Chapter 10

Families in Israel: Traditions and Transitions

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Abstract

This chapter provides a look at families in Israel in terms of demographic characteristics and trends, as well as major patterns of lifestyle, values, and practices. We begin with a discussion of the location and population of Israel. Following a general introductory presentation of families in Israel, a variety of particular components of family life are reviewed. In the first section, Couple Formation and Marital Dynamics, we cover laws and practices in dating, mate selection, cohabitation, marriage, and marital dissolution. For example, while some marriages are still arranged, most people select their own partners and the rate of cohabitation is increasing. The divorce rate has been increasing but still remains low for an industrialized country. The majority of people have favorable attitudes about marriage and more than 95 percent marry at some time in their lives. A discussion of family formation in the second section focuses primarily on the place and role of children and parenting practices. Among other aspects, we note that government policies and the availability of public and private services makes combining family and employment easier. The third section deals with issues of families and gender, including opportunities for women and men in Israeli society, household division of labor, and power distribution. While Israel has an image of being an egalitarian society, in reality there is much gender role segregation and differences in power and opportunities. In the next section we discuss some unique characteristics of stress in Israel and its impact on families. In particular, the effects of living under continuous war-related stress and security threat are examined by reviewing research on loss and bereavement, shelling of border communities, and survivors of terrorist acts, as well as support provided for these families at the national and community levels. The next section covers families and aging. The great majority of elderly people in Israel live in close proximity to at least one of their children, and maintain contact on a daily basis, either in person or by phone. People believe that good and supporting family relations greatly influence the quality of life of the aged. Within Arab society in Israel, the extended family is still the basic social unit responsible for the care and support of aged family members. Finally, we discuss multigenerational household arrangements among rural Arabs and new immigrants from the former Soviet Union as other family forms.

We point out in this chapter that families in Israel are being pulled in opposite directions by two main forces—one toward greater modernization and Westernization, while the other acts to strengthen traditional values. Despite indications of some convergence among different groups, marked differences still characterize these groups in every aspect of family life. While there has been some convergence in the lifestyles of different subgroups and although the nuclear family form predominates, there is no pattern that can be defined as “the” Israeli family. Consequently, diversity and “other” family situations are presented throughout the chapter. A few remarks on diversity and change in family patterns in Israel, along with possible future directions, conclude the chapter.
Chapter 10

The Family in Israel: Between Tradition and Modernity

Yoav Lavee and Ruth Katz

Introduction and Overview

Israel is a small country marked by cultural diversity. Shaped by massive waves of immigration from more than seventy countries, as well as by a mix of Jewish and Arab populations, Israel 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 to secular. A review of family life in Israel therefore must consider the diversity within the society—the uniqueness of various family lifestyles in different ethnic and religious groups.

In discussing major trends and patterns of families in Israel, a hybrid comparative perspective is adopted. This includes 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, with different groups experiencing these processes at different paces. Overall however, families in Israel continue 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.

Location and Population

Israel is a small country (20,770 square kilometers, slightly smaller than the U.S. state of New Jersey), located on the Middle East continental bridge between Asia and Africa. It is flanked by 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 6.8 million, of which about 80 percent are Jewish and the rest are non-Jewish, primarily Arabs (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2004).

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. Modern Jewish settlement began in the latter part of the 19th century, coinciding with the massive emigration of Jews from Eastern Europe, the United States, the British Commonwealth, and Latin America. Another large wave from Europe occurred with the rise of Nazism in the 1930s. In 1948, when the
State of Israel was established, the population was 873,000. Over the last 50 plus years, there has been a six-fold increase in the population. Immigrants have arrived from almost every corner of the globe, bringing with them a variety of cultures, lifestyles, and family patterns.

Two large influxes occurred shortly after Israeli independence was declared in 1948: 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. 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 *Sepharadim* (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 is one group. The second group is *Ashkenazim*, whose origin is in American or European continents (Smooha, 1993). At present, 30 percent of the Jewish population are Asian-African born or children of Asian-African origin; 38 percent are European-American born or children of American-European origin; and 32 percent were born in Israel to Israeli-born parents (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2004). The Arab population itself is composed of several religious groups—Muslims (82%), Christians (9%), and Druze and others (9%).

This portrayal of the population highlights its pluralistic nature. There is 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 heritage; and a mix of new immigrants and veteran Israelis.

Families in Israeli Context

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 (2.9, on the average), and the majority (about 75%) remain married for the entire life cycle. The average size of a household is 3.37. More than 64 percent of the households are composed of couples with their children, and another 17 percent consist of couples without children (including couples in the empty nest stage of their family life cycle). Only 8.3 percent of the households are composed of a single parent and her or his children. Nearly all family units live in separate households but remain in close contact with their extended family. However, in a little more than five percent of the households—primarily newcomers from the former Soviet Union and Arab families—the family lives with other relatives or the household consists of two or more families (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2004).
It is important to note that these numbers do not reflect variations among socio-cultural groups in Israel, such as Jews and Arabs, nor do they reflect changes over time. Therefore, some of the more salient variations across time and between groups are examined, focusing primarily on three important family aspects: 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 four percent are never married by the time they are 50 years old (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2004). However, the average age at marriage is rising, and there are indications that the marriage rate is expected to decline. Periodic indices of the “marriage likelihood” provide estimated future rates of marriage if the current behavior of men and women continues. These indices indicate that the likelihood of marriage for Jewish men and women by the end of their fertility period has decreased from 98 percent in the 1970s to 80 percent for men and 83 percent for women in the 1990s. Among Arab men and women, these likelihood indices remain above 90 percent (DellaPergola, 1993).

Couples are getting married later today than in the 1960s. However, this change in marital age is not uniform for all groups. In the early 1960s, the average age at marriage was 26.4 and 22.0 for Jewish men and women, respectively, while Muslims’ average marital age was 23.5 for men and 19.7 for women. During the following three decades, age at marriage did not change much for Jewish men, but it rose by about three years for Jewish women. In 2002 the age at marriage for Jewish men and women was 27.3 and 25.0, respectively. In the Arab population, the average age at marriage in 2002 was 26.4 and 21.7 for Arab men and women, respectively. Thus, in the Jewish population, the average difference between marrying men and women has declined over the past three decades from 4.4 years to 2.3 years, whereas for Muslims it has remained at about four years.

The divorce rates have risen in all groups since the 1970s. As Figure 10.1 shows, the crude rate of divorce increased from 0.9 and 0.5 for Jews and Muslims, respectively, in the 1970s to 2.0 and 1.1 in 2000. 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 2000, the divorce/marriage ratio for Jewish couples was 32.6, whereas for Muslims it was 12.1. Interestingly, the crude divorce rate and divorce/marriage ratio for Moslems in 2000 resembles those of the Jewish population in Israel in 1970 (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2004). These figures point to a slow decline in marital stability, especially since the mid-1980s (Katz and Peres, 1995). 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). Of those who married in the early to the mid-1970s, nearly 19 percent divorced within 25 years, and of those who married in the early 1980s, 14 percent divorced within 15 years. Among those who married in 1990, about 13 percent divorced within ten years (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2004).
Examination of changes in fertility patterns across the 50 plus year period of Israeli statehood points to an interesting double process of convergence: one between the two main Jewish ethnic groups—Sepharadic and Ashkenazi—and the second between Israel’s two major religious groups—Jews and Muslims (see Figure 10.2). Historically, Jewish women of Sepharadic (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 30 years, however, the fertility rate of women of Asian-African origin 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 Jewish Israeli fertility pattern at 2.7 children has emerged (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2004). However, 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 and Baras, 1992).

Changes in fertility rates over the years are also seen among Muslim, Christian, and Druze families. Birth patterns among Arab women are most significantly shaped by education and other indicators of traditionalism (Peritz and 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, Christians have the lowest fertility rate of the total population (2.3).

Despite the changes, the fertility rate in Israel—among both Jews and non-Jews—is still higher than the fertility rates in other developed countries. In the United States, for example, the fertility rate is 2.06 children/woman (The World Factbook, 2000), and in Europe it ranges between 1.2 children/woman in Italy to 1.9 in Ireland (Eurostat, 1997).

Laws, Norms, 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, Shari’a courts for Muslims, and corresponding institutions for adherents of other religions, including Christians and Druze.²

The law also makes divorce harder to obtain, especially for women, because 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. Either a civil court or a rabbinical court can adjudicate all issues of property division and child custody, 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. Because 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 Justice, 1999; Povarsky, 1994; Rosen-Zvi, 1990; and Sharshevski, 1993).

The Muslim courts also contend with a dual legal system comprised of religious law and unofficial custom. Ancient customs that predate Islamic law coexist with other customs that, having developed over the past few decades, reflect more liberal attitudes toward gender roles. The choice between custom and law, and between different customs, 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 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 (three 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 ultra-orthodox population and semi-arranged marriages among Arabs. Within the ultra-orthodox Jewish community, dating is not accepted. 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 old). Men, too, are expected to marry at an early age because marriage is the only permissible avenue for a sexual outlet. The parents arrange marriages, 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 actually prohibited in certain locations. However, 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 in order “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. Still, Arab women cannot marry without the consent of their parents and even the consent of brothers and other relatives.

Cohabitation

Attitudes toward cohabitation are changing. Today, nearly 63 percent of Jewish Israelis believe that “it is better for a couple who plan to get married to live together first,” and more than 60 percent approve of cohabitation even if the couple does not plan to get married (Steier, Oren, Elias, and Lewin-Epstein, 1998). These attitudes are considerably more prevalent among younger people (age 35 years or less) than among people aged 56 or over (about 70 and 44 percent, respectively). 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.

No official statistics are available on the prevalence of cohabitation in this country. However, in a recent study of a representative sample of 2000 Jewish respondents, 26 percent reported having lived with their present spouse before marriage and 19 percent reported they had lived with a partner whom they did not marry (Katz, 2001). As expected, the study indicated that cohabitation is associated with younger age, higher education, and a secular orientation. Cohabitation, however, 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

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 negligible minority of Jewish men and women prefer a legal non-religious marital contract, and even fewer prefer to forfeit 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 between a few hundred to a thousand 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 professional performers. 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 gifts of money to help defray the wedding costs as well as to assist the young couple in starting their new life together.

There are various wedding traditions (such as the Henna) followed by several ethnic groups—primarily of North African and Asian origin—and 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 before the wedding to symbolize her purity and virginity. Following the Mikveh, on the night immediately preceding the wedding ceremony, the Henna ceremony is 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. It 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. A reception at the groom’s family house follows.

Arab weddings often involve several large parties. The bride’s family might hold a great 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.

Marriage Values and Components of Marital Strength

The large majority of people have a favorable attitude toward marriage and eventually more than 95 percent of men and women marry at some time in their lives. Apparently, having children is one of the major motivating factors for marriage. Results from a study with a representative sample of 1159 people showed that nearly 50 percent of the respondents believe that the major purpose of marriage today is to have children (Steier et al., 1998). Likewise, 73 percent think that people who want to have children should get married. However, less than 50 percent believe that
married people are happier than their unmarried counterparts. This belief about marital happiness was expressed more frequently by men (53%) than by women (38%), and more by people aged 56 or over than by younger people (60 percent and 36 percent, respectively). Only a small percentage of people (11%), 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.

The values that people hold regarding marriage and marital relationships can be inferred from the reasons that people give when asked what keeps them together. The most frequent motives for staying together are 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, 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 are just as frequently mentioned “marriage keepers” as is love.

Another way of examining marriage values is by the perceived components of marital quality. Both husbands and wives associate healthy marital relationships with love (sense of bonding, caring, and feeling of unity and companionship), mutual understanding, respect, and trust between the partners. These attributes are followed by satisfactory sexual relationship, cooperation, communication, and compatibility (that is, similar mentality, worldview and character, as well as mutual leisure and social interests) (Lavee, 1997). Similar ingredients of marital satisfaction are expressed in other studies (Sharlin, 1996).

In general, people tend to express satisfaction with their marital quality. In a study of 1504 Jewish men and women aged 18 years and over, 74 percent of the men and 61 percent of the women reported being very satisfied with their marital relationships (Shaked, 1994). Only seven percent of men and women reported being distressed. The respondents also reported satisfaction with their sex life (67 percent and 72 percent of the men and women, respectively, being very satisfied). At the same time, more women than men (14 percent and seven percent, 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. However, a comparative study of various ethnic/religious groups in Israel indicated that marital satisfaction varies positively with the degree of traditionalism—the more traditional the community, the higher the perceived quality of the relationship (Lavee, 1995). 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 remain even after statistically controlling for
educational level, economic situation, level of religiosity, and number of children. Furthermore, marital satisfaction among Arab couples is highest among rural Muslims and lowest among women in a mixed Arab-Jewish urban community (Katz, Lavee, and Azaiza, 1998).

**Marital Dissolution**

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

As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, the divorce rate, although rising, is still relatively low. In a follow-up study of the entire cohort of marriages in 1964, less than 15 percent had divorced in a 20 year period (DellaPergola, 1993). However, a comparison of couples who had been married in different years shows a steady increase in the divorce rate. The Jewish population is significantly more prone to divorce than are Arabs. Among Jewish couples, those of European-American origin divorce more than do those of Asian-African origin (Peres and Katz, 1991). Despite the rise in divorce, however, marital breakups are not as common as they are in most industrialized countries.

**Families and 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 percent of Israelis believe that childless people have an “empty life,” and more than 80 percent 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 Place and Role of Children**

The attitude of Israeli society toward its children manifests itself in the policy that all women received a birth allowance. Likewise, 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 child-care and for summer camps, as well as for municipal taxes (Safir, 1991). The Health Ministry provides mother and child health clinics throughout the country, in
which free pre- and postnatal care is provided to all mothers and their children up to the age of three years (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 quite high. More than ninety percent of children aged birth to 17 years live with their biological or adoptive parents and only 7.3 percent live in a single-parent household. However, due to a decrease in fertility among all population groups, the average size of Jewish households has slightly decreased, from 3.9 in 1970 to 3.65 in 2003. In Arab families, the average household size in 2003 was 5.21. More than 50 percent of children live in the same household with one or two other children. There is only one child in 14 percent of households, while 33 percent of children live with three or more siblings (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2004). 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 ultra-orthodox, is that family and outside work can be combined. Thus, employment of mothers with young children is a rather common phenomenon in Israel. In 2003, about 66 percent of mothers whose youngest child was under the age of one, and 76 percent of mothers with children under the age of 15 years, were employed (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2004).

Government policies and the availability of public and private services makes combining family and job roles easier. In order to facilitate the participation of mothers of young children in the labor market, legislation was passed in 1955 granting maternity leave. This enables employed mothers to receive their salary while staying home for 12 weeks following delivery. The National Insurance Institute pays for maternity leave and provides each family with a special grant on the birth of a child. The policy has evolved over the years so that today, employed mothers can take an additional nine months of unpaid leave without losing their job. Recently, the law providing for a fully paid three-month maternity leave was changed to parental leave in order to include the father. It is not yet known 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 has never led to a “motherhood cult” that assigns the care of infants and toddlers exclusively to the mother (Azmon and Izraeli, 1993). Day-care centers that provide full care for babies and toddlers from the age of three months are widespread throughout the country (there are about 1000 centers). Most of these 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 and Izraeli, 1993). A few Israeli scholars, however, challenge this belief, arguing that while early child-care centers might enhance intellectual and interpersonal capacities, they pay little attention to the emotional dimensions of the children’s development (Sagi and Koren-Karie, 1993).

**Parenting Practices**

Although each parent develops his or her own parenting style based on their past experiences, beliefs about parenting also exist within a cultural context. Parents often have an ideal image of the “adaptive adult,” which guides them in socializing their children (Roer-Strier, 1996). In a multicultural society like 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 “kangaroo,” the “cuckoo,” and the “chameleon” styles. These metaphors are used here to discuss parenting styles among various groups in Israel.

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, could be risking their family cohesion and sense of continuity between generations.

The kangaroo style reflects 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 fulfill their role accordingly with confidence and consistency. These families 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 might influence their children otherwise (Roer-Strier, 1996). Parenting of this style is 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 can be found among Arab families concerned with preserving the Arab culture amid surrounding Western influences. Children are socialized to obey their parents and submit to their demands. Unlike many Jewish Israeli families, it is very rare to find Arab babies being left with caregivers, babysitters, or other strangers (Haj-Yahya, 1995). 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.
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.

Components of all three parenting strategies exist in the mainstream Israeli family. Children are central to their parents’ lives, and it is a common practice for parents to take their children with them everywhere—from celebrations to food shopping and even to work on school holidays. Many parents supply their children with extracurricular activities from an early age in order to develop intellectual and artistic skills. In fact, children in Israel remain a central focus of concern for their parents for a longer period than in most industrialized countries. When sons and daughters begin compulsory military service at age 18, parenting often becomes even more intense than previously (Azmon and 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).

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 and Izraeli, 1993; Raday, 1991). Hence, 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 that 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 has accompanied the Zionist movement and the formation of the State of Israel. Several factors have contributed to the evolution of this myth. Most influential among these has been the role of women in the kibbutz. From its inception, a radical commitment to maximal equality between men and women has characterized the kibbutz. 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) (for more on the
early kibbutz movement and family life, see Queen and Habenstein, 1974). 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-Raphael and 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. The woman soldier has emerged as an attractive symbol of gender equality (Azmon and Izraeli, 1993). In reality, however, 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**

Despite the emphasis on gender equality in the formative era of the State, opportunities for men and women in education and employment resemble those of other industrialized countries. Whereas educational opportunities are largely equal for men and women, the labor market remains basically segregated along gender lines in terms of occupational distribution as well as social and economic rewards.

The educational level of men and women is nearly equal in Israel. The median number of years of schooling is 12.3 for men and for women alike (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2004). 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 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. In 2003, 56% of all college students and 57% of the graduate students were women (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2004).

Similar progress is also evident in the increased proportion of women’s participation in the labor force. Participation has increased steadily, from 22–25 percent in the 1950s and 1960s, to
32–39 percent in the 1970s and 1980s, and 48 percent in the 2000s. These rates, however, are not equally distributed among all ethnic groups. Among Arab women, about 17% participate in the labor force compared to 53% of Jewish women. It appears that education plays an important role in women's labor force participation: The gap between women's and men's participation in the labor force decreases as the educational level increases; among those with college education, 78% of women participate in the labor force (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2004).

Neither the types of occupation, organizational status, nor incomes of men and women reflect progress in gender equality. Despite some changes since the 1970s, 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 do men (30 percent and nine percent, respectively)—and their average income per hour is only 77 percent of men’s.

Policymakers have taken steps 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 employed mothers, such as maternity leave, the Equal Opportunity in Employment Law (1981), and the Equal Opportunity Law (1988). These laws make discrimination based on either sex or family status illegal in job advertising, hiring, training, promotion, and firing. However, because these laws are difficult to enforce and do not include affirmative action, gender segregation persists (Raday, 1991). Likewise, the Equal Pay Law (1964) provides 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.

**Household Division of Labor**

Attitudes toward marital division of labor range from the most egalitarian to the most traditional. In a recent National survey (Glickman, Oren, & Lewin-Epstein, 2003), 81% of the Jewish respondents and 73% of the Arab respondents agreed that both men and women should contribute to the family income, but 25% of the Jewish and 40% of the Arab respondents still believed that the man's role is to earn money and the woman's role is to take care of the house and children. As expected, egalitarian values are 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. 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 child-care, and for maintaining ties with kin. On average, women spend 2.5 times more than men do in housework (Glickman et al., 2003). Furthermore, 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 paid 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. In these cases both spouses 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 Muslim families and the least among urban Muslim 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.

Interestingly, the segregated division of labor and the additional burden incurred on women are not necessarily perceived by them as unfair. We (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 (Moslem Arabs) and lowest among families with a more egalitarian role division (Jews and Christian Arabs).

Power Distribution

In addition to the division of labor, the decision-making process of husbands and wives also reflect gender differences. 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 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 and 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 primarily 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 if recent changes in women’s status and power in the family are due to socio-cultural and socio-political 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).

Families and Stress

For the most part, Israeli families face life challenges similar to those faced by families in other industrialized countries. There 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. There 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.

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 embedded in the core of Israel’s existential reality. In its 57 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 effect on Israeli families is further intensified by the multiplicity of periodic recurrence of traumatic events, which have built up a cumulative sense of threat, as well as by a high probability of threat realization and a sense of personal vulnerability (Milgram, 1993). Thus, a constant state of vigilance is programmed into the Israeli consciousness. A recent survey of a representative sample of 1000 Israeli residents, both Jews and Arabs, has shown that in their daily lives, Israeli families have security concerns that permeate into family life and that daily security events and threats impact on people’s mood and on their family relationships (Lavee & Ben-Ari, 2003). Moreover, reconciliation attempts between Israel, the Palestinians, and neighboring countries have given rise to stress for the families facing forced relocation (Wamboldt, Steinglass, and DeNour, 1991) or living under conditions of prolonged uncertainty (Ben-David and Lavee, 1996; Lavee, Ben-David, and Azaiza, 1997; Lev, 1998; Shamai and Lev, 1999).

The small size of the country is important for understanding the effect of war-related stress on families and communities, as well as the support for families provided by formal and informal support networks. In many cases, the stressor events characterize a whole community, or even the entire Israeli population. The suffering of individuals becomes a generalized suffering of their
family, of their community, and oftentimes of the whole country. Due to the small size of the country and the high degree of identification with the victims, the fallout from events in any part of the country unleashes nationwide empathy (Good and Ben-David, 1995). At the same time, family coping and resilience cannot be understood without viewing the management of stress by the community and the support provided by the society as a whole. Many communities are organized to provide immediate support and intervention to the victims and their families (Ayalon, 1993; Chetkow, Guttmann, Reisner, and Rubin, 1984). These activities provide not only emotional and tangible support but also a sense for the afflicted families that the whole nation stands beside them.

War-related stress. Wars have left thousands of widows, orphans, and bereaved parents, grandparents, and siblings. Many thousands of soldiers have suffered major injuries, have been physically disabled for life, or have been afflicted with chronic post-traumatic stress disorder (Solomon, 1993; Waysman, Mikulincer, Solomon, and Weisenberg, 1993). Loss and bereavement, have been extensively studied in Israel (see Rubin, Malkinson, and Witztum, 1999, for a review). Since the establishment of the State in 1948, more than 20,000 soldiers have lost their lives. 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 parents. Research shows that bereaved parents have a heightened level of bereavement responses beyond the number of years normally expected (Rubin, 1993, 1996). In fact, terms such as coping, adaptation, and resolution are perhaps inadequate for describing the experience of the majority of bereaved parents (Rubin et al., 1999).

The small size of the country makes the number of people who have been killed or seriously injured more meaningful on a collective level. It is also important for understanding that for Israelis, wars are not something that happens “out there,” but rather right here at home or nearby. Wars have always had immediacy for Israeli families in terms of the geographic proximity to the battlefront. And because military service is mandatory, there is a high probability of having a family member on active duty. Over the years, a “bereavement culture” has emerged, reflecting the importance the Israeli society accords to the death of its young people. Various forms of commemoration and remembrance play an important role in both the national and the personal mourning process (Witztum and Malkinson, 1993). Israeli society’s attitude toward the bereaved reflects a consensus regarding the importance of individual sacrifice for the good of the nation. A large unit in the Defense Ministry is entrusted with the care of families whose loved ones were killed during military service. Spouses, orphans, and parents receive economic and psychological support through individual, family, and group therapy. During the annual Memorial Day, the entire nation pays tribute to the fallen soldiers and their families. Ceremonies are conducted at military cemeteries throughout the country, all places of entertainment are closed, and a two-minute silence is observed during which all traffic stops and people stand at attention in memory of the soldiers who have sacrificed their lives for the country.
Terrorist acts and shelling of border communities. Terrorist acts have been part of the Israeli experience for decades. These include incursions against civilians in border communities, terrorist acts on school buses, hostage taking, airplane hijackings, stabbings, shootings, and car and suicide bombings. In the past eleven years, since the signing of the Oslo Accord (1993), there have been thousands of casualties in suicide bombs on city buses, in open markets, and at shopping malls and restaurants. In the four years following the beginning of the Palestinian uprising (intifada) in September 2000 only, more than 1000 people have been killed and nearly 7,000 injured in such hostile activities. In addition, residents in border communities have suffered repeated incidences of rocket shellings from across the border, accompanied by loss of life and property. The primary victims of such hostilities are those directly exposed to the event, who are afflicted with injuries, lifetime disabilities, or chronic post-traumatic stress disorder. They also include those who were directly involved in terrorist acts and who were miraculously saved, but still suffer trauma. Then there are the secondary victims, including the families and close friends of primary victims, bystanders caught up in violent acts as witnesses to the catastrophe, and those threatened by geographical proximity to the event.

Community response and support. The support provided to the victims and their families is demonstrated both through formal support systems and informal support networks. Some forms of support are targeted to encompass afflicted families on a national level, whereas other forms of support are more focused on a local level to assist families in stricken communities (Lavee, 2004).

In the case of a terrorist attack, a wide range of formal and informal support is provided to individuals and families, both during and after the immediate crisis. Interventions are undertaken at the scene of the attack, in hospitals, in the forensic medicine institute, at the homes of families, and in the surrounding community. Within minutes after a terror attack, the social service system is activated and information centers are opened in nearby hospitals. Emergency teams of specially trained social workers are on duty to provide support and assistance in locating missing family members in the initial hours following the attack. In cases involving fatalities, they also accompany family members to the Institute of Forensic Medicine for identification, providing emotional support throughout this traumatic ordeal. If needed, parents are also assisted in breaking the news to the children.

In the community, social workers engage in outreach activities for residents living in the area of the terror attack, and home-based interventions are provided for the families of the victims whenever required. After the acute phase, hospital-based and community social services follow up on trauma victims and the physically injured to provide assistance. They help establish support groups and support networks, conduct group interventions, and provide coping strategies to empower victims, their spouses and their families. Another kind of support is provided by local psychological services. School psychologists visit local schools shortly after the event in order to
provide consultation to teachers and to help students with emotional management of the trauma and with development of coping tools appropriate for their age.

Immediate and long-term assistance to victims and their families is also provided by the National Insurance Institute as mandated by the Victims of Hostilities Benefits Law. This includes benefits during medical treatment, monthly disability benefits, and monthly benefits to bereaved spouses and parents, as well as loans and grants for housing, and payments for personal and recuperation services. The Institute also provides for treatment, hospitalization, and medical equipment, as well as vocational rehabilitation to the victims and to bereaved parents, spouses, and children.

In times of crisis, there is also an upsurge in volunteer activity on the part of both professionals and lay people to support families in need. For example, the Terror Victims Association recruit volunteers and victims of past terrorist attacks to visit the hospitals in order to offer support and relief to the stricken families, even as they wait anxiously outside of operating rooms. Through this program, families who have been victimized by terrorist attacks in the past continue to help families who are suffering now in the weeks and months after the event. They assist them directly or through professional counseling with problems of disability, emotional distress, depression, nightmares, and marital problems. They also help with funeral arrangements, organize memorial ceremonies for victims, and provide counseling through crisis hotlines.

Other volunteer organizations deliver similar relief to the victims, their families, and the community through financial and emotional assistance. They visit hospitalized victims or families in mourning; bring recovered teenage victims together with the recently wounded in order to foster the recovery and healing process; and organize social events, holiday activities, retreats and camps to draw victims out of their trauma and to build networks of support. Additional forms of support are provided by informal networks made up of neighbors, co-workers, friends, and relatives (Lavee, 2004).

In times of crisis, cohesive communities provide ground rules for acceptable behavior during crisis situations, support for individuals and families, and constructive activities that reduce anxiety and apprehension (Milgram, 1983). Research shows that the entire community’s reaction during and after attacks reflect the degree of community cohesiveness and that children’s reactions to war stress are strongly influenced by the social cohesiveness of the community in which they live.

As the aforementioned review shows, Israelis have been living under enormous stress for a very long time, with the constant presence of security threats disrupting everyday life. Yet, most Israelis live their lives normally: they go to work, raise kids, do housework, go shopping or to the movies, and exercise at the gym. Although wars and terrorist acts continue to affect the lives of
primary and secondary victims, the many faces of community support make these families more resilient and give them the strength to go on with their lives.

Families and Aging

Relative to other modern societies, Israel is still a young society. Only about 10 percent of its population are aged 65 years or more, as compared with 16–18 percent in European countries. However, the total population has been growing older in the past five decades: in 1948, only four percent of the population were 65 years of age or older. Furthermore, about 40 percent of the Israeli elderly population are 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 socio-cultural groups. While Jews comprise 80 percent of the population, their share in the elderly population is about 94 percent. Of those, only six percent are Israeli-born, and the rest immigrated from Europe and America (70%) or from Asian-African countries (24%). 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 eight percent, respectively) (Beer, 1996). Because these two groups (Arabs and new immigrants) are also more economically disadvantaged, they are unable to purchase the services needed and are therefore forced to rely primarily on their families for assistance.

The Role of Elders, Caregiving, and Housing

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 maintain contact on a daily basis, either in person or by telephone. 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. Their children commonly care for the elderly they grow older and frailer. People believe that good and supporting 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 percent of the healthy elderly and 76 percent of the disabled elderly continue to live at home.

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: 68 percent of the elderly Arabs live with their family (as compared to 18 percent 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 and Brodsky, 1998). For example, following the Community Long-Term Care Insurance Law (1988), 11 percent of the Arab elderly today receive such services. Some express the fear that formal services can 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.

The extent of informal support to the elderly in Israel depends upon 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 few years 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, & Mellhausen-Hassoen, 2003).

Other Family Situations

In this section we describe multigenerational households, in which two or more generations live in a single household. Such living arrangements are most prevalent among rural Arabs and new immigrants from the former Soviet Union.

Traditionally, the rural Arab society had a patrilocal residential pattern, in which a married couple lived with the husband's family and the multigenerational household (Hamulla) functioned as the central social and economic unit. The extended kinship structure is undergoing a transformation toward more “modern” kinship patterns, but still it is the most prevailing pattern of family life among rural Arabs. Some variations of this arrangement is seen where one son lives in
the same household with his parents and other married sons build their homes adjacent to the parents’ home. Theses living arrangements, whether in shared households or in close geographical proximity with shared duties, determine the structure of the intergenerational contacts (Katz and Lowenstein, 2002). The family network, characterized by adult children who are actively involved in the lives of their elderly parent, is a source for practical and emotional support. In accordance with this patrilocal pattern of living arrangement, the social and cultural norms specify that sons are the primary caregivers to their elderly parents, and their wives are an integral part of this support network (Lowenstein and Katz, 2000).

Multigenerational living arrangements are also common among new immigrants from the former Soviet Union, albeit for a different reason. Especially during the first years of migration, extended living arrangements represent a resource-generating strategy. The main reasons cited by older-generation immigrants (age 65 years or more) for establishing shared households with children and grandchildren are economic constraints, housing shortages, the need for mutual help, and familiarity with this type of living arrangement (Katz and Lowenstein, 1999).

Studies conducted on three generations of Russian migrants in shared households reveal that they experience increased intergenerational solidarity, but at the same time increased conflicts (Lowenstein, 2002). For the elderly, multigenerational living arrangements provides a stable social network, which helps ease the adjustment during immigration (Litwin, 1997). It also reduces loneliness in a new environment and provides supportive social interactions and instrumental assistance, especially in contact with the authorities. The younger generation benefits from the parents’ help with household chores and caring for small children while they are at work. However, coresidence can also entail numerous strains, such as loss of personal space and privacy and increased conflict (Lewenstein, 2002). A study of immigrants living in multigenerational household ten years after the immigration indicated that both generations preferred separate households (Lowenstein and Katz, 2005).

In sum, multigenerational living arrangements in Israel stem from two different sources. For Arabs, it stems from cultural norms and traditions, whereas for immigrants from the former Soviet Union it emerged as an adjustment strategy in a new environment.

Concluding Comments

An analysis of trends and patterns among families in Israel indicates that families are being pulled in opposite directions by two main forces. The first force 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.

**Families in Israel—Diversity and Change**

While this depiction of the Israeli family provides some generalized trends, it overlooks significant differences between various social, cultural, and religious groups within the country. Given the rapid change in population over the past five decades, the mass immigration from countries all over the globe, and the existence of such a diversity of sociocultural and religious groups, it is reasonable to ask whether there is such an entity as an “Israeli family.” As Lea Shamgar-Handelman (1996) raised the issue:

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? (p. 388)

The review of family lifestyles, patterns, traditions, customs, and values throughout this chapter 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.

The 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 narrower among the younger and more educated strata of society. Among both Jews and Arabs, there are families with strong traditional values and lifestyles, while more liberal views and practices characterize others. Thus, the patterns and trends in mate selection, cohabitation, marital dynamics and 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. This movement toward similarity is 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.
Notes

1. Druze (also spelled Druse) call themselves Muwahhidun (also Mowahhidoon) or monotheists. This is a relatively small Middle Eastern religious sect. They have an eclectic set of doctrines (mostly kept secret) based on the teachings of the hikmah, and close cohesion. Currently they have more than 250,000 members and live mostly in Lebanon, with smaller communities in Syria and Israel. The Druze permit no conversion and no intermarriage (Druze, 2001; Religious Tolerance, 2000).

2. The Rabbinical Court is a recognized judicial institution which makes its decisions according to Jewish law—Halachah. The major issues brought before these courts are: marriage, domestic relations, divorce, guardianship, custody of children, inheritance and wills, and conversion to Judaism. The Supreme Rabbinical Court is located in Jerusalem. The status of the judges (dayanim) is similar to that of regular court judges.

The Shari’ah Court in Israel is a recognized Muslim judicial institution which makes its decisions according to the Islamic law (shari’a)—the Qur’an and the sunna. The sunna comprises of the traditions of the Prophet and his companions that elaborate the jurisprudence contained within the Qur’an. Administration of the Shari’ah Court system is the responsibility of the Minister for Religious Affairs.

3. The kibbutz (plural kibbutzim; meaning “gathering,” “collective”) is a type of collective community averaging about 100 families found in Israel, in which all wealth is held in common. Typical features of the kibbutz include the collective ownership of property, income is shared, and members are provided with living facilities, food, clothing and other necessities and services on an equal basis.

In the past, most kibbutz members, both men and women, worked in agricultural and industrial enterprises belonging to the kibbutz and children were reared by the community as a whole rather than by their parents alone. During the past three decades the kibbutz movement has witnessed a radical social change. The kibbutzim have edged toward greater privacy and in most kibbutzim today the family has consumption and socialization functions as well.

References


