WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE ISRAELI FAMILY? RECENT DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

LEO DAVIDS
York University, Ontario

The Israeli literature agrees that the family patterns of North America and Europe (e.g. low fertility, abundant divorce) are not characteristic of Israel, despite its great economic development in the post-1967 period. Apparently, traditional values are much stronger in Israel than in the West (due to Israel's great Oriental immigration, strong religious communities, etc.) in regard to demographic/family behavior.

Our review of birth rates, marriage and divorce in Israel for the most recent available years indicates that this picture is changing. Both Arabs and Jews now show signs of rapid modernization/Westernization, as the shift to an urban nuclear family pattern is in full force. Unless these trends unexpectedly reverse themselves, Israeli families will soon be just like those of the "First World" - small, individualistic and unstable.

Observers of the family in Europe and North America have noted a broad tendency away from traditional patterns, which included high fertility, life-time marriage and full-time housewives, towards a modern type characterized by fertility at or below replacement level, marital careers involving one or several divorces, and most wives employed away from home. These changes have been amply documented in such works as Ferris (1971) and Kirk (1981), and in the impressive feminist literature of the past decade (e.g. Greenberg, 1981). This brief article will not review the details or reasons for this major shift, but it serves as a starting point for our consideration of the family scene in Israel; we shall be looking essentially, at the question of whether the very same developments have occurred in Israel, or are very soon to occur here.

The Israeli social science literature presents a picture of strong familism and traditional behavior, manifested by early marriage, rarity of divorce, birth rates considerably higher than those characterizing Western countries (although for Israeli Jews, fertility is certainly below "Third World" norms) and proportionately fewer "liberated" wives than Israel itself had in pre-state years. Friedlander (1973) describes and explains the low level of family planning among Israeli Jews (in great contrast with the situation among Diaspora Jews, who are outstanding in fertility control), while the classic article by Matras (1973) likewise depicts a traditional, patriarchal family situation in Israel.

More recently, the same theme has been very explicitly argued by Peres and Katz (1980; 1981); they present statistics through the middle 1970's which support their contention that Israel's vast economic and technical progress in the past few years has not been accompanied by demographic changes typical of North American and European societies.

While the above literature presented a valid picture in its time, our review of relevant

Please direct all communications to: Leo Davids, Department of Sociology, Atkinson College, York University, Downsview, Ontario M3J 2R7, Canada.

data for the most recent available years leads us to suggest that their assessment is no longer valid. The latest evidence regarding marriage, fertility and divorce indicates a rapid movement in Israel -- more quickly for Jews, but eventually also among the minorities -- toward the unstable and small family patterns of the Industrialized world. Our argument is not that Friedlander, Peres et al were wrong, but that their conclusions may now be out of date, unless the new tendencies unexpectedly reverse themselves in the near future.

We shall make use of the vital statistics in the Yearbook and monthly bulletin of the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics regarding the past 5 - 6 years, along with recent writings by staff members of the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics (hereafter, ICBS).

Let us begin with the situation regarding marriage, which has seemingly become less popular in many of the most developed countries as significant elements of the population delay marriage to later ages or remain permanently unmarried (see Matras: 1977, chapter 8, and Kirk, 1981). Israel has been characterized by almost universal marriage and by a fairly young age at marriage (Bachi, 1976a). However, our Table I, presenting marriage rates for the period 1976 - 1981, shows a consistent downward trend in the marriage rates for Israeli Jews since the mid-1970's; whereas their crude marriage rate was 9.7 in 1975, it had descended to 7.4 in 1981. The age-specific rate in our Table I,

Table 1. Crude & Age-Specific Marriage & Divorce Rates By Israeli Population Group, 1976-1981.

MARRIAGE

	Crude (/1000 Pop'n)		Age Specific (/1000 aged 15-49)	
	Non-Jews	Jews	Jews	Non-Jews
1976	6.4	8.6	50.2	37.7
1977	7.0	8.3	48.9	40.2
1978	7.3	8.1	47.8	41.2
1979	7.8	7.9	47.3	42.0
1980	7.2	7.6	45.7	38.6
1981	7.9	7.4		

DIVORCE

	Crude		Age Specific	
	Non-Jews	Jews	Jews	Non-Jews
1976	0.4	1.0	3.3	1.6
1977	0.5	1.1	3.7	1.8
1978	0.5	1.2	3.8	2.0
1979	0.6	1.2	3.9	2.2
1980	0.5	1.2	4.1	2.1
1981	0.6	1.3		

Source: ICBS, Monthly Bulletin XXXIII No. 6, June 1982, p.7.

which is a more sensitive measure of "nuptiality" (i.e. likelihood of marriage in a given time period) conveys the very same message. According to Sabatello's Table II (1981), age at first marriage for Jewish women has been rising during the latter half of the 1970's, and the percentage of women who will not have married by age 50 is almost 7.

Data from the same sources inform us that the traditional scarcity of divorce in Israel has now ended, although divorce is still much commoner elsewhere. Israeli Jews now

appear to be following their Diaspora brethren (see Davids, 1982a) in the rising frequency of marriage dissolution. Both the crude and age-specific divorce rates since 1976 show steady growth among Jews, with a similar tendency among the non-Jewish minorities of Israel; judging by the divorce trend of the past 2 or 3 years, Jews in Israel are very likely to manifest further increases in divorce rates during the early 1980's. Sabatello (1981) reinforces this expectation, as the percentage of Israeli couples divorced after five years (since their wedding) has risen from 4.8 for couples marrying in 1968 to 6.0 for couples marrying in 1975 (his Table III).

The evidence regarding fertility decline is somewhat more complicated, but the overall picture is clearly consistent with the movement towards low fertility which appeared in Western countries during the 1960's. Israel's crude birth rate has been descending from about 25 per 1,000 (for Jews) in 1976 to about 21 per 1,000 in 1981, while the decrease in births among the non-Jewish sectors has been steeper yet. The crude birth rate for Israeli non-Jews, as shown in our Table II, has descended from 43.5 per 1,000 in 1976 to 34.8 in 1981. Total fertility rates and other measures in this same area concur with this evidence (see Sabatello, 1981); total fertility (i.e. average life-time total of births per woman) for Jewish women has declined from the 4.01 of 1951 to 2.76 in 1980.

Table 2. Israeli Crude Birth Rates, By Population Group, 1970-1981.

	Jews	Non-Jews
1970	24.2	45.7
1972	24.1	45.0
1974	24.7	44.6
1976	25.1	43.5
1977	23.6	41.5
1978	22.3	39.8
1979	22.0	39.2
1980	22.0	36.5
1981	21.4	34.8

Sources: ICBS, Statistical Abstract (Annual) No. 26. 1975, pp. 64-65 and ICBS, Monthly Bulletin XXXIII No. 6, June 1982, p. 6.

Whereas the major continent-of-origin subgroups of the Israeli Jewish population used to exhibit very large variations during Israel's first few decades, these differences have almost disappeared as we enter the 1980's. (Cf. Friedlander, 1975 and our Table III). While Jewish mothers of Asian or African origin used to bear, on average, more than twice as many children as those of European or American origin in the 1950's, the current fertility differences are quite small, as one can see in our Table III. Women of African/Asian birth or parentage among the Jewish population in Israel have apparently adopted family planning techniques quite successfully since Friedlander's assessment (1973), and there appears to be no reason to expect any reversal of this tendency towards planned families in the foreseeable future. (The reasoning behind these forecasts is spelled out in works such as Ben-Porath, 1980; Matras, 1977; Nam and Gustavus, 1976).

Similarly, the urban vs. rural factor is not very useful in the analysis of child-bearing variations in contemporary Israel. (Jews have long been almost exclusively urban throughout the world, and in Israel 90% of the Jewish population reside in urban places; ICBS, 1981:39). Disregarding short-term fluctuations, therefore, all the vital statistics indicate that the family of 2 or 3 children has already become the norm among Israeli Jews today (see also Bachi, 1976a:221-225).

Table 3. Fertility Measures For Israeli Jewish Women By Continent Of Birth, 1960-1970-1980.

	Gross Reproduction Rates[a]			Total Fertility Rates[b]		
	Born in Europe & America	Born in Israel	Born in Asia & Africa	Born in Europe & America	Born in Israel	Born in Asia & Africa
1960	1.20	1.32	2.50	2.38	2.76	5.10
1970	1.38	1.52	1.97	2.48	3.12	4.07
1980	1.34	1.34	1.47	2.76	2.76	3.04

Source: Table III/21 and III/22 of ICBS, *Statistical Abstract of Israel*, No. 32, 1981, pp. 90-91.

[a] "Gross Reproduction" means the total number of daughters born per woman in a specified group.

[b] "Total Fertility" refers to the life-time average total number of births — regardless of gender — per woman.

Arab women in Israel (i.e. the youngest cohorts) have just begun to adopt family planning on a large scale, and over the next generation it is likely that fertility patterns in all sectors of Israel's population will converge fairly closely.

Although we have little quantitative evidence regarding fertility trends among Israel's religious and ultra-orthodox Jews, the observations of many social scientists (e.g. Bachi, 1976a:215-217 and Frishman, 1979) suggest that this sector of the population will show major increases during the 1980's, and is likely to replace the Moslem population as Israel's leaders in high fertility with resultant large average size of family.

Employment of married women outside the home has been increasing in the industrialized societies generally during the past ten to twenty years, and this is very much the case for Israel as well. Whereas the percentage of married women formally participating in the Israeli labor force was about 25% two decades ago, the proportion today is about 40%; the rise in labor force participation is still more striking if we look at the age group that would normally be most affected by maternal duties, i.e. women aged 25-34. Whereas about 25% of them were in the labor force in 1968, fully 48% of Israel's married women in that age bracket were part of the labor force in 1980(ICBS *Yearbook*, 1981: 328 - Table XII/6).

This is not the place to survey explanations of why this tremendous growth in labor force participation by married women has occurred, nor its well-known impact on fertility, but the phenomenon is basically well understood and is expected to continue along the same lines in the foreseeable future (cf. Davids, 1982b: 3-5). Nor shall we examine data concerning net migration balance in Israel, i.e. the figures derived by subtracting emigration out of Israel from immigrants to Israel. Suffice it to say that net immigration in the past year or two has not been favorable to Israeli population growth, and Bachi has repeatedly asserted that, in the long run, the decisive factor determining the size of Israel's Jewish population will not be net immigration but natural increase (Bachi, 1976b; 1979).

What emerges from our examination of the most recent demographic statistics is a picture very different from that contained in the Israeli literature on this subject during the 1970's. Although a late starter compared to most European and North American countries, Israel is now moving rapidly towards a late modern type of family situation, characterized by high levels of contraception, of female employment, of divorce, with

declining fertility which may approach zero population growth in the not too distant future (cf. Vinokur-Kaplan, 1979).

While the non-Jewish (particularly Moslem and Druse) communities are still a considerable distance from this family pattern, the statistics indicate that all sectors of the Israeli population are definitely moving in this direction, despite variations in speed and "estimated time of arrival." We might speak of Israel now moving more quickly from a traditional or Asiatic family culture towards that already found in the "First World."

Although we shall not spell out the implications of this shift here, it is obvious that the establishment of the new patterns would, in the long run, have far-reaching effects on Israel's political and military situation in another generation or two. Moreover, if these trends continue within Israel, world Jewry would face an escalating demographic crisis in view of the shrinkage of Diaspora Jewry which (cf. Schmelz, 1981; 1983) has already commenced and is rather unlikely to be reversed -- except for the demographic contributions that may continue to flow from the Jewish population of Israel. Thus, from a policy viewpoint, Jewish leadership might find few types of information as significant for the future as the indicators of Israeli familism and fertility which we have reviewed here. Whether or not vigorous action by government could significantly change or limit these trends has been discussed elsewhere (Friedlander and Goldscheider, 1979; Davids, 1982b).

It should not take more than another half-decade or so for social scientists to ascertain how deep rooted are the new tendencies of the past few years, and for the leaders of Israeli and world Jewry to decide whether the demogrphic situation does or does not constitute a major crisis.

REFERENCES

Bachi, Roberto

1976a The Population of Israel. Jerusalem: Demographic Centre, Government of Israel.

1976b Population Trends of World Jewry. Jerusalem: Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University.

1979 The Demographic Crises of Diaspora Jewry (in Hebrew or English). Jerusalem: President's Seminar on World Jewry and the State of Israel (Background paper no. 4).

Ben-Porath, Yoram

1980 "Child mortality and fertility: issues in the demographic transition of a migrant population." Pp. 151-199 in Population and Economic Change in Developing Countries. Richard A. Easterlin (ed.). Chicago: U. of Chicago Press.

Davids, Leo

1982a "Divorce and remarriage among Canadian Jews." Journal of Comparative Family Studies, 8:37-47.

1982b "Natality encouragement in Israel." (in Hebrew). Research Report for the Demographic Centre, Government of Israel.

Ferris, Abbot L.
1971 Indicators of Trends in the Status of American Women. New York City: Russel Sage Foundation.

Friedlander, Dov
1973 "Family planning in Israel: irrationality and ignorance", Journal of Marriage and the Family, 35:117-130.

1975 "Mass immigration and population dynamics in Israel", Demography 12:581-599.

Friedlander Dov and C. Goldscheider
1979 The Population of Israel. New York: Columbia University Press.

Frishman, Blu
1979 "Attitudes of ultra-orthodox and secular girls concerning marriage, pregnancy and birth," (in Hebrew). Society & Welfare 2:64-70.

Greenberg, Blu
1981 On Women and Judaism. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society.

Hiorns, Robert W. (ed.),
1980 Demographic Patterns in Developed Societies. London: Taylor and Francis.

Israel Central Bureau of Statistics,
1981 Statistical Yearbook (November).

1982 Monthly Bulletin (May et seq).

Kirk, Maurice
1981 Demographic and Social Change in Europe: 1975-2000. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press and Council of Europe.

Matras, Judah
1973 "On changing matchmaking...." American Journal of Sociology 79:364-388.

1977 Introduction to Population: A Sociological Approach. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.

Nam, Charles B., and Susan O. Gustavus
1976 Population: The Dynamics of Demographic Change. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Peres, Yochanan, and R. Katz
1980 "Family and familism in Israel" (in Hebrew), Megamot, 26:37-55.

1981 "Stability and centrality: The nuclear family in modern Israel." Social Forces 59:687-704.

Sabatello, Eitan F.
1981 "Israeli couples in action during the 1970's". Paper at First World Congress on the Jewish Family Heritage (in Jerusalem, August, 1981).

Schmelz, Uziel O.
1981 World Jewish Population. Jerusalem: Jerusalem Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University.

Schmelz, Uziel O. and S. Della Pergola
1983 "Population trends in U.S. Jewry and their demographic consequences", American Yewish Yearbook.

Vinokur-Kaplan Diane
1979 "Trends and changes in family structure and planning." (in Hebrew). Society and Welfare, 2:51-63.