Socioeconomic, Historical, and Cultural Context of Israel and Impact on the Families

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Introduction

Israel is a country in the Middle East located by the Mediterranean Sea bordering Egypt in the south, Jordan to the east, Syria in the northeast, and Lebanon in the north. Its size (22,072 km^2) is 0.05 times as big as California (423,970 km^2). The State of Israel was established on the historic land promised to the tribes of Israel after the exodus from Egypt and where the kingdoms of Saul, David, and Solomon reigned. Following the destruction of the Temple and the fall of Jerusalem in 70 BCE by the Roman Empire, the Land of Israel was replaced by many conquerors of nations and religions, while most of the Jewish people were in exile up until the twentieth century (CIA, 2016).

After World War II, following the Holocaust, the Jewish interest gained sympathy, and the world nations recognized the need to provide the Jews with a national home and sovereignty in parts of the Land of Israel. The UN had a resolution on the partition of Palestine into two states: Jewish and Arab. Following the UN's resolution and the declaration of Independence of Israel

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from the British mandate on May 14, 1948, the War of Independence erupted when the armies of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq declared war on the newly formed state (Bar-On, 2012).

The State of Israel has known ongoing wars to protect herself from her many enemies (Suez/Sinai War, 1956; Six-Day War, 1967; War of Attrition, 1967–1970; Yom Kippur War, 1973; Lebanon War, 1982, 2006; Operation Cast Lead, 2008–2009; Operation Pillar of Defense, 2012; Operation Protective Edge, 2014). In the first three decades of her existence, Israel was surrounded on all sides by hostile countries that did not recognize her. In 1977, this had changed with the Egyptian president's visit to Israel and the peace accord signed between these two countries. As of 2014, Israel has peace treaties and diplomatic relations with two of its neighbors, Egypt and Jordan. Israel has ongoing conflicts with the Palestinians residing in Gaza and the West Bank. Several attempts to resolve the conflict via bilateral negotiations have ended with no resolution and with increase violence (CIA World Facts on Israel, 2016). Israel relies on a large defense, which is comprised of soldiers in compulsory service and the regular army as well as reserve force, especially in times of emergency. Both sexes are obligated to military service.

Since her establishment, Israel has defined herself as the homeland of the Jewish people. Israeli law (Law of Return, July 5,1950) grants citizenship to any Jew – defined as a person being

born to a Jewish mother or having converted to Judaism while renouncing any other religion – who immigrates to and expresses a desire to settle in Israel. In 1970, an amendment of this act extended the right to family members, who are not Jewish, including the spouse of a Jew, any child or grandchild, and the spouses of children and grandchildren. Since her birth, Israel is shaped by massive waves of immigration from more than 70 countries around the world (Lavee & Katz, 2003). Most citizens of Israel are Jewish, but there are large minority of indigenous Arab (20%, most of Muslim), along with other minority groups. Since the establishment of the State of Israel, there have been approximately 3.2 million immigrants; about 43% arrived in 1990 or later (CBS, 2016b). The Ministry for Immigrant Absorption was opened in 1968 to provide assistance to new immigrants and returning Israeli citizens, starting from their first days in Israel until their full integration in all areas of life: housing, language acquisition, job training, job placement, children's education, health, etc. There are currently 18 immigrant absorption centers in Israel that offer professional assistance to new immigrants and are sensitive to difficulties in cultural adaptation (Koch-Davidovich, 2011). A special population, Ethiopian Jews, arrived in Israel due to rescue operations by the Israeli government between 1984 and 2006. At the end of 2006, the Ethiopian community in Israel numbered 110.7 thousand residents – about 76.1 thousand were immigrants, and 34.6 thousand were Israeli born (about 31% of the community). In 2006, children aged 0–14 comprised over one-third of the Ethiopian community, whereas children in that age group comprised only about one-fourth of the overall Jewish population (Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), 2006). This population has required major absorption efforts and government services to address their special needs and their very traditional tribal views of the family. They had to adjust to a Western and industrialized country that emphasizes equal opportunities for males and females and offers modern life rather than traditional tribal ones (Rosen & Rubenstein, 1993).

According to the 2015 UN figures, Israel is considered one of the most densely populated countries in the world with 343.91 people per square kilometer. Six percent of the area of the State of Israel is forested, and 27% of its area is agricultural (World Bank, 2015). Since the 1970s, the largest city is Jerusalem, Israel's capital, home to about a tenth of the country's population, while Tel Aviv is the economic and technological capital of Israel.

Israel's population at the beginning of 2017 consisted of 8.68 million residents which are comprised of 6.45 million Jews (74.8%), 1.796 million Arabs (20.8%), and 384 thousand (4.4%) minorities. The age distribution according to the Central Bureau of Statistics (2016) is birth to 14 years, 27.73% (male 1,159,980/female 1,106,946); 15–24 years, 15.52% (male 648,199/female 620,218); 25–54 years, 37.15% (male 1,552,754/female 1,484,059); 55–64 years, 8.51% (male 340,601/female 355,382); and 65 years and over, 11.09% (male 405,511/female 500,877). As of 2015, the median age was 29.7. In 2014, there was a mortality rate of 1.8–2.2 infants per 1000 births (World Health Organization, 2017). However, disparities have led to the fact that Arab infants die three times more frequently than Jewish infants, and the infant mortality rate of Bedouins is the highest, with a ratio of 1:4.

With Judaism being the dominant religion in Israel, Islam and Christianity comprise the minority of religions, and the percentage of Arab Christians among Arabs in Israel is approximately 9% and constitutes about 2% of the total population (Central Bureau of Statistics CBS, 2015). In addition, there are Druze (1.7%) and Circassians, who are also counted as Arabs. Israel is influenced by a mixed of Western and Middle Eastern cultures, fused together with values and practices ranging from highly orthodox religious perspectives to secular ways of life (Lavee & Katz, 2003). The Jewish people in Israel are divided into two main ethnic groups: Sephardim (Jews whose origins are from Africa, Asia, and the Muslim republics of the former Soviet Union) and Ashkenazim (originate from Europe and America).

There are more than 30 languages spoken in Israel. The main language used both for official communication and for everyday communication among Israelis is Modern Hebrew. Arabic serves as another language in some of the official publications, and it can also be used in speeches in the Knesset or in requests to the authorities. Other languages are used to facilitate communication with different immigrants' communities such as Russian and Amharic.

A family in Israel is defined as traditional nuclear family that is composed of two parents, a male and a female, and their biological children (Lavee & Katz, 2003), although alternative family patterns exist such as single-parent families, double-career families, and single-sex families. According to Harpaz and Ben Baruch (2004), the family usually fulfills the following main functions: reproduction, material and emotional security, socialization, and introduction of primary social attitudes.

Political and Government Structure

Israel is a parliamentary democracy. It does not have a constitution yet, but the basic laws are enacted and executed by the Knesset and supervised by the High Court of Justice (HCJ). The parliamentary system is comprised of a president, a symbolic head of the state, who does not hold significant executive powers; the executive branch that includes a prime minister and the government cabinet (ministers); and the legislative branch – the Knesset with its 120 members elected in general and proportional elections for a term of 4 years. Citizens over 18 years old are entitled to vote for the party they support. The party who receives the most votes has more members in the Knesset, and the head of the party is the one to be invited by the president to form a government (The Knesset, 2017).

The political discourse in Israel mostly revolves around the security issue rather than socioeconomic positions. The political blocks in the Knesset include the left, the right, the religious (Haredim), the center, and the Arabs. These blocks differ in their approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict and the ways to resolve it. They also hold different views on economic issues (welfare state vs. free market and capitalist approach) and the separation of state and religion. Until 1977, the left Zionist parties governed. In 1977, a political transformation took place as the right wing came to power. Since then, the right wing has become the central ruling party, with only a few short power changes (CIA, 2016).

Family Demographic Indicators: Economy

The Israeli economy is strong, stable, and thriving, albeit there is an ongoing security threat, uncertainty, wars, and a rapidly growing population. According to the Human Development Index (2015), out of 188 countries, Israel is ranked 19th (USA is ranked 10th). This is based on life expectancy at birth of 82.6 years, expected years of schooling 16 years, and gross national income (GNI) per capita of \$31,215 (UNDP, 2015).

The Israeli economy is a free market economy that is comprised of government-initiated industry alongside a developed private sector, including a booming hi-tech industry. Other major industrial sectors which include the defense, tourism, metal, chemical and diamond processing, medical equipment, and pharmaceuticals industries are among its leading exports. Its major imports include crude oil, coal, grains, raw materials, and military equipment. Natural gas fields discovered off Israel's coast since 2009 have brightened Israel's energy security outlook.

Beginning in the mid-1980s, Israel economy shifted from a centralized socialist one, with a broad public sector and a large taxation, toward a freer, competitive market economy. Despite the many challenges throughout the years such as hyperinflation, the bank stock crisis, the Arab boycott, high defense expenditure, and absorption of waves of immigration, Israel has managed to reach a high level of economic development (Krempf, 2015).

The world markets, including foreign investors, global banks, and credit rating agencies,

demonstrate great confidence in the strength of the Israeli economy. This success is attributed to many factors, including the educated workforce; the extensive foreign aid received by the State of Israel throughout the years from the Jews of the world, the USA and Germany; the absorption of human capital in the form of immigration; the correct macroeconomic policy of the government and the Bank of Israel; structural reforms; and the opening of economy to competition (OECD, 2015).

In 2015, there were 2.41 million households in Israel, 79.2% of them with employed adults (1.91 million). The average annual expense for family is 15,407 NIS (New Israeli Shekel). A household with children spends on average 1.4 more than a household with no children (13,313 vs. 17,999 NIS). The expenses of a household with children on education have reached 1483 NIS (Central Bureau of Statistics Israel (CBS), 2015).

Family Demographic Indicators: Health

The National Health Insurance Law 5754-1994 stipulates that all of Israel's residents are eligible for health services based on principles of justice, equality, and mutual assistance. The government finances health services, primarily through an earmarked, progressive tax paid by all residents. The law further stipulates that health services must be provided while maintaining human dignity and the patient's right to privacy and medical confidentiality. The basket of services covers the following: individual preventive care and health education, medical diagnosis, ambulatory medical care including psychiatric care. psychogeriatric hospitalization and chronic nursing care, comprehensive rehabilitation, medications, medical and assistive devices, preventive dental care for children, first aid and transportation to a hospital or clinic, medical services at work, and addiction treatments and recovery (Library of Congress, 2015).

Over the years, the health system in Israel has gained many achievements in medical research, public health, and public access to health ser-

vices. Israeli doctors are highly respected in the world and have a great reputation. According to the World Health Organization, as of May 2016, life expectancy in Israel is sixth in the world. The average life expectancy of men is 80.6 years and women are 84.3 years old. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, there was a decline in the quality of services provided by the health system due to the increase in the burden of patients compared with the reduction of the health budget and the lack of standards. 2011 saw a strike by doctors and interns following the erosion in wages and working conditions and the growing burden on health funds and hospitals.

Health services for elementary and secondary school students in Israel are financed by the State. In elementary schools, the nurses conduct routine examinations, such as testing vision and hearing and measuring height; give inoculations; and teach nutrition, personal hygiene, and sex education. The health services provided in secondary schools are primarily educational and focus on preventing drug and alcohol addiction and communicable diseases such as AIDS and on safety and accident prevention. In addition to the health services provided at schools, preventive services are offered to adolescents through specialty service centers, which are financed by the Ministry of Health, social welfare agencies, and one of the health funds' Health Services. These centers specialize in adolescent health and provide sex education, medical testing, and treatment of problems that arise during adolescence, such as acne and weight problems. Countrywide youth counseling centers further provide youth with instruction, counseling, and referral in a variety of areas, including health (Ministry of Health, 2017).

Family Demographic Indicators: Education

The proportion of expenditure on education relative to GDP is the highest in the world (7.3%). Nevertheless, relative to the number of children, the investment in education per pupil is lower than that of most of the OECD countries. The education system in Israel includes schools that

teach in Hebrew and schools that teach in Arabic. The state education system consists of compulsory free access to ages 3–4 to early childhood education and care,

kindergarten, elementary school (grades 1–6), junior high school (grades 7–9), and high school (grades 10–12) (OECD, 2016a). The Compulsory Education Law is one of the first laws enacted in the First Knesset in 1949. The law obliges the child's parents to enroll the child in the educational institution and to ensure the regular appearance of the child until completion of compulsory education. In Israel, there are state schools, which are public schools intended for the general public, state religious schools for the religious public, an ultra-Orthodox educational system, and additional private education.

The Special Education Law 5748-1988, grants children ages 3–21 with physical, mental, emotional, or behavioral disabilities the right for appropriate education in order to enable every child to fulfill his/her potential. The law also ensures the scope of services to be provided including special accommodations, paramedical services (e.g., physical, occupational, and speech therapy), expressive therapies, and assistive devices.

Family Demographic Indicators: Women Status

Until the late 1970s Israel's self-image was that of an egalitarian society (Muhlbauer, 2006). Women have worked side by side with men to establish the new state and have been serving in the Israeli Defense Army since its inception. Israel had a woman prime minister, Golda Meir, from 1969 till 1974, thereby becoming the world's third woman with that title. According to *The Jerusalem Post* (March 8, 2017), today's proportion of women in Israel's parliament, 27.5%, is higher than that of the US Senate (21%) or House of Representatives (19%). Moreover, Israel's female parliamentary representation is greater than France's and Canada's (26%). In fact, Israel is only slightly behind the OECD average when it comes to female legislative representation. However, only 4 out of the 23 ministers (17%) in the current Israeli cabinet are women (Kenig, 2017).

According to the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) (2017) report, at the end of 2015, there were 3,102,500 women ages 15 and up living in Israel, 12.3% of them above age 65 in comparison with 9.9% of men. The average age for women to get married is 25, and the average age for them to have their first child has increased from 26.5 in 2004 to 27.6 in 2015. The percentage of women never married ages 45–49 has reached 9.4% of the population.

The employment policy for women in Israel reflects two central concepts that exist in Israeli society: the expectation that women will take an active part in the labor market and the centrality of woman's role in the family (Vogel-Bizawi, 2005). Despite the progress of Israeli legislation on equality that is one of the most advanced in the world, the wage differential between men and women has hardly changed. This discrimination affects the economic status of women and their power and independency within the family and society systems (Berkowitz, 2001; Frenkel, Hecker, & Braude, 2011).

According to Israel Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) report in 2017, 68% of women in Israel are employed full time and 32% work part time (less than 35 h a week), while 10.3% of mothers are self-employed. At the executive level positions, the number of women has reached 34.1% in 2016. The monthly income for a woman employee is NIS 7666 ($2175) vs. 11,219 ($ 3182) for a man employee. The hourly pay rate for employed women is low in comparison to men; the highest gap is for women and men with 13–15 years of education −24.4% gap.

Although women are encouraged to access science-, technology-, and computer-related fields, the highest number of women is in paramedical areas 83.1% and in education 80.2%. The lowest number of women is found in the following areas: physics and math, 37.1%; statistics and computer science-related fields, 29.9%; and engineering and architecture, 28.1% (CBS, 2017).

Family Strengths and Needs

Families (microsystems) live as systems nested within other systems (mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem) as indicated by Bronfenbrenner (1979) in the ecosystem theory. In order to understand families facing with challenges, it is important to focus on family's strengths (Stinnett, DeFrain, 1985, 2002). As highlighted in *The International Family Strength Mode*l, "Families, in all their remarkable diversity, are the basic foundation of human cultures. Strong families are critical to the development of strong communities, and strong communities promote and nurture strong families. All families have strengths. And, all families have challenges and areas of potential growth. If one looks only for problems in a family, one will see only problems. If one also looks for strengths, one will find strengths" (Asay & DeFrain, 2012, p. 4).

Poverty The level of poverty and inequality in Israel is high, especially among the elderly population, the Arabs and the ultra-Orthodox. Income inequality and high housing prices continue to be a concern for many Israelis (OECD, 2017). In Israel, the poverty line is defined as earning less than half the median income and is adapted to the size of the family (Gal, 1997). In 2015, out of 1.99 million families, 20% of households received welfare services; 35% of single-parent families receive support and welfare services (CBS, 2015). The main characteristics of disadvantaged families include economic distress, housing shortage, low education level, and ongoing ineffective relationships with existing social services (Bar-On, 2002). In Israel, today we meet families with multigenerational "persistent poverty" that experience constant and ongoing anxiety both for the parents and their children (Shamai, 1994). Politzer, Shmueli, and Avni (2016) claim that in Israeli municipalities, a low socioeconomic index is correlated with relatively high mortality rates. The average mortality rate (adjusted for age) in the lower half of the municipalities is 11% higher than in the upper half of the municipalities.

The economic response to individuals who live below the poverty line in Israel is the responsibility of the National Insurance Institute, which must ensure minimum conditions for subsistence of families and individuals, through income maintenance benefits and other allowances benefits according to the conditions of entitlement prescribed by law. The central role of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services is to assist by providing material assistance to individuals and families, other than their entitlement for assistance through the National Insurance Institute. In many cases they are eligible for additional assistance due to the multiple stressors and difficulties they face.

In early 2015, the government endorsed the social partners' agreement of a 16% increase in the minimum wage, spread over 3 years from April 2015, and, in November 2015, it agreed to a further 6% hike in the minimum wage for December 2017 (Bank of Israel, 2015).

Single-Parent Families and Divorce On average 6% of the families (117,000) are single-parent families with children under the age of 17. In most of these families, 92% are headed by women. Twenty percent (20%) of the single mothers with children under the age of 17 never married in comparison with 15% in the last decade (CBS, 2015). Most single-parent families are divorced (more than half), but there is a steady increase in the percentage of women who choose to have a child alone, or as they choose to call themselves "single mothers" (Segal-Engelchin & Wozner, 2005). While single parents have a substantial proportion of immigrants whose economic situation is lower than that of the general population, "single mothers" are usually women with higher education and a moderate to high socioeconomic status (Segal-Engelchin & Wozner, 2005).

The proportion of same-sex parent families in Israel is still very low – comprised of 1%, of approximately 18,000 households (from the "New Family" website). This means that homosexual families are marginal, but there is a steady

increase in the number of these families, and in particular, there are areas where these families are more common, for example, in large cities and in central Israel (Godcar, 2009b).

The divorce rate in Israel is around 26% (Central Bureau of Statistics Israel, CBS, 2017; Nahir, 2016). The divorce process in Israel is handled by the religious Rabbinic courts since 1953. Even if a divorce settlement is reached at the civic family court, still the approval of the Rabbinic courts is required. According to the laws (1959, child support payments; 1962, parental obligations), parents are obligated and equally responsible for the child and his/her needs. The parents need to reach agreement to care for the child following divorce, and the plan needs to include child support payments and needs to be based on the best interest of the child (Eldar & Barneah, 2002).

In 1995, a special law indicated that family issues during divorce are to be dealt in specialized courtrooms and that the family is to be served within one courtroom under one judge. The court system provides legal representation to the ones proven in need for legal representation and unable to afford it. This court encourages the use of mediation in order to reach an acceptable agreement by all parties involved as well as a cheaper solution to the otherwise expensive divorce process. There are marriage and family counseling centers which operate under the jurisdiction of the legal and court system. The law indicates that families must go through evaluation and assessment when they are served by the court during their divorce process, as well as mediation if needed (Eldar & Barneah, 2002).

The educational system addresses the needs of children whose families are going through the process of divorce. School counselors and homeroom teachers who receive adequate training are to engage with the parents and the children in order to help parents understand the needs of the child and help them focus on the child's needs and their obligations as parents care for him/her. Counselors address the diversity of family structures in classrooms with students at all grade levels and also provide individual and group support to the child during and after the period of separation or divorce to deal with emotional and mental issues (Eldar & Barneah, 2002).

Domestic Violence According to data collected by WIZO (2016), a women's organization, during 2014, 10 women were murdered by their partners, 18,912 cases were opened by police, and more than 7000 women complained of domestic violence. In Israel today, there are some 200,000 battered women and 600,000 children enduring a life of violence. Welfare officials estimate that only 1% of the 200,000 men who engage in domestic abuse attend violence prevention centers. Every day an average of 65 cases of domestic violence are opened by police. During the year, 14 shelters for abused women around the country hosted 641 women and 932 children; 7640 protection orders were taken out against violent men; and WIZO (2016) received 700 calls about domestic violence through its hotline. The numbers within the healthcare system are not encouraging either: 4930 women were treated for acts of domestic violence and sexual assault, and 1020 battered women were identified at Ministry of Health well baby clinics, compared to 422 the year before – an increase of 240%.

During the early years of the State of Israel, the issue of domestic violence was often ignored and marginalized (Swirski, 1991). A major reason for the delayed government response to this issue is the concessions to the religious parties made by the different governments to ensure their support and collaboration. For this reason, the entire Jewish population in Israel – even secular and Reform Jews – have to live by orthodox rulings in matters pertaining to the family such as marriage and divorce (Yishai, 1985). In 1991, the law to prevent domestic violence was passed and was a breakthrough in the effort to deal with domestic violence and in providing an institutional resolution to an acute problem. It was the first time that law enforcement and social welfare services were allowed to remove the victim from the family in order to protect her/him (Harmel & Nachshon-Glick, 2002).

Findings indicated that about 7% of Jewish families with children reported physical violence

against women and that gender violence is more frequent among the non-Jewish sector of the population and more common among low socioeconomic classes that are exposed to rather chronic difficulties (Izikovitz, 2002). Further analysis pointed to three factors that militated against the severe victimization of women by their partners: greater secularity, higher education, and employment outside the home (Muhlbauer, 2006). Hence, secularity, educations, and financial independence are protective factors for women against domestic violence.

Family Policies and Services Ecological approach for services has been utilized to include law enforcement, medical and clinical services, rehabilitation, education, and judiciary to establish prevention and intervention policies and programs to deal with domestic violence (Harmel & Nachshon-Glick, 2002). The overarching approach held by the system is that violence is an illegitimate relational interaction and is not justified regardless of circumstances. Services are offered immediately to families experiencing domestic violence and are accessible and available to families for the duration needed with no exception; the perpetrator must receive treatment (even against his/her will).

The office of Welfare and Social Services is tasked with the provision of services to families and children experiencing domestic violence. Three treatments' foci were established:

(a) Programs to protect victims that include shelters for battered women and children and for teenage girls at risk, short-term emergency residential facilities for women and girls at risk, transitional residential facilities, emergency hotlines, emergency centers for children who are not yet removed from home, and emergency centers for children who are removed from their homes.
(b) Programs to provide intervention and prevention services.
(c) Professional programs and trainings to prepare professionals to work with this at-risk population. Social and welfare workers are

appointed by the Minister of Welfare and Human Services to act on behalf of children at risk (Harmel & Nachshon-Glick, 2002).

Children and Violence According to the government's estimate, 16% (400,000) of the children and youth in Israel are considered at risk (Vysblyi, 2012). An effort to establish a national baseline for children and youth at risk (for physical and emotional abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, risk behaviors) has started in 2006 by a government committee led by Schmidt (Schmidt, 2006). The committee found that 31% of the children identified are young under the age of 6, 38% school age, 31% youth, 58% boys, and 43% Arabs and 34% of the children were identified to have special needs.

The role of the education system is "child find" – identifying children at risk of domestic violence and referring them to services (Public committee report on the state of children and youth at risk by Weissblai, 2012). The law (Oz & Balshan, 2007) indicates the obligation of reporting of every person above age 18 in regard to any suspicion they have about child abuse and neglect in minors. The law identifies professionals such as physicians, nurses, educators, social workers, welfare providers, police force personnel, psychologists, counselors, paraprofessionals, and administrators as mandatory reporters. The office of child/youth abuse prevention has the mandate to be the liaison between the education system and the welfare services system and to provide training, consultation, and support when needed. According to the report, 85% of the children in the child welfare system were referred by the educational system. The national "at-risk child find" campaign has started at universal community services such as community clinics, preschool and daycare systems, and elementary, middle, and high school systems. Local municipalities have formed an interdisciplinary entity that can oversee the implementation of the regulations and coordinated services, the sharing of information, and storage of data, which are accessible to the different stakeholders. Less than half of the children who were identified for this

national "child find" campaign were known and received services from welfare service providers, probation officers, or school attendance officers. The office of education has developed special resources and information in regard to warning signs and identification of children at risk for abuse and neglect. The Israeli government approved in 2012 the expansion of the national campaign targeting children and youth at risk to include additional 92 municipalities to get to 164 municipalities in this initiative to implement the plan locally.

In addition, the education system has taken upon itself the duty to teach children life and relational skills that can support their future growth and development. The program Nonviolent Friendship, Dating, and Adults' Relationship targets children and youth to promote mutual respect. This is a collaboration between the office of education and the office for welfare services. The program includes 11 experiential meetings 90 min or 45 min and runs by educational and social welfare counselors at different communities' venues (Gnichovsky, Barnea, Zimerman, & Rokach, 2010).

Culture and Values as Reflected in Policies Israeli society, like the rest of the Western world, has gradually undergone changes in its values from a very collectivist society in its early years, to an extreme individualistic society (Godcar, 2009a; Harpaz, 1998). There are a number of global developments which encourage greater individualism: cross-cultural exposure, economic globalization and a sense of a world without borders, urbanization, advancement in technology, and women's rights (Brislin, 1993; Sharabi and Harpaz 2002). "The family is being pulled in opposite directions by two main forces: one that prods the family toward greater modernization and Westernization, while the other acts to strengthen traditional values" (Lavee & Katz 2003, p. 193). The modern trends are reflected in legislation creating the legal status of publicly recognized partners, permitting international adoption for individuals, approval of in vitro fertilization procedures for single women, and other changes in legislation, creating a new social and psychological reality (Godcar, 2009a, 2009b).

Still Israel is considered more "family oriented" than Western and Eastern European countries based on these criteria: a relatively high birth rate, a relatively low divorce rate, and a relatively low proportion of out-of-wedlock births (Peres & Katz, 1991). During 2016, the population has increased by 2%, 83% from newborn babies (181000), and 17% of this increase is due to new immigrants (24,000) (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2017). In 2015 there were 1.99 million families in comparison to 1.66 million in 2006. On average, there are 3.7 members in the family (3.54 in the Jewish family vs. 4.61 in the Arab family). Most children (92%) live with both parents, and only 210 thousand children (8%) live with one parent. Most single-parent family households (92%) are headed by mothers.

Several explanations were offered by Peres and Katz to the cultural focus on the family (1980):

(a) Due to the ongoing experiences of violence and wars, Israelis have an increased desire to be with their families, as it provides them with a sense of closeness and security.
(b) The views and beliefs held by most Israelis coming from Africa and Asia (Sephardi Jews) are of more traditional family values.
(c) Tradition and Jewish religious beliefs are central in guiding individuals as well as the institutions in Israel.
(d) Israel is a small and cohesive society which supports the sense of intimacy and connectedness.

Israel is a "child-oriented" society. Israelis hold the views that children provide meaning to life and that procreation is the main purpose of marriage (Steier, Oren, Elias, & Lewin-Epstein, 1998). According to Central Bureau of Statistics 2016 report, at the end of 2015, there were 2.798 million children (birth −17) living in Israel, which comprised 33% of the total population of the country. It includes 1.996 (71.3%) million Jewish children and 718 (25.7%) thousand Arab

children as well as an additional 84,000 children (3%) that are categorized as "others." The fertility rate for women is 3.13 children on average for both Jewish and Arab women (Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), 2015).

Israel maintains a comprehensive system of laws protecting children's rights from pregnancy. Health benefits and education are guaranteed by law. The State provides families with a children's monthly allowance and special benefits to disabled children and their families. Special laws regulate youth labor and protect children from abuse and exploitation. The juvenile justice system applies different rules than in the adults' court to address children and their developmental levels. Women who have given birth or adopt children are entitled to a hospitalization grant (for expenses of the birth, and of the hospitalization of the mother and baby, including premature babies), maternity benefits, and equipment grants. In addition, mothers are entitled to maternity leave allowance to compensate the working mother for the loss of wages during her maternity leave. Additional child-related benefits paid by the National Insurance Institute are an education grant paid to single parents for each of their children, benefits paid to parents whose finances are below the poverty line, and custodians of orphans or children immigrating to Israel without their parents (Library of Congress, 2015).

Family Life Education The State of Israel is a pioneer in investing in families in order to close social gaps and support the healthy development of children. Israel is a young country (established in 1948) and has very diverse ethnic and religious groups residing in it who are holding a wide range of cultural values and beliefs (Lavee & Katz, 2003). The family life education (FLE) field in Israel faces the following challenges (Brislin, 1993; Sharabi and Harpaz 2002):

1. Diverse multicultural ethnic groups who hold opposing views in regard to collectivist vs. individualist, patriarchal vs. egalitarian, religious/traditional vs. modern and progressive,

and socialist-welfare economy vs. free capitalist economy.
2. There are cultural and political clashes among the different groups based on political, economic, and cultural differences.
3. Ongoing wars and high investment in defense and security.

Therefore, to bridge the gaps, Israel incorporates a preventative, educational, and collaborative approach to empower families and individuals to address and resolve family issues (Darling, Cassidy, & Powell, 2014). Although, geographically, Israel is a small country, the variation among the different local communities and their country of origin influence the needs of the group and therefore the type of services needed to address these needs. Hence, family social workers and educators are trained to effectively teach audiences of which they are familiar and aware of their views and practices. Programs are designed to meet the specific challenges and cultural beliefs (Ballard & Taylor, 2012). In the following paragraphs, several examples of culturally specific programs targeting families and children are provided. All the programs are government-supported programs.

The Drop of Milk (Tipat Halav) stations are an example of health prevention and provision of services to families with young children within the neighborhood and communities. These stations are dedicated to preventive medicine in the community and are largely staffed by public health nurses who are able to promote health in the community addressing the needs of pregnant women, infants and children (birth to 6 years), and their families free of charge. The services include prenatal examinations, inoculations, early detection of physical and emotional disabilities, counseling, and health education focusing on preventing accidents in the home, at school, and on the roads (Ministry of Health, 2017).

Mentoring of adoptive parents is a program developed by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Services in cooperation with JDC-Israel-Ashalim. It is a unique mentoring of seasoned adoptive parents to new adoptive families. Organizations for adoptive parents, Ometz Leametz (Bravery to

Adopt) and Nitzanei Tikva (Buds of Hope), run the training focusing on empowering parental leadership, discussing adoption problems, and providing tools for support and accompaniment of those who undergo the process for the first time in their lives (Katzav & Nieman, 2015).

"Mother to Mother in the Community" is a voluntary project utilizing experienced mothers volunteering to support and empower new mothers who are coping with physical and emotional difficulties during their transition into motherhood. At present, many young mothers experience a sense of loneliness, isolation, depression, and despair in the wake of lack of family support. The "Mother to Mother in the Community" project is intended to restore some of the tribal feeling to contemporary life. Volunteers are given comprehensive training and then are sent to the home of new mothers once a week for 2 h modeling caring for the infant, listening, and providing new mothers with a support system. This project empowers young mothers to provide sensitive and responsive care to their babies and reduce risk of violence and abuse (Katzav & Nieman, 2015).

Social Services for Families at Risk Over the years, the Ministry of Social Services has handled approximately 18–21% of the households, while in recent years, this percentage has stabilized at the level of approximately 20% constituting 465,000 families (Gorbtov, Eldar, & Ben Moshe, 2009). In other words, every fifth family in Israel is in the care of the Ministry of Social Services, or one or more of its members are in its care. Families face difficulties associated with living conditions, couple communication, issues of raising and educating children, impairment in the functioning of parents and their ability to provide children with educational solutions, and to extreme situations such as violence, bereavement and suicide. The service distinguishes among seven different types of families in need of care and services:

(a) Families in financial distress
(b) Families with functional difficulties and in situations of temporary or ongoing crisis

(c) Single-parent families
(d) Families suffering from violence
(e) Families in need of assistance in connection with legal issues
(f) Families with death and bereavement victims due to accidents or assaults
(g) Families and individuals with special characteristics, prostitutes, homeless people, and victims of human trafficking

The treatment of the individual and the family is based on the following principles: (a) the nuclear family unit that is critical for individual growth and development; (b) ecosystem intervention that sees the interconnectedness among the individual, family, community, and culture; (c) identification, reinforcement, and nurturing of the individual and family's strengths; and (d) partnering with families and individuals to empower them to ensure long-term effects of treatment (Gorbtov et al., 2009).

The services are provided mainly through the departments of social services in the local municipalities, as well as local or regional specialized centers in cooperation among municipalities. Most of the treatment for families and individuals at risk is carried out by social workers in social services departments and especially by those defined as family social workers. Family counseling and support centers operate within the social services departments, utilizing systemic approach to families.

For example, "Otzma (power)" centers for poverty-stricken families are run by social services departments and offer a multisystem answer to poverty-stricken families. The focus of this program is to improve the economic and personal well-being of these families by providing information and guiding them in utilizing all of their rights, implementing employment programs, creating involvement in the community, and advancing the independence of the participants. The program integrates individual, group, and community intervention. Currently, 26 centers are operating in 17 municipalities with the intention to institutionalize it on a larger scale (Katzav & Nieman, 2015, p. 28).

Another program is the National Program for Children and Youth at Risk. Six government ministries (the Ministry of Social Affairs and Services, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministries of Health, Immigration and Absorption, Public Security and Economy), the Local Government Center, and the Israel Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) have joined to reducing the numbers of children and youth who are subject to threatening conditions within the family and their surroundings. Other participants are the Local Government Center and the Israel Joint Distribution Committee (JDC). The program covers seven primary fields of life: physical health and development, belonging to a family, learning and acquisition of skills, mental well-being and health, social belonging and participation, protection against others, and protection against their own dangerous behaviors. The program has an accompanying information system called the Town Information Infrastructure (TMI in Hebrew). Towns participating in the national program are allowed to document and extract information on children and parents participating in the solutions and to manage continuity of services across the various committees and teams operating within the program. More than 170 towns, town clusters, and neighborhoods have participated to provide support for this particular weak population group (Katzav & Nieman, 2015).

Professionals who are dealing with child abuse and neglect are required to receive special trainings focusing on child abuse and neglect. They are required by law to cooperate and share information in order to provide a seamless treatment plan. Since 2006 all educational counselors are obligated to partake in 180 h professional development training focusing on child abuse and neglect and attending to at-risk children. There are also 2-year program preparing counselors to specialize in working with children, victims of sexual abuse. Psychologists are trained in their program of study to do so. Educators, who teach "life skills" courses, are required to have the same training as the counselors. Early childhood teachers have been the focus of the office of

education, and they offer 3–4 times a year special trainings for ECE to identify and recognize child abuse and neglect warning signs. The higher education system who prepares the education workforce offers at least four annual course hours to train professionals working with children to identify child abuse and neglect.

An example for a unique and innovative program targeting child abuse is the animal therapy program for violent parents and their children. It has been developed by senior professionals in the Adult Probation Service. The program focuses on putting an end to parental violence, strengthening ties between the violent parent and child, and developing good communication between them. It consists of three phases: (a) participation in a dedicated therapeutic group, (b) participation in a therapeutic farm for parents and children who have experienced violence, and (c) in-home services for implementing the change. Evaluation outcomes of the program indicated that 91% of participants in the program did not open a new criminal case. In 2007–2014, 260 parents and children participated in 18 programs at the therapeutic farms. The goal in the future is to increase the number of programs and therapeutic farms in various regions in the country (Katzav & Nieman, 2015).

Reform in Social and Welfare Services Israeli government initiated a reform in social and welfare services with the focus on professional strengthening and building the role of the family social worker as the expert working with families in their communities as part of a neighborhood interdisciplinary professional social services team. The goal of the reform is to tailor services to the specific communities and to establish a community professional workforce that is focused on the needs of the community. This requires adapting services and training to small municipalities. Issues addressed by the family social worker include families experiencing poverty and distress, single-parent families, complex families, families with exceptional individuals, families in various crisis situations, and families in various stages of life.

The service process includes an assessment of the family, a well-planned intervention program, implementation, and an ongoing assessment of the results of the intervention with the family. A training system is adapted to the needs of the position and the size of municipality. The construction of designated modular training tracks is done for those with core functions in the department (manager, directorate, area centers, family social worker, expert social worker, social security officer, etc.).

Professional Trainings

Higher Education Systems Israel is ranked number four as one of the most well-educated populations in the world having 46% of all adults holding at minimum an undergraduate degree compared to OECD average of 33% (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2015). The higher education institutions in Israel (Technion, 2024; Hebrew University 1925) were founded prior to the establishment of the State (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013). Currently, institutions of higher education operate under the authority of the Council for Higher Education, which is headed by the Minister of Education. In the course of the past two decades, higher education in Israel has been expanding – from 21 academic institutions with 88,800 students in 1989/1990 to 70 institutions with 306,600 students in 2011/2012 (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2012). Out of 67 academic institutions in 2011/2012, 7 are universities, 1 is an open university, 36 are academic colleges, and 23 are teachers' colleges. Most higher education in Israel is publically funded, and only 13% of the students study at private colleges (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2011). The most common fields of study in Israel are, among bachelor's students, the humanities and social sciences; among master's students, the humanities as well as business and management; and among doctorate students, the natural sciences and mathematics. The number of students who chose to major in the health and social welfare fields was lower than the average in OECD countries (7% vs. 12%) (Ministry for Foreign

Affairs, 2011). In Israel, as in OECD countries, higher education influences employment and salary level, which is 70% higher for those with an academic education compared to non-academics. Sixty percent of young people in Israel are expected to begin studies toward a bachelor's degree in the course of their life. The difference in rates between women and men was significant (66% vs. 53%).

According to the Council for Higher Education report (2014), out of 66,000 students in the undergraduate degrees in 2013/2014, 21.4% graduated in social sciences; out of the 57,885 master's degree students, 16.4% were in social sciences.

More specifically, academic higher education institutions within their social sciences departments and programs in Israel indicated that they offer courses in children's rights, mandatory reporting, warning signs, child abuse and neglect, types of abuse, and tools and ways to prevent and intervene with children at risk to abuse and neglect. The teachers' preparation programs pointed out that they prepare educators to identify the signs and characteristics of abuse, provide guidance and tools working with children with behavioral and learning challenges, as well as addressing at-risk population. The office of welfare services claims that there needs to be a joint training for all professionals working and engaging with children at risk and their families in order to build a cohesive system of care. At present, the office of education does not require educators involved with children at risk to participate on committees with welfare office professionals.

For example, Bar-Ilan University, College of Social Sciences, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, offers a course on the *sociology of families*. This course describes and presents different theoretical frameworks for examining the institution of the family and the social processes taking place within the family. The course deals with the challenges faced by contemporary families in Israeli society and in other societies around the world and deals with various issues such as marriage and divorce, labor-family conflict,

intergenerational relations, and the division of gender roles. At another university, Tel Aviv University, School of Social Work, offers a course on *the family system*, focusing on family life, relationships, parenting and parent-child relationships, boundaries, triangles, communication, self-differentiation and intergenerational transmission, and evaluating family functioning.

A new and unique certification in family counseling focuses on parenting (520 academic hours). This 2-year track combines a broad knowledge of parenting and family from birth on through all stages of development and family growth. The track relates to the couple's difficulties as partners in a relationship, as new parents, and as part of the family.

Levinsky College of Education offers a training program *Parental Guidance Studies* for family counselors. The program was developed in light of the growing needs of the community and families, as well as many requests from parents to receive guidance how to support challenging behaviors in children. The guidance model of a family counselor is based on short-term counseling approaches.

Adler Institute for Couple and Family Therapy – The program combines practical tools in the field of parental guidance and understanding of parent-child relations according to the Adlerian worldview. The program is based on the extensive knowledge accumulated over the years at the Adler Institute, which leads the country in the field of family therapy and parental guidance and integrates other therapeutic approaches.

High School In order to graduate, students in high schools are required to complete a two-unit sociology course. The curriculum deals with the connection between the person and the society around him/her, the culture in which we live, the family in the past versus the postmodern family, and the influence of the environment on the shaping of the personality and life of the individual, as well as the social group as an important element in the life of the individual and society. The topics are tailored to relate to the student's current affairs and life.

Families The Ministry for Social Services offers workshops to enrich family life under vacation conditions. The purpose of the workshops is to strengthen the family framework (marriage, couple relations, and parenthood). The workshops are designed for individuals, couples, parents, and children who experience normative challenges and crises in the family life. The goals include providing tools and knowledge to understand family crises, enrichment of family life, and imparting skills and tools to positive communication. The workshops are administered in recreational conditions for 4–5 days and are based on targeted group intervention which offers physical and emotional "time-out." In 2009, 35 workshops were held, 20 of them among the general population, 10 in Arab society, and 5 in Haredi society. In total 875 participants participated in the workshops.

Camps for Mothers The target population are mothers in families coping with multiple stressors, burdens of life, and distress, for which the camps are an opportunity for enrichment and respite. This population includes mothers with many children, mothers from families at risk, mothers who are experiencing domestic violence or need to deal with alcohol addiction, single mothers, and mothers of exceptional children. The program is offered in two models: day camps (4 days) or camps with accommodation (3 days) operated by the social services departments. In 2009, 1000 mothers participated in the program.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Israel is a young country that has grown rapidly in population, economy, health, and education. Since its foundation, Israel population has increased, due to natural increase and immigration, tenfolds (Bergren & Saltzman, 2017). In the future, Israel is going to face several challenges due to demographics. Longevity in Israel is one of the highest in the world which is going to affect the health systems and in-home care

services for the elderly (Weiss, 2017). Although Israel has a growing economy, it has one of the highest rates of economic inequality as it holds the highest poverty rate (Lavee, 2017).

Israel is a very diverse population ethnically and religiously. The Israeli society is facing major domestic debates in regard to the proper role of religion in Israeli public life, the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, and socioeconomic gaps and divides. Israel is thriving to be an egalitarian society with a strong focus on the family and especially the well-being of children. Future efforts are going to be focused on identifying policies and services that can address these issues as well as developing professional workforce that can provide the services to families and children to meet their needs and challenges.

President of Israel Reuven Rivlin spoke at the Annual Herzliya Conference in 2015 where he asserted, "Israeli society is undergoing a far-reaching transformation. This is not a trivial change, it is a transformation that will restructure our very identity as 'Israelis' and will have a profound impact on the way we understand ourselves and our national home; there is no escape from this change" (Bergren & Saltzman, 2017, p. 6).

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