow-up study of the entire cohort of marriages in 1964, less than 15% had divorced in a twenty-year period (DellaPergola, 1993). However, a comparison of couples who have been married in different years shows a steady increase in the divorce rate. The Jewish population is significantly more prone to divorce than the Arabs. Among Jewish couples, in turn, those of European-American origin divorce more than those of Asian-African origin (Peres & Katz, 1991). Despite the rise in divorce, however, marital breakups are not as common as they are in most industrialized countries.

CHILDREN AND PARENTING

The Place and Role of Children

Israel is a "child-oriented" society. Married couples are expected to have children, and a childless couple is not considered a family. Nearly 60% of Israelis believe that childless people have an "empty life," and more than 80% believe that "the greatest joy in life is to follow children's growing up" (Steier et al., 1998). On average, Israelis desire more children (3.5) and have more children (2.7) than people in other industrialized countries. Children are highly valued not only by their parents, who usually give the needs of their young top priority, but also by society as a whole. The welfare of children is considered a collective responsibility.

All women receive a birth allowance, with families receiving monthly children's allowances and tax deductions depending on the number of children in the family. Special discounts are provided to large families for public child care and for summer camps, as well as for municipal taxes (Safir, 1991). The Health Ministry provides mother and child health clinics all over the country in

which free pre- and postnatal care are provided to all mothers and their children up to age three (Rosenthal, 1994).

The basic assumption of Israeli women from all population categories, including the ultra-orthodox, is that family and outside work can be combined. Thus, the employment of mothers with young children is a rather common phenomenon in Israel. In the 1990s, about 54% of mothers whose youngest child was under the age of one, and 67% of mothers with children under the age of 15 were employed (Katz, 1997).

Government policies and the availability of public and private services facilitate the participation of mothers of young children in the labor market. Legislation granted maternity leave in 1955, which enables working mothers to receive their salary while staying home for twelve weeks following delivery. An additional nine months of unpaid leave is allowed without loss of employment. Recently the 3-month paid leave was changed to *parental* so that fathers could be included in legislative provisions. Although these policies encourage at-home care by the mother for up to 12 months, the strong family orientation has never led to a "motherhood cult" that assigns the care of infants and toddlers exclusively to the mother (Azmon & Izraeli, 1993). Daycare centers that provide full-day care for babies and toddlers from the age of three months are widespread (about 1,000) throughout the country and are favorably viewed.

Parenting Practices

Parents often have an ideal image of the "adaptive adult," which guides them in socializing their children (Roer-Strier, 1996). Using a metaphor from the animal world, Roer-Strier (1996) presents three different parenting styles—the "cuckoo," the "kangaroo," and the "chameleon" styles.

The cuckoo style is based on the behavior of the cuckoo bird, whose offspring are cared for in the nests of other birds after the eggs hatch. Parents of this type entrust their children to the formal and informal socializing agents of the host culture. Such practices were found primarily among immigrants who came to Israel in the 1950s and agreed to send their children away to Youth Aliyah boarding schools or Kibbutzim at a very young age. The same pattern can now be seen among Ethiopian immigrants, who, as Roer-Strier (1996) notes, may be risking their family cohesion and sense of continuity between generations.

The kangaroo style is based on this animal's tendency to protect its offspring in a secure pouch. Families of this type see themselves as their children's chief socializing agents and tend to raise their children according to the traditions followed in their family of origin and to perceive as a threat any outside system that may influence their children otherwise (Roer-Strier, 1996).

Parenting of this style is found in Israel primarily among the ultra-orthodox Jews who raise their children according to the religious norms and values followed by their ancestors from Central Europe.

A variant of this style may be found among Arab families, who are concerned with preserving Arab culture amid surrounding Western influences. Children in Arab families are socialized to obey their parents and submit to their demands, and care is provided by parents and members of the extended family (rarely provided by caregivers, babysitters, or other strangers (Haj-Yahia, 1995).

The chameleon style is based on the ability of this animal to adapt to its environment by changing its color. In this “bi-cultural” style, parents encourage the child to live peacefully with both cultures. The child is taught to behave like others outside of the home, but to behave at home according to the parents’ culture of origin. Families of this type maintain contact with their traditional culture, thereby preserving a sense of continuity and family cohesion.

Children in Israel remain a central focus of concern for their parents for a longer period of time than in most industrialized countries. When sons and daughters begin compulsory military service at eighteen, parenting often becomes even more intense than previously (Azmon & Izraeli, 1993). At the age when most young people fulfill their developmental task of separation and individuation, Israeli soldiers are becoming closer to their parents (especially to the mother). Three years after completing military service, two-thirds of these young adults are still living at home and are economically dependent on their parents (Mayseless, 1991, 1993).

ELDERLY AND THEIR FAMILIES

The elders have a major significance in both the Jewish and Arab traditions. This is reflected in the role of the elderly in family life as well as in the filial responsibility of families and communities towards their aged. In Judaism, the duty of filial responsibility is expressed in the fifth commandment “Honor thy father and thy mother.” The great majority of elderly people in Israel live in close proximity to at least one of their children, and contact is maintained on a daily basis, either in person or by phone. The healthy aged are usually highly involved in the lives of their offspring (children and grandchildren), have Sabbath meals together, are an important source of support and assistance to their adult children, and are considered an integral part of the family. Many grandparents care for their grandchildren while the parents are working or on vacation as well as provide financial and other tangible support, such as preparing meals and shopping. As they grow older and frailer, elderly people are com-

monly cared for by their children. The overwhelming majority of the elderly's children wish to keep their aging parents at home, caring for them themselves. As a result, more than 95% of the healthy elderly and 76% of the disabled elderly continue to live at home (Brodsky, 1998).

In Arab society, the "elders" are of major importance as the leaders, the carriers of tradition, and the source of wisdom and respect for the family and community. Although some changes have taken place in Arab society in Israel with respect to governance and political control, the extended family is still the basic social unit responsible for the care and support of aged family members. Consequently, the informal support network in the Arab sector is quite active and extensive: 68% of elderly Arabs live with their families (as compared to 18% of the Jewish elderly), most of them with their children (Brodsky, 1998).

Multigenerational living arrangements, in which the elderly continue to live with their family of procreation, are also common among new immigrants from the former Soviet Union, albeit for a different reason. It is estimated that two-thirds of these elderly immigrants live with their families (Strosberg & Naon, 1997). In a recent study (Katz & Lowenstein, 1999), the main reasons cited by older-generation immigrants (age 65 or more) for establishing shared households with children and grandchildren were economic constraints, housing shortages, the need for mutual help, and familiarity with this type of living arrangement. The study also revealed that this type of living arrangement, as well as intergenerational solidarity and family functioning, were important factors favoring adjustment to their new country.

During the past decade a fair number of formal services have been established to complement the informal support system, with the aim of balancing public and family resources. These service systems are challenged by the need to adapt to the patterns of care and expectations of Israel's varied ethnic and cultural groups (Brodsky, 1998).

FAMILIES AND GENDER

Two contradictory sets of ideological systems coexist in Israel: an egalitarian ideology, which minimizes gender differences, and a traditional ideology, which assigns different sets of rights and obligations to men and women (Azmon & Izraeli, 1993; Raday, 1991). Thus, while the country as a whole has adopted an egalitarian ideology, with an egalitarian educational system and opportunities open to men and women alike, a notable portion of the population is still within, or just one generation away from, its traditional origins. Family laws also are marked by duality: the legal status of women is determined simultaneously by some of the most modern legal approaches as well as

by one of the most ancient legal systems in the world (Raday, 1991). Women's rights for equal opportunity are explicitly recognized in the legal system and in the Declaration of Independence. At the same time, ancient Jewish law, which serves as the legal authority in matters of marriage and divorce, imposes a different legal status on men and women.

The Myth of Gender Equality in Israel

A myth of gender equality, which accompanied the Zionist movement and the formation of the State of Israel, can be traced to three factors. From its inception, the kibbutz was characterized by a radical commitment to maximal equality between men and women. Most of the family roles in the kibbutz movement were assigned to other institutions, such as a communal kitchen and dining room, a communal laundry, and a series of age-graded children's houses in which the children slept and played under the guidance of trained *metaplot* (house-mothers). The explicit goal was to free women for full participation in the labor force and social life of the kibbutz. In the early days of the kibbutz movement, women took leadership roles in government and social functions, and participated in "masculine" jobs, such as farming, industry, and machinery. However, the role of women has changed rapidly and today the majority of women in the kibbutz work in education and domestic services (Ben-Rafael & Weitman, 1984; Palgi, 1997).

A second force in the creation of the gender equality myth has been military service. Women in Israel are unique in their compulsory military service. Although the woman soldier has emerged as an attractive symbol of gender equality (Azmon & Izraeli, 1993), the military is a gendered institution. Although a wide range of jobs in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) are filled by women, the majority still occupy clerical and administrative positions and are excluded from direct combat jobs.

A third factor in the creation of the gender equality myth is the role of women among the founders of the Jewish settlement in Palestine. Pioneer women were represented as equal, even identical to the men. They were the women who broke down the barriers between the sexes, who worked like men and fought hand in hand with them: they drained swamps, constructed roads, tilled the land, and fought the foe (Bernstein, 1987). Nevertheless, the basic inequality between men and women remained, and when the formative period of the State was over, women continued to occupy the lower positions in all spheres of social life. They were far less visible in the public sphere and functioned primarily as wives and mothers, with total responsibility for their family's domestic needs (Bernstein, 1987).

Gender Equality and Gender Gap in Education and Employment

Although educational opportunities are largely equal for men and women (median years of education is 12.1 for men and 12.0 for women) (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2001), the labor market remains basically segregated along gender lines in terms of occupational distribution as well as social and economic rewards.

A significant increase in educational level has taken place among Arab women in the past decade: from a median of 7.5 years of schooling in the 1980s to 10 years in the 1990s. In the past two decades, the number of women in higher education has doubled, while the number of men has remained constant. As a result, more women than men completed college in 1995; more than 20% of women now have a college degree, as compared with 17% of men. This proportion of women with a higher education degree is among the highest in the world.

Similar progress is also evident in the increased proportion of women's participation in the labor force, which has increased steadily, from 22-25% in the 1950s and 1960s, to 32-39% in the 1970s and 1980s and 48% in 2000 (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2001). These rates, however, are not equally distributed among all ethnic groups. Among Moslem women, only 13% participate in the labor force, as compared to one-third of Christian and Druze women and more than 50% of Jewish women. Although women with young children constitute the largest portion of working women (71% of them are in the labor force), labor force participation of women increases with the age of the youngest child and decreases with the number of children in the family.

Despite some changes in the past two decades, the labor market is still segregated, with women most frequently employed in education, health and welfare services, while occupying only one-fifth of managerial positions (Central Bureau of Statistics, 1998). Additionally, many women work part time—much more frequently than men (30% and 9%, respectively)—and their average income per hour is only 80% of men's.

A few steps have been taken by policymakers in order to promote women's participation in the labor force and to further the equality of women in employment and in pay. Among them are the legislative efforts to provide protection to working mothers, such as maternity leave, the Equal Opportunity in Employment Law of 1981 and the Equal Opportunity Law of 1988. These laws have made discrimination on the basis of either sex or family status illegal in job advertising, hiring, training, promotion, and firing. However, since these laws are difficult to enforce and do not include affirmative action, gender segregation persists (Raday, 1991). Likewise, the Equal Pay Law of 1964 provided that employers are required to pay female employees a wage equal to

that of male employees in the same workplace for responsibilities that is essentially equal. In reality, however, the law has not succeeded in achieving a redistribution of wages between the sexes.

Household Division of Labor

Attitudes toward marital division of labor range from the most egalitarian to the traditional. In a recent poll, 54% of the respondents expressed egalitarian values, whereas 39% of the men and 29% of the women surveyed expressed more traditional values (Gross, 1999). As expected, egalitarian values are found to be more prevalent among the younger generation and among the more educated as compared to older and less educated couples.

To what extent is gender equality *actually* maintained within families? One way of answering this question is by examining the overall burden—labor force and family work combined—on husbands and wives. In a study of a national representative sample of 1,000 employed mothers and 500 housewives (Katz, 1989), the average *overall* burden (i.e., active time invested on the job and at home) was largest for working mothers (13.5 hours per day), followed by husbands and by housewives (12.7 and 9.7 hours, respectively). Husbands do not significantly share the additional burden arising from their wives' employment. The number of hours they devote to home and children is about the same, whether or not their wives are employed. Husbands, in general, invest most of their time—much more than their spouses—in their jobs. These figures reflect the traditional division of roles into primary and secondary ones: both partners allocate their active time in accordance with traditional responsibilities (Katz, 1989). However, when the wife's income is equal to or greater than that of her husband, the division of labor in the family is more egalitarian and both tend to attribute as much importance to the career success of their spouses as to their own (Izraeli, 1994).

Division of labor is more segregated among the Arabs, with the clearest segregation among rural Moslem families and the least among urban Moslem and Christian Arabs. The husband usually fulfills the instrumental roles of main provider and protector, while the wife fulfills the expressive role of housewife (Haj-Yahia, 1995). Nearly all of the household chores and child care tasks are usually performed by women, while men assume responsibility for home, garden and car maintenance, financial management, and contact with social agencies and government authorities (Katz et al., 1998). Interestingly, Arab women in rural areas perceive the division of household labor as fair and express less desire to change it than do urban Arab women, who are more likely to perceive the division of labor as unfair.

The division of labor affects marital satisfaction in different ways for couples from different cultural/religious groups and differently for men and women. Among Jewish couples, women's marital satisfaction is associated with their husbands' liberal views, while men's satisfaction is predicted by their own liberal views and by their spouses' conservative values (Shachar, 1991). Likewise, equal role sharing and decision-making is associated with women's higher marital satisfaction and with men's greater marital strain (Rabin & Shapira-Berman, 1997).

Among Arab families, however, marital satisfaction is highest among both men and women in couples with the most segregated role division and lowest among families with a more egalitarian role division (Lavee & Katz, 2002). These findings support the idea that gender role *ideology* is an important moderating factor between household division of labor and marital satisfaction (Greenstein, 1996).

Power Distribution

In addition to division of labor, gender differences are reflected in the decision-making process of husbands and wives. Wives are more dominant in family decisions regarding child care and education as well as family leisure, whereas men are more dominant in decisions regarding family finances, car purchases, and both spouses' jobs. Other major household purchases, such as furniture and appliances, most commonly are made by joint decisions. A wife's personal resources (e.g., education, income, and occupational prestige) have a considerable impact on her share in marital decisions, while the husband's resources have very little impact (Katz & Peres, 1993). Changes in relative resources between the spouses as well as between parents and children, resulting in changes in family structure and in the balance of power, may sometimes occur following migration. A husband/father who traditionally wielded the power in the family may find himself stripped of his accustomed role, and role reversal may occur (Ben-David & Lavee, 1994).

In the Arab family, the status of women has always been lower than that of men, especially in the public sphere where males make the decisions. Arab women are expected to be dependent on their husbands and to satisfy their needs. In the private sphere, however, the status of women is much stronger, reflecting a gap between the patriarchal ideology and the actual power of women in the family (Al-Haj, 1989). The influence and role of women in decision making is increasing, particularly among younger couples, and husbands tend to consult their wives about almost everything (Haj-Yahia, 1995). It is still unclear as to whether recent changes in women's status and power in the family are due to sociocultural and sociopolitical developments (Haj-Yahia,

1995) or whether they are a consequence of women's increasing personal resources, such as education and contribution to family income (Al-Haj, 1989).

FAMILY STRESS

Research on Israeli families' stress and coping indicates that they are not different from other families in the Western world. Certain sources of stress exist, however, that are unique to Israel. Most notable are stresses and strains inflicted by the Israeli-Arab conflict—repeated wars, terrorist acts, and other security-related issues. Israel (and before it, Palestine) has lived in a state of war with its neighboring countries for over 100 years. Wars, terrorist acts, and security threats are at the core of Israel's existential reality. In its fifty years of existence, Israel has fought seven wars and suffered a ceaseless chain of hostilities, including repeated shelling of border settlements and numerous terrorist activities inside the country. The armed conflict between Israel and its neighboring Arab countries has resulted in thousands of military and civilian casualties. The percentage of Israeli families who have suffered injury or loss, or who have close relatives or personal friends that have experienced this suffering approaches 100% (Milgram, 1993).

In discussing Israeli families' coping with the stress of war and security threats, it is difficult—and perhaps unwise—to separate between the stress and coping of individuals, families, and the community (Lavee, in press). Due to the small size of the country and the high degree of identification with the victims—whether of a terrorist attack or of border shelling—the fallout from events in any part of the country unleashes nationwide empathy (Good & Ben-David, 1995). At the same time, family coping cannot be understood without viewing the management of stress by the community organized to provide support and intervention to the victims and their families (Ayalon, 1993).

Since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, more than 19,000 soldiers have lost their lives. There are currently more than 18,000 bereaved families. Needless to say, the loss of a spouse, a father, a sibling, or a son has a major effect on the life course of all family members, especially on parents. Research on bereaved parents has shown that a heightened level of bereavement responses is demonstrated beyond the number of years normally expected (Rubin, 1993, 1996). In fact, Rubin and his colleagues (Rubin, Malkinson, & Witztum, 1999) suggest that terms such as *coping*, *adaptation*, and *resolution* are inadequate for describing the experience of the majority of bereaved parents.

Combat stress reaction (CSR) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) have long-lasting effects on the army veteran's life and his family (Solomon,

1993). CSR casualties report more problems in social, family, sexual, and work functioning. In addition, secondary post-traumatic symptoms leading to severe marital distress have been found among wives of CSR veterans (Waysman, Mikulincer, Solomon, & Weisenberg, 1993).

Shelling targeted against border communities, particularly in northern Israel, have been an ongoing source of stress for families over the past 30 years. Most of the research on this population has focused on children's reactions and has shown that children's coping is highly influenced by the community's response. The social cohesiveness of the community was found to moderate children's anxiety (Ziv & Israeli, 1973; Zuckerman-Bareli, 1979) and to provide ground rules for acceptable behavior during crisis situations.

The Gulf War provided a unique opportunity for examining family coping under stress. During a five-week period (January-February, 1991), the civilian population, throughout the country, was exposed to missile attacks with potential chemical weapons, and families were repeatedly confined to hermetically sealed rooms. In research on the entire family as a coping unit (Ben-David & Lavee, 1992; Lavee & Ben-David, 1993) four types of families were identified based on the level of stress, roles, and interaction styles:

Anxious families, characterized by high level of stress, low or no role distribution, and negative interaction style; *Cautious families*, with a high level of stress, clear role allocation, and positive interaction among members; *Confident families*, typified by a relatively low stress level, clear role allocation, little interpersonal interaction with a positive overall family atmosphere; and *Indifferent families*, characterized by a low stress level, no role allocation, and little interaction among family members.

More recent geopolitical developments in the Middle East, namely the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians (1993-2000), and the armed Palestinian *intifada* (uprising) that erupted in September 2000, have given rise to new sources of stress for families, both Jews and Arabs alike (Lavee, Ben-David, & Azaiza, 1997; Shamai, 2001). A new wave of violent terrorist attacks on civilians has been occurring in a variety of urban settings, such as buses, discotheques, restaurants, and open-air markets, killing more than 400 civilians and injuring thousands of others.

Support for families is provided by social workers and psychologists in hospitals, social welfare agencies, and schools, as well as by the National Insurance Institute. Information centers for families are opened in hospitals a few minutes after casualties arrive following a terrorist attack. These information centers, staffed by specially trained personnel, give telephone and face-to-face information as well as initial support for family members. This is followed by more intensive support provided by family professionals who arrive at the hospital shortly after the attack. They assist families of the deceased, escort family

members of the injured to see their loved ones, attend to each family's special needs, and coordinate all contacts between families and hospital staff.

Long-term care and support is provided by the National Insurance Institute to injured and disabled persons, as well as to the dependents and bereaved families of terrorist attack victims. They receive medical care, vocational training, financial aid and rehabilitation allowances, in addition to counseling and treatment from social services. Psychological treatment is also given to trauma victims who were present at the scene and witnessed the atrocities. At the same time, school psychologists, educational counselors, and trained teachers offer support to schoolchildren, who are encouraged to discuss their fears and concerns.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

An analysis of trends and patterns among families in Israel indicates that the family is being pulled in opposite directions by two main forces: the first prods the family toward greater modernization and Westernization, while the other acts to strengthen traditional values. On the one hand, changes have taken place in marriage, family, and divorce patterns, making families more similar to their counterparts in other Western industrialized countries. People are marrying later in life, the acceptance of cohabitation is increasing, families are becoming smaller due to a decline in the average number of children, and the divorce rate is rising, especially among younger cohorts. On the other hand, the family in Israel is stronger and more stable than in other industrialized nations. Families have, on average, more children, a significantly lower divorce rate, more traditional gender roles, and a largely traditional cultural heritage in family lifestyle. These contrasting forces—traditionalism and Westernization in values, practices, and lifestyles—affect all population groups, albeit at a different pace and with different intensity.

The review of family lifestyles, patterns, traditions, customs, and values throughout this article leads to two contrasting generalizations. Despite indications of some convergence among different groups, marked differences still characterize these groups in every aspect of family life.

Our review rejects the notion of the existence of a clear, monolithic Israeli family. A vast diversity in family patterns exists, manifested by a plethora of family values, attitudes toward gender roles, and choices of lifestyles. Clear differences exist between Jewish and Arab families. Among Jewish families, large differences exist between ultra-orthodox and secular families as well as between families of various countries of origin (e.g., North African and Asian countries, Ethiopia, East and West Europe, North and South America). Among

Arab families, marked differences can be found between urban and rural families of different religious affiliations (Moslems, Christians, Druze, and others). These differences are especially evident among the less educated and older generations, and are becoming more narrow among the younger and more educated strata of society. Among both Jews and Arabs, there are families with strong traditional values and lifestyles, while others are characterized by more liberal views and practices. Thus, the patterns and trends in mate selection, cohabitation, marital dynamics, family relationships, divorce, single parenting, parenting practices, gender preferences, and gender roles do not pertain equally to all families. Indeed, there is a wide diversity in norms, customs and family lifestyles, both between and within groups.

Along with these differences, there has been some convergence in the lifestyles of different subgroups during the past five decades—between Jews and Arabs, among Jews of different origins, and among Arabs of different religious affiliations. This convergence is evident in the narrowing gap in marriage and fertility rates, gender preferences, parenting attitudes and practices, women's status in society and in the family, distribution of power, and household division of labor. Within the Jewish population, a large proportion of inter-ethnic marriages and integration in the educational system and in military service have eroded much of the difference between groups. Arab and Jewish families also have become more similar in terms of family structure and lifestyle patterns as a consequence of the increasing educational level of Arab men and women, greater participation of women in the labor force, and frequent contact between Arabs and Jews. The resulting portrait of Israeli families depicts a slow process of convergence while maintaining a diversity of family patterns ranging from traditionalism to modernity.

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