Families in Israel

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Is there a pattern, a form, or a structure of family that can be identified as uniquely Israeli? In what way is this “Israeli family” different from any other family in a similarly modernized, industrialized society? If there is a unique form of Israeli family, is it equally shared by all Israelis, or is it the dominant pattern among some sectors of the population and not among others?

(Shangar-Handelman, 1996, p. 388)

This chapter provides a look at families in Israel. Following Shangar-Handelman (1996) we contend that there is no single, distinct, unique “Israeli family,” but rather there is a diversity of family patterns and lifestyles.

Israel is characterized by a vast diversity in family patterns, manifested by a plethora of family values, attitudes toward gender roles, and choices of lifestyles. Clear differences exist between Jewish and Arab families. 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, family patterns and norms do not pertain equally to all families. Indeed, there is a wide diversity of norms, customs, and family lifestyles, both between and within groups.

1. ISRAELI SOCIETY: AN OVERVIEW

Israel is a small country (20,770 sq km), located in the Middle East. It is flanked by the Medite and Syria and Egypt about 6.5 Jewish and Arabs (Cen.
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This chapter is a revised and updated version of Katz and Lavee (in press).
the Mediterranean Sea on the west, Jordan and Syria on the east, Lebanon on the north, and Egypt on the south. The population is about 6.5 million, of which about 78% are Jewish and the rest are non-Jewish, primarily Arabs (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2002).

Israel is also a young and dynamic country. Its population 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. In 1948, when the State of Israel was established, the population was 873,000. Over the last 50 years, there has been a sixfold increase in the population. Immigrants have arrived from almost every corner of the globe, bringing with them a wide variety of cultures, lifestyles, and family patterns. Two large influxes occurred shortly after Israeli independence was declared: Holocaust survivors from Europe and Jews from Islamic countries (mainly North Africa, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen). The 1950s saw a relatively large wave of immigrants arrive from Europe and North Africa, whereas the 1960s were characterized by immigration from the affluent West (the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom), and the 1970s and 1980s by immigration from the USSR. In the 1990s, there was massive immigration (about 700,000) from the former Soviet Union. Jews from Ethiopia (about 56,000) have immigrated in two waves: first in the mid-1980s and again in the early 1990s.

The Jewish majority today is composed of two main ethnic clusters: "Orientals" or Sephardim (Spanish), who themselves or their ancestors originated from the Near East, North Africa, Yemen, Ethiopia, the Balkans, Iran, Iraq, India, and the Muslim republics of the former Soviet Union; and Ashkenazim, whose origin is in American or European continents. At present, 33.5% of the Jewish population are Asian-African born or children of Asian-African origin; 49% 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, 2002). The Arab population itself is composed of several religious groups: Muslims (75%), Christians (16%), and Druze and others (9%).

This portrayal of the population highlights its pluralistic nature: a mix of Jews and Arabs; different ethnic/religious groups within each of these sectors; different levels of religiosity, ranging from secular to ultra-orthodox among both Jews and Arabs; a variety of countries of origin, traditions, and heritages; and a mix of new immigrants and veteran Israelis.

Despite this diversity, the predominant form of the family in Israel is the traditional nuclear family. The overwhelming majority of couples have children (2.7, on average), and the majority (about 75%) remain married for the entire life cycle. The average size of a household is 3.79. About 62% of the households are composed of couples with their children, and another 20% consist of couples without children (including couples in the empty-nest stage of their family 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 family.

2. PAIRING UP

Dating and Mate Selection

For most Israeli Jews, dating begins during adolescence within peer social groups such as high school, youth movements, and higher education institutions. Military service is one of the main avenues of acquaintance, as service is compulsory for men (3 years) and for women (18-24 months) starting at age 18. After a period of acquaintance that is usually brief,
young people introduce their intended spouses to parents and friends. Shared entertainment, meals in the family setting, and, at times, staying overnight in the home of the boyfriend or girlfriend’s parents are normative.

Two other patterns of mate selection are also common, albeit in a much smaller proportion: arranged marriages within the ultraorthodox population and semiarranged marriages among Arabs. Within the ultraorthodox community, dating is not accepted. The bride’s purity is of the 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 the parents, often with the assistance of traditional “matchmakers,” persons known in the community for their ability and success in arranging suitable matches between unmarried men and women. The couple meets only a few times before marriage, and only in the presence of their family. Usually, the couple accepts the parents’ selection, although they may have 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 done. 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, although dating is not “public.” Free encounters between unmarried men and women in the village are not accepted and are actually prohibited in certain locations, but many couples know each other before they marry and meet outside of the village or away from their home environment. When they decide to marry, the groom’s parents are expected to speak to the prospective bride’s parents “to ask for her hand.” As soon as both partners receive the consent of their families, they announce their engagement. The tradition, therefore, is upheld in some respects but not in others. Arab women today still cannot marry without the consent of their parents and even the consent of brothers and other relatives.

**Cohabitation**

Cohabitation as a prelude to formal marriage is widespread among young Jewish couples, especially the secular and more educated. It is rare among less-educated Jewish couples, and is not practiced among orthodox Jews or Arabs. In a recent survey of a representative sample of 2,000 Jewish respondents, 26% reported having 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).

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). However, cohabitation is not perceived as an alternative to formal marriage. In most cases, couples formalize their relationship after several years, especially when they wish to have children.

**Marriage**

Marriage in Israel is almost universal and has not changed much over time. Among all population groups, men and women alike, less than 3% in time they at Statistics, marriage is that the ma The large- able attac having child- ing factors; with a rep- (Steier et al in the respond- pose of me and 73% I have child- less than 5 are happy- parts. Onl (11.2%), and old al- an un满足 married at

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In all se- mony is t with anyw or more friends, ne- sides. Asi wedding t itself, the music and fessional in household
many marry from decide parents h parties, but not other parents, that they are 50 years old (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2002). However, the average age at marriage is rising, and there are indications that the marriage rate is expected to decline.

The large majority of people have a favorable attitude toward marriage. Apparently, having children is one of the major motivating factors for marriage. Results from a study with a representative sample of 1,159 people (Steier et al., 1998) show that nearly 50% of the respondents believe that the major purpose of marriage today is to have children, and 73% believe that people who want to have children should get married. However, less than 50% believe that married people are happier than their unmarried counterparts. Only a small percentage of people (11.2%), both men and women, young and old alike, believe that it is better to have an unsatisfactory marriage than to not be married at all.

Despite defining themselves as secular, most young couples in Israel accept the set of religious laws and rules and enter into formal (religious) marriages. Only a small minority of Jewish men and women (about 4%) prefer a legal nonreligious marital contract. Because Jewish marriages can only be held through the religious legal system (rabbanut), marriages in civil courts are usually held in neighboring countries (primarily Cyprus). An even smaller minority of couples choose to forgo formal marriage and remain in cohabitation as a permanent lifestyle.

In all sectors of society, the wedding ceremony is usually conducted in large halls, with anywhere from a few hundred to 1,000 or more guests invited, including family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers of both sides. Aside from a relatively brief religious wedding ceremony conducted in the hall itself, the wedding involves catered food, music and dancing, and sometimes also professional performers. Whereas in the past household gifts such as small appliances, linens, kitchen goods, and so forth were the norm, nowadays it is more common for guests to bring money gifts to help defray the wedding costs and to assist the young couple in starting their new life together.

There are various wedding traditions followed by several ethnic groups, primarily of North African and Asian origin, such as the Henna, and other religious ceremonies, such as the Mikveh and groom's Sabbath, practiced by orthodox Jews and by many secular couples as well. The Mikveh is a religious purification ritual, in which the bride is immersed in water prior to the wedding to symbolize her purity and virginity. Following the Mikveh, on the night immediately preceding the wedding ceremony, is the Henna ceremony, a ritual in which the bride's hair, feet, and hands are dyed by red dried leaves to protect against the evil eye. The groom's Sabbath is a religious service that takes place in the synagogue on the Sabbath preceding or following the wedding (depending on one's cultural origin) with the male members of the family, followed by a reception at the groom's family house.

Arab weddings often involve several large parties. The bride's family may hold a large celebration several days before the wedding for the bride to formally part from her female relatives and friends, as she usually joins the groom in his family home after marriage. In addition, the groom's family has a party to welcome the bride into her new family. At a rural wedding celebration, the whole community is often invited. Traditionally, all celebrations, including the reception, meals, and dancing, are held separately for men and women.

3. FERTILITY AND SOCIALIZATION

In 2001 the total fertility for an average Israeli woman was 2.89. However, the birth pattern is not uniform among all groups in
Israel. It is significantly higher among Muslims (4.71 children) and Druze (3.02) than among Jewish and Christian-Arab women (2.59 and 2.46, respectively). In the Jewish population itself, the fertility rate is considerably higher among ultraorthodox women and lowest among secular and highly educated women of Ashkenazi origin. In the Arab population, birth patterns are most significantly shaped by education and other indicators of traditionalism (Peritz & Baras, 1992). It is worthy of note that these birthrates are higher than those in other developed countries. In the United States, for example, the fertility rate is 2.07 children per woman (Central Intelligence Agency, 1998), and in Europe it ranges between 1.2 children per woman in Italy to 1.9 in Ireland (Eurostat, 1997).

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 (3.48) and have more children (2.7) than people in other industrialized countries. Children are highly valued not only by their parents, who usually give their needs top priority, but also by society as a whole. The welfare of children is considered a collective responsibility.

The attitude of Israeli society toward its children is manifested in the policy that all women receive a birth allowance and families receive a monthly children’s allowance and tax deductions depending on the number of children in the family. There are special discounts for large families for public childcare 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 is provided to all mothers and their children up to the age of 3 (Rosenthal, 1994).

As the marriage rate is relatively high and the divorce rate is relatively low, the probability of children growing up in a dual-parent family is high. Ninety percent of children aged 0 to 17 live with their biological or adoptive parents, and an additional 5% live in a reconstituted family that also functions as a dual-parent family. More than 50% of children live in the same household with one or two other children. Only 14.4% of children are the only child in their household, while 33% of children live with three or more siblings (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2002). Thus, most children grow up in households that include other children as well.

The emphasis on children has not prevented women from seeking employment outside the home. The basic assumption of Israeli women from all population categories, including the ultraorthodox, is that family and outside work can be combined. Thus, 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 1, and 67% of mothers with children under the age of 15, were employed (Katz, 1997).

Combining family and job roles is made easier by government policies and by the availability of public and private services. To facilitate the participation of mothers of young children in the labor market, legislation was passed in 1955 granting maternity leave, which enables working mothers to receive their salary while staying home for 12 weeks following delivery. The National Insurance Institute pays for maternity leave and also provides each family with a special grant on the birth of a child. The policy has evolved over the years so that today working mothers can take an additional 9 months of unpaid parental leave without losing their jobs.

Although at-home care for 12 months has never been assigned the explicitly to fathers (1993), Day care for the first 3 months has been provided throughout Israel through labor and welfare services. One of the major benefits of the child-care system in Israel is that it was developed among the middle class, which is the most important group in society, and it is a source of solidarity and group identity. Among the Israeli family, unpaid care is a source of societal bonding.
of unpaid leave without losing their job. Recently, the law providing for a fully paid 3-month maternity leave was changed to parental leave to include the father. We do not yet know how many fathers use this right, to what extent employers are willing to grant it, or the ability of the authorities to enforce it.

Although these policies encourage at-home care by the mother for up to 12 months, the strong family orientation that has never led to a "motherhood cult" that assigns the care of infants and toddlers exclusively to the mother (Azmon & Israeli, 1993). Day care centers that provide full-day care for babies and toddlers from the age of 3 months are widespread (about 1,000) throughout the country. Most of these child-care facilities are run by women's organizations and are subsidized by the Ministry of Labor and Welfare, making them affordable to low-income families and single mothers. Private day care centers, as well as centers run by local authorities, are also available. In addition, large companies and academic institutions often provide on-site day care facilities for working parents. There is generally a positive attitude among parents in Israel toward the use of day care and preschool services, which are commonly believed to enhance rather than impair the child's intellectual, emotional, and social development (Azmon & Israeli, 1993). A few Israeli scholars, however, challenge this belief, arguing that while early child care centers may enhance intellectual and interpersonal capacities, they pay little attention to the emotional dimensions of the children's development (Sagi & Koren-Karie, 1993).

Among Arab families, unlike many Jewish Israeli families, it is very rare to find babies who are left with caregivers, babysitters, or other strangers (Haj-Yahia, 1993). Members of the extended family often help parents fulfill the basic tasks of disciplining and taking care of children. In these families, the role of the father (and other males in the family) is to control and discipline, while the role of the mother (and other females in the family) is to nurture and support the children.

**Parenting Practices**

Although each parent develops his or her own parenting style based on past experiences, beliefs about parenting also exist within a cultural context. Parents often have an ideal image of the "adaptive adult" that guides them in socializing their children (Roer-Strier, 1996). In a multicultural society such as Israel, which is marked by immigration, parenting practices are tied to individual perceptions of family heritage, customs, and norms of behavior relative to the host society. Using a metaphor from the animal world, Roer-Strier (1996) presents three different parenting styles—the "cuckoo," who entrust their children to socializing agents, such as boarding schools or kibbutzim; the "kangaroo," who see themselves as their children's chief socializing agents and tend to raise their children according to the traditions followed in their native culture; and the "chameleons," who adopt bicultural practices by encouraging the child to behave like others outside of the home but to behave at home according to the parents' culture of origin.

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 18, parenting often becomes even more intense than previously (Azmon & Israeli, 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).
4. GENDER ROLES

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 are also 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, the ancient Jewish law, which serves as the legal authority in matters of marriage and divorce, imposes a different legal status on men and women.

Educational opportunities are largely equal for men and women. The median number of years of schooling is 12.3 for men and women alike (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2002). 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 11.0 years in 2001. In the past two decades, the number of women in higher education has doubled, while the number of men has remained constant. By 2001, 38.9% of women and 38.2% of men had postsecondary education.

Similar progress is also evident in the increased proportion of women's participation in the labor force, which has increased steadily from 22 to 25% in the 1950s and 1960s to 48% in 2000. These rates, however, are not equally distributed among all ethnic groups. Among Muslim women, only 13% participate in the labor force, compared with 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.

The progress in gender equality is not reflected in the type of occupations, organizational status, or incomes of men and women. 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. 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 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 (1981), and the Equal Opportunity Law (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 (1964) provided that an employer is required to pay female employees a wage equal to that of male employees in the same workplace for work that is essentially equal. In reality, however, the law has not succeeded in achieving a redistribution of wages between the sexes.

5. MARITAL SATISFACTION

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What are the characteristics that make relationships work and last? Additional research has focused on the role of commitment, trust, and satisfaction in marital functioning. In the context of marriage, marital satisfaction refers to how married women and men rate their relationships with their partners. Studies have shown that marital satisfaction is a key predictor of marital stability and happiness. Marital satisfaction is also influenced by factors such as communication, conflict resolution, and shared values and beliefs.

Similar studies have been conducted on the role of marital satisfaction in determining the quality of relationships with children. Marital satisfaction is often associated with better parenting skills and more positive relationships with children. Conversely, high marital conflict and low marital satisfaction can lead to negative outcomes for children, such as behavioral problems and academic difficulties.

In conclusion, marital satisfaction is a crucial aspect of marital functioning. Marital satisfaction is influenced by various factors, including communication, conflict resolution, and shared values and beliefs. Studies have shown that marital satisfaction is a key predictor of marital stability and happiness, and is also associated with better parenting skills and positive relationships with children. However, the relationship between marital satisfaction and other factors such as income and education is an area that requires further research.
5. MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS

Marital Satisfaction

What are the most important components of marital satisfaction? Both husbands and wives tend to associate healthy marital relationships with a sense of bonding, caring, and feeling of unity and companionship, followed by mutual understanding, respect, and trust between the partners (Lavee, 1997). Additional ingredients of marital satisfaction mentioned by respondents were satisfactory sexual relationship, 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 in a study of long-term marriages (Sharlin, 1996). Sharlin found the most frequent motives for staying together were love and appreciation of closeness and comfort with each other, enjoyment of one's lifestyle and reluctance to change it, a belief that marriage is a partnership for life, and the perceptions that "we complement each other in spite of occasional tensions" and that "our shared experiences have drawn us closer together." At the same time, many long-term couples stay together for other reasons. When asked about crucial motives for staying together during marital crises, social conventions (e.g., "marriage is a partnership for life") and responsibility for children were just as frequently mentioned "marriage keepers" as love.

In general people tend to express satisfaction with their marital quality. In a study of 1,504 Jewish men and women ages 18 and over (Shaked, 1994), 74% of the men and 61% of the women reported being very satisfied with their marital relationships. Only 7% of men and women reported being distressed. The respondents also reported a fairly high satisfaction with their sex life (67% and 72% of the men and women, respectively, being very satisfied).

At the same time, more women than men (14% and 7%, respectively) expressed a marked dissatisfaction with their sex life. Educational level was associated with sexual satisfaction for women (more dissatisfaction among women with low education), but not for men (Shaked, 1994).

There is little data 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 Muslims, 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 Muslims and lowest among women in a mixed Arab-Jewish urban community.

Division of Labor and Power Distribution

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 than among 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. Generally speaking, the household division of labor has not changed in parallel with the massive entrance of mothers into the labor force, and has remained largely traditional. The strong emphasis on maintaining family ties, on having two or more children, and on caring for elderly parents results in differential loads for women and men. Women are normatively responsible for the functioning of the household, for childcare, and for maintaining ties with kin. 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 (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 (Israel, 1994).

Interestingly the segregated division of labor and the additional burden incurred on women are not necessarily perceived by them as unfair. Lavee and Katz (2002) found that gender role ideology is an important moderating factor between household division of labor and perceived fairness and marital satisfaction. In particular, perceived fairness in the division of labor and the level of marital satisfaction were highest among couples with the most segregated role division (Muslim Arabs) and lowest among families with a more egalitarian role division (Jews and Christian Arabs).

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 childcare and education as well as family leisure, whereas men are more dominant in decisions regarding family finances, car purchase, 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).

In the Arab family, the status of women has always been lower than that of men. Arab women are expected to be dependent on their husbands and to satisfy their needs. The status of women is especially lower in the public sphere, and decisions at the community level are mainly a male domain. 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 or whether they are a consequence of women’s increasing personal resources, such as education and contribution to family income (Al-Haj, 1989; Haj-Yahia, 1995).

6. FAMILY STRESSES

For the most part, Israeli families face life challenges similar to those faced by families in other industrialized countries: normative, developmental transitions, as well as non-normative life events; chronic stressors and economic strains; daily hassles due to conflicting demands of workplace and home; and strains and stresses of family relationships, including intergenerational conflicts, marital crises, divorce, and violence. There are, however, some specific stressors that are inflicted by living in a conflict-prone environment.

WARS, TERROR, AND SECURITY

Israel (a country at war for over 30 years) has a ceaseless state of emergency, and Israeli society is infused by a sense of constant insecurity. The Arab-Israeli conflict has been a ceaseless state of emergency, with thousands of fatalities, and the possibility of a nuclear confrontation. The stress of living in a conflict-prone environment has its toll on the well-being of Israeli families. The stress of living in a conflict-prone environment is exacerbated by the constant fear of terrorist attacks, which is a common experience among Israeli families. Since the 1993 agreement, the number of terrorist attacks has increased dramatically, leading to a rise in anxiety and stress among Israeli families.
are, however, certain sources of stress unique to Israel. Most notable are stresses and strains inflicted by the Israeli-Arab conflict—repeated wars, terrorist acts, and other security-related issues. In addition, stresses for immigrant families may be viewed as characteristic of Israeli society because these families constitute a large proportion of the society.

**Wars, Terrorism, and Security-Related Stress**

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 50 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 who 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 distinguish between the stress and coping of individuals, families, and the community. Due to the small size of the country and the high degree of identification with the victims—whether a terrorist attack or 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 normal range 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, Mikułincer, Solomon, & Weisenberg, 1993).

Shelling targeted against border communities, particularly in northern Israel, has 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-Barchi, 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 5-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: (1) anxious families, characterized by high level of stress, low or no role distribution, and negative interaction style; (2) cautious families, with a high level of stress, clear role allocation, and positive interaction among members; (3) confident families, typified by a relatively low stress level, clear role allocation, and little interpersonal interaction with a positive overall family atmosphere; and (4) 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 (Ben-David & Lavee, 1996; Lavee, Ben-David, & Azaiza, 1997; Lev, 1998; Shamai & Lev, 1999). 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.

**Immigration and Immigrant Families**

As was noted earlier in this chapter, Israel has been shaped by massive waves of immigration from all corners of the globe. More than 700,000 immigrants arrived from the former Soviet Union in the last decade alone, and about 56,000 immigrants came from Ethiopia in the mid-1980s and early 1990s. Although immigration is not unique to Israel, its proportions require family professionals to attend to the wide range of difficulties faced by immigrant families.

Immigration poses major stress for the families involved in a number of ways: movement from one geographical location to another, often requiring changes in climate and lifestyle; disengagement from a familiar network of social relations, with the disruption of long-standing ties and the accompanying sense of loneliness, isolation, and lack of support; and the need to abandon old norms and values and adopt new ones (Levenbach & Lewak, 1995; Shuval, 1993).

Research on immigrant children, adolescents, adults, and the elderly, primarily those who have from the indicated logical dis following stressors: stressors related to health (Ritman, 1998). Interpersonal dissatisfaction, with their Schwartz, and psychological primarily cultural difficulties.

To ease many immigrants' integration, Katz and Ired two approaches: one holds, for reported in intergenerational extent, cultural adjustment and family relationships.
who have immigrated in the past decade from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia, indicated that they suffer heightened psychological distress for a long period of time following migration. The most significant stressors are material-related, followed by stressors relating to culture, information, and health (Risner, Modai, & Ponizovsky, 2000). Compared with their Israeli-born counterparts, immigrant adolescents express less satisfaction with their lives (Minsky, Bar-On, Drainman, & Peri, 2002), which is associated with their perceived pressure to assimilate with the host society (Roccas, Horenczyk, & Schwartz, 2000). For the elderly, adjustment and psychological well-being are associated primarily with expressive difficulties and cultural differences (Ron, 2001).

To ease material and economic difficulties, many immigrants choose to live in multi-generational households (70% of the elderly immigrants from the former Soviet Union). Katz and Lowenstein (1999), who have studied two adult generations in shared households, found that the best adjustment was reported by married older immigrants who received formal support. Past and current intergenerational solidarity and, to some extent, current family functioning affect adjustment among the older generation but hardly affect the younger generation.

Immigration often affects interpersonal relationships in the family—between marital partners as well as between parents and children. Differences between family members in their willingness to immigrant and differences in their rate of absorption sometimes intensify interpersonal conflicts. New work conditions and living arrangements create shifts in patterns of closeness-distance regulation and changes in patterns of conflict resolution (Ben-David & Laviee, 1994). Additionally, migration often results in changes in family structure and a shift in the balance of power, both between spouses and between generations (Sharlin & Elshanskaya, 1997). For example, a father who traditionally wielded the power in the family may find himself stripped of his accustomed role, and role reversal may occur as children become "socializing agents" and mediators in their parents' relations with authorities.

7. DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

In the past three decades, the crude rate of divorce (per 1,000 population) increased from 0.9 and 0.5 for Jews and Muslims, respectively, in the 1970s to 1.8 and 1.2 in the mid-1990s. The difference between Jews and Muslims is best reflected in the divorce/marriage ratio, which indicates the number of divorces per number of marriages in a given year. In 1995 the divorce/marriage ratio for Jewish couples was 32%, whereas for Muslims it was 11%. Interestingly, the crude divorce rate and divorce/marriage ratio for Muslims in the mid-1990s resembles those of the Jewish population in Israel in 1970 (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2002). These figures point to a slow decline in marital stability, especially since the mid-1980s (Katz & Peres, 1993). However, the divorce rate is still significantly lower than it is in most industrialized countries. In the United States, for instance, the divorce rate in 1996 was 4.3 (National Center for Health Statistics, 1998).

In a follow-up study of the entire cohort of marriages in 1964, less than 15% have divorced in a 20-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, and among Jewish couples, those of European-American origin divorce more than those of Asian-African origin (Peres & Katz, 1991).

The majority of people (nearly 63%) believe that divorce is the best solution for
couples who are unable to resolve their conflicts, and 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 has 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 than by women, and by older persons (age 56 or over) than by the young (age 35 or less) (Steier et al., 1998).

Divorce Law and Customs

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 (1953), all matters of marriage and divorce have been delegated to the religious courts of the various communities—rabbinical courts for Jews, Sharia 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 Shariviski, 1993.)

The Muslim courts also contend with a dual legal system composed of religious law and unofficial custom. Divorce in Muslim law can be effected in any of three ways (Al-Karnawi & Graham, 1998; Cohen & Savaya, 1997). The first is for the husband to declare the irrevocable talaq three times in the presence of two witnesses, after which the process is completed in a religious court. This option is not legitimate in Israeli law and is not commonly practiced. The second is when husband and wife both agree to the divorce and the woman returns the bride-price (Mohn) his family paid for her. The third is for either the husband or the wife to file a court suit for divorce.

Remarriage

With the rise of the divorce rate, Israel, like other modern societies, has witnessed an increase in second marriages—from 7,830 couples in the 1970s to 13,314 in the late 1990s. About 13% of all marriages in 1999 were couples in which either the groom or the bride, or both, were divorced, compared with 8% in the 1970s (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2002). Divorced or widowed men are twice as likely to remarry as are women. In 2000 the most prevalent pattern of remarriage (38.5%) was between divorced men and never-married women, followed by couples in which both spouses previously divorced (32.2%). In contrast, only 20% of remarriages were between divorced women and never-married men. Remarriages of widowed men composed about 6% of all remarriages, and those who

Analyzi patterns of found that second marriages were common, and that people who were the instability mutual aid life experience.

8 & 9. 11 Relative to still a young population, with 16% having a 4% of the older. For elderly people, marriage display a major decline in expectations (world), and most notable comes from the 1990s' tributaries population. The crisis is also diffuse and differences share in it. Of those,
and those of widowed women were 4% of those who remarried in 2000.

Analyzing data on the stability of different patterns of marriage, Katz and Peres (1995) found that the divorce rates are higher among second marriages than first marriages. Are there certain patterns of remarriage (i.e., combination of groom's and bride's previous marital status) that are more prone to divorce following remarriage? Katz and Peres postulated that marriages of previously divorced people would be most at risk for divorce. Surprisingly, they found that marriages between widows and never-married men were the least stable. They explained the instability of such a pairing on the basis of mutual adjustment problems due to different life experiences.

8 & 9. KINSHIP AND AGING

Relative to other modern societies, Israel is still a young society. Only about 10% of its population are aged 65 or more, compared with 16% to 18% in European countries. However, the total population has been growing older in the past five decades: In 1948 only 4% of the population was 65 years of age or older. Furthermore, about 40% of the Israeli elderly population is over 75 years of age, an eightfold increase since 1948. Three factors play a major role in the aging of Israeli society: a decline in the fertility rate, an increase in life expectancy (which is among the highest in the world), and an influx of elderly immigrants. Most notably, the age structure of the newcomers from the former Soviet Union during the 1990s is marked by their older age, contributing significantly to growth in the elderly population (Brodsky, 1998).

The composition of the elderly population also differs by sociocultural groups. While Jews comprise 80% of the population, their share in the elderly population is about 94%. Of those, only 6% are Israeli-born, and the rest immigrated from Europe and America (70%) or from Asian-African countries (24%) (Brodsky, 1998). Among Arabs and recent immigrant Jews (primarily from the former Soviet Union), the elderly are noted for a higher disability rate than those of the veteran Jewish population (22%, 14%, and 8%, respectively) (Beer, 1996). Since these two groups (Arabs and new immigrants) are also more economically disadvantaged, they are unable to purchase the services they need and are therefore forced to rely primarily on their families for assistance.

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 toward 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. For example, many grandparents care for their grandchildren while the parents are working or on vacation. They also provide financial and other tangible support, such as preparing meals and shopping. As they grow older and frailer, elderly people are commonly cared for by their children. People believe that good and supportive family relations greatly influence the quality of life of the aged. The overwhelming majority of children of the elderly 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. Even though 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: Sixty-eight percent of elderly Arabs live with their family (compared with 18% of the Jewish elderly), most of them with their children (Brodsky, 1998).

Until recently, there were no nursing homes for the elderly in the Arab sector in Israel. However, recent changes, primarily the rise in young Arab women's participation in the labor force, have forced families of disabled elderly to seek formal support provided by the state (Azaiza & Brodsky, 1998). For example, following the Community Long-Term Care Insurance Law (1988), 11% of the Arab elderly today receive such services. Azaiza and Brodsky (1998) express the fear that formal services may harm the existing delicate intergenerational fabric and suggest that newly developed services for the Arab elderly must find a balance between the familial and the public care systems.

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 & Naor, 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.

Thus, it appears that the extent of informal support to the elderly in Israel depends on each individual's family status, living arrangements, and proximity to family members, as well as children's values and beliefs regarding who is responsible for elderly care. Many families expect to keep elderly relatives at home, caring for them themselves. 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 (Katz, Lowenstein, Prilutzky, & Melhousen-Hassoen, 2003).

11. SPECIAL TOPICS: THE FAMILY IN THE KIBBUTZ

Perhaps nothing is as uniquely Israeli as the kibbutz. This type of settlement also has been unique in terms of family roles and functions. We therefore conclude this chapter with a discussion of the family in the kibbutz.

The first kibbutz was founded in 1909 and others were created in the following years. The early kibbutzim were relatively small collectives (kibutzim) that gradually evolved into the larger and more extended communities. By the late 20th century, there were more than 200 kibbutzim in Israel, having a total population of more than 100,000.

The early pioneers of the kibbutz movement wished to create a collective society that strived to achieve personal independence under conditions of perfect equality. They sought to discourage individualism, abolish gender inequality, and bring up a new type of person.
person who would be socialized to live communal life. Within this collectivistic ideology, the family was viewed as a competing force of influence that might reduce identification with the collective (Talmon, 1972). The kibbutz community was regarded as a “collective parent” that is committed to satisfying the needs of each and every child without the mediation of the family (Aviezer, Sagi, & van Ijzendoorn, 2000).

The kibbutz family has attracted much attention on the part of social scientists in the past 50 years (Beit-Hallahmi, 1981; Ben-Rafael & Weitman, 1984). In the early days, kibbutz ideology and practices were described as antifamilistic (Talmon, 1972): the absence of formal weddings; the discouraging of spouses from spending their free time together; the rejection of symbols of family ties; and the delegation of childcare to the collective. Communal child-rearing was seen as a major task for the whole commune.

The kibbutz family has given up its economic production and consumption functions as well as most of its socialization function. Family functions such as food preparation, laundry, childcare, and socialization were accorded to the collective. Families did not commonly have meals together, as adults ate in the communal dining room and children had their meals in children’s houses. However, the founders’ philosophy did not abolish the family altogether (Talmon, 1972). The family did exist in a psychological sense; it provided physical and emotional intimacy and an exclusive subunit separate from the larger group.

Up until the 1950s, collective sleeping for children away from their parents constitutes the most distinctive characteristic of kibbutz child-rearing practices. Children spent most of their time, ate their meals, bathed, and slept at night in much the same way as they would in family homes. Family time was spent in the parents’ dwelling in designated hours and children returned to the children’s house for their night sleep (Aviezer et al., 2002).

The 1950s and 1960s were marked by a change in the balance between the collective and family life (Irving, 1966). The kibbutz has become a family-oriented society and the family has regained more socialization roles (Palgi, 1991). Mother-child interaction during infancy was encouraged and there was a growing campaign in favor of family-based sleeping arrangements. In the 1970s and 1980s, the family has become dominant in kibbutz life. Familistic trends were supported by growing economic prosperity, which enabled improved family housing, and by weakened ideological identification of young members (Lavi, 1990). The family has regained functions in the areas of consumption and socialization and an increasing number of kibbutzim changed to home sleeping.

More recently, a privatization process has “normalized” the kibbutz family, turning it into a “regular” household that is responsible for most of its own functions and services (Palgi, 1997). The family-based sleeping arrangement has become the norm. The communal dining hall has ceased to be the only place where meals are prepared and consumed, and families eat together, away from the rest of the commune. Thus, the kibbutz upbringing, which began with a sense of distrust in parental capabilities, evolved into crediting the family with the primary authority over the care of children (Aviezer et al., 2002).

Over the years, the extended family has become an important component of the kibbutz community, with several generations and several separate household units within the community maintaining daily contact. The kibbutz has become not just a community of families, but a community of extended families as well. This has been the final victory of the family over the historical antifamilistic ideology (Beit-Hallahmi, 1981).
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Israel is a small country marked by cultural diversity. This country, shaped by massive waves of immigration from more than 70 countries around the world, as well as by a mix of Jewish and Arab populations, is characterized by many languages, traditional family patterns alongside modern lifestyles, the influence of Western culture together with Middle-Eastern heritage, and values and practices ranging from highly orthodox religious ones to secular ones.

Despite this diversity 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 interethnic 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.

Analysis of changes in marriage and family patterns over the past five decades shows that families have become 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.

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