

NEED FOR AND USE OF JEWISH SOCIAL SERVICE AGENCIES

A Report on the Findings of the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey

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Only a minority of all the households in the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey report seeking assistance for services for a personal or family problem, the needs of the elderly or disabled, or a program for singles. Moreover, only a minority of those who do seek such assistance contact a Jewish agency in hopes of receiving it. The primary reason for not seeking a Jewish agency appears to be lack of any interest or perceived value in doing so. However, of those who do contact a Jewish agency, the great majority receive the service sought and are satisfied with it.

Mindful of the biblical commandment to "open your hand to your brother, to your poor and needy in the land" (Deuteronomy 15:11), Jews throughout the ages and in every land in which they have dwelt have created networks to provide welfare and social services to those who were impoverished or otherwise in need. The aim of this article is to summarize the information provided by the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) about the need for and use of Jewish social services in the United States.

The National Jewish Population Survey was conducted in the summer of 1990. Some 2,441 interviews were completed in the third stage using the CATI system (computer-assisted telephone interviewing). The data collected represent the responses of the civilian Jewish population living in households. No information was obtained for institutional or other nonhousehold

populations, such as those in hospitals, nursing homes, the military, or prisons.

The survey questionnaire has two parts: a core, asked of all respondents, and a set of three supplementary modules, each asked of a randomly selected portion of the total sample. That is, each respondent was asked a series of core questions plus questions from one of three supplementary modules, dealing with Jewish identity, philanthropy, and social services, respectively. The questions concerning the need for and use of Jewish agencies discussed below were, unless otherwise noted, part of the social service module asked of 825 respondents.

The survey questions deal with three broad areas of service: (1) general personal and/or family problems, (2) the needs of the elderly or disabled, and (3) programs for singles. The extent of the reported need for and use of Jewish agencies for assistance in each of these areas is discussed in turn.

Professor Winter spent the 1990-91 sabbatical year as a consultant to the Research Department of the Council of Jewish Federations concentrating on the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey. He wishes to thank the Research Department, for which an earlier version of this report was prepared, and its director, Barry Kosmin, for making the data used in this study available to him.

HOUSEHOLDS SEEKING HELP WITH PERSONAL OR FAMILY PROBLEMS

The NJPS asks respondents if "you or any household member" has sought assistance with each of nine problem areas. For eight areas, the question refers only to seeking

assistance within the past 12 months. For a ninth, reference is to seeking help at any time. The nine areas are (1) "a grant or loan to help meet financial needs," (2) "finding a job or choosing an occupation," (3) counseling for any . . . personal or family problems," (4) "emotional or behavior problems of children or teens," (5) "full- or part-time infant or day care for children living in your home," (6) "before- or after-school programs for school-aged children," (7) "an alcohol or drug problem," (8) "a gambling problem," and (9) "adopting a child," for which reference is to seeking help at any time.

In all, as shown in Table 1, nearly half (44.8% or approximately 1,426,480 households) sought assistance for one (29.3%) or more (15.5%) of these matters, whereas over half (55.2%) did not need or seek any assistance. The problem area for which help was most commonly sought is "a grant or loan to help meet financial needs." About one household in five (20.4% or approximately 651,820 households) are reported to have sought assistance in such

matters. Nearly one household in seven (13.8% or about 441,550 households) sought counseling for personal or family problems. Seeking assistance in finding a job or choosing an occupation was done somewhat less often. Almost 12% (about 376,910) of the households sought vocational assistance.

Among those with children of an appropriate age, it was somewhat more common to seek assistance with (1) before- or after-school programs (15.6% or about 99,590 households), (2) emotional or behavioral problems with children or teens (19.8% or 126,780 households), or (3) day care (24.6% or 143,830 households). However, only a relatively few, about one household in 20 (5.2%, or 164,320), has ever sought assistance in adopting a child. Even fewer, about one in every 37 households (2.7%, or 86,460 households), sought assistance within the last year for alcohol or drug problems, whereas virtually no household (under 0.5%) reported seeking assistance with a gambling problem.

For purposes of comparison, it is worth noting that about one household in seven (14.5%) has a member who paid dues to a Jewish Community Center during the past year, which is a bit larger than the percentage (13.8%) who sought personal or family counseling. Of the households paying JCC dues, about half (49.9%) included somebody who actually participated in a program or activity at the Center. JCCs are generally used for recreational or educational activities.

Of the households in which somebody sought assistance with one or another of the nine problem areas, only about one in six (16.0% or 227,980 households) are reported to have approached a Jewish agency for help (Table 2). Of course, the rate at which Jewish social service agencies are approached for needed assistance varies from problem area to problem area, from a low of under 10% for infant or child day care (8.3%) or seeking assistance with before- or after-school programs (9.0%) to a high of 30.0% among those seeking help in adopting a

Table 1
HOUSEHOLDS SEEKING HELP

Problem Area	Percent of Households Seeking Help	Number of Households Seeking Help
Financial need	20.4	651,820
Job or occupation	11.8	376,910
Personal, family problem	13.8	441,550
Problem child ^a	19.8	126,780
Day care ^b	24.6	143,830
B/A school program ^c	15.6	99,590
Adoption	5.2	164,320
Alcohol/drugs	2.7	86,460
Gambling problems	<0.5	
Any of above problems	44.8 ^d	1,426,480 ^d

NOTE: Estimates based on interviews in 825 households.

^aAsked only of households with child aged 6-17.

^bAsked only of households with child aged 0-6.

^cNumber too small to permit meaningful estimates.

^dDue to multi-problem households, less than sum of above.

Table 2
OF THOSE SEEKING HELP, HOUSEHOLDS
APPROACHING A JEWISH AGENCY

Problem Area	Of Those Seeking Help	
	Percent of Households Approaching a Jewish Agency	Number of Households Approaching a Jewish Agency
Financial need	11.5	75,040
Job or occupation	12.7	47,920
Personal, family problem	17.5	77,630
Problem child ^a	15.4	19,570
Day care ^b	8.3	11,940
B/A school program ^c	9.0	8,960
Adoption	30.0	49,820
Alcohol/drugs	14.7	12,740
Gambling problems	"	"
Any of above problems	16.0 ^d	227,980 ^d

NOTE: Estimates based on interviews in 825 households.

^aAsked only of households with child aged 6-17.

^bAsked only of households with child aged 0-6.

^cNumber too small to permit meaningful estimates.

^dDue to multi-problem households, less than sum of above.

child. For the other problem areas, less than 20% of those households that sought assistance approached a Jewish agency for it. This percentage ranged from a high of 17.5% for counseling for a personal or family problem, to 15.4% for help dealing with a child's emotional or behavioral problems, to 14.7% for alcohol or drug problems, to 12.7% for help finding a job or choosing an occupation, and to a low of 11.5% when seeking a grant or loan to help meet financial needs.

It is, however, worth noting that, of those who did approach a Jewish agency for assistance, the great majority (Table 3) use its services. Overall, nearly three of every four households (74.0% or 168,600 households) that approach a Jewish social agency for aid eventually avail themselves of that aid. Indeed with the exception of aid concerning a job or occupational choice, in which fewer than half (47.9%) of those

Table 3
OF THOSE APPROACHING A JEWISH AGENCY,
HOW MANY USE IT

Problem Area	Of Those Seeking Help	
	Percent of Households Approaching a Jewish Agency	Number of Households Approaching a Jewish Agency
Financial need	72.5	54,410
Job or occupation	47.9	27,990
Personal, family problem	77.0	59,770
Problem child ^a	90.6	17,730
Day care ^b	64.7	7,730
B/A school program ^c	70.6	6,330
Adoption	79.6	439,823
Alcohol/drugs	82.1	10,460
Gambling problems	"	"
Any of above problems	74.0 ^d	168,600 ^d

NOTE: Estimates based on interviews in 825 households.

^aAsked only of households with child aged 6-17.

^bAsked only of households with child aged 0-6.

^cNumber too small to permit meaningful estimates.

^dDue to multi-problem households, less than sum of above.

approaching a Jewish agency use its services, a sizeable majority—between about two-thirds (64.7%) when the issue was day care and nine-tenths (90.6%) when it was help with a problem child—of those who approach a Jewish agency use its services. However, since the number of initial contacts is low, even with a high "success" rate among them, overall Jewish agencies assisted only a small fraction—just over one in 20 (5.3% or 168,600 households)—of all households. Of these, the great majority (79.9% or 134,660 households), constituting about one in every 24 (4.2%) households, report using a Jewish agency for help with but one of the nine problem areas. The remaining households, just over one in 100 (1.1% or 24,060 households), report availing themselves of the aid of a Jewish agency in two or more of the problem areas.

The most common reason (mentioned

Table 4
REASONS FOR NOT CONTACTING A JEWISH AGENCY WHEN IN NEED

Reason	Problem Area							
	Fin. Prob.	Job Occ.	Fam. Prob.	Prob. Kid	Day Care	B/A Prog.	Adopt	Addict ^a
No interest	35.5%	37.0%	30.6%	41.3%	38.2%	32.6%	30.6%	27.8%
Unavailable	21.3	12.6	17.2	23.3	17.0	25.1	11.0	22.7
Don't know								
location	14.6	29.0	8.2	8.5	15.9	6.7	5.2	24.0
Inconvenient	0.3	1.7	1.1	3.0	9.4	9.8	5.2	0.0
Cost	0.5	1.0	2.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Waiting list	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Not Jewish	2.9	4.0	2.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	7.2	0.0
Other	24.8	14.6	38.0	23.9	19.4	25.8	40.7	25.6
Number of households	535,020	271,770	338,500	104,740	128,760	83,880	103,770	68,490 ^a

^aNumber of households in this column less than 5% of total households; read with caution.

by 27.8% to 42.3% of the respondents, depending on the problem area) for not approaching a Jewish agency at all (Table 4) is that there is no special interest in or attraction to the use of a Jewish agency. Specifically, the most common response to the open-ended question, "Why didn't you/they contact a Jewish agency?" was coded as either (1) "no interest" in approaching a Jewish agency or it "didn't matter" whether one did so or not (from 14.1% to 28.8% were coded in this category) or (2) that the household simply "preferred to get service elsewhere" (from 5.6% to 16.1% of the coded responses).

The next most common reason (mentioned by 11.0% to 25.1% depending on the problem area) is generally that no Jewish agency is available (6.1% to 22.7%) or, if it was, that the appropriate service is not provided (3.3% to 10.7%). In general, not knowing how to locate a Jewish agency is the third most common response (given by 5.2% to 24.0% depending on problem area). Cost, inconvenient hours, distance or inaccessibility, being placed on a waiting list, or the presence of a non-Jew in the household are generally relatively uncommon reasons for not contacting a Jewish agency for help. No household cites previous negative experience with a Jewish agency as a reason for not using one for the problem in question.

HOUSEHOLDS SEEKING HELP WITH ELDERLY OR DISABLED

Of every 25 households, about 9 (35.8% or 1,140,160 households) include at least one person who is either aged 62 or older or is disabled physically, mentally, or by a health condition, such as Alzheimer's disease, paraplegia, or blindness, that limits employment, educational, or daily activities and has lasted at least 6 months.¹ About three-tenths of the households (29.2% or 929,590 households) include one (17.3%) or two (11.7%) persons aged 62 or more, whereas about one household in eight (11.8% or 374,460 households) includes one (9.8%) or two (2.0%) people with a disability. In some 3.5% (about 112,490) households there is one (2.8%) or two (0.7%) members who are reported to be in need of daily supervision or special assistance. Approximately one in every 20 households (5.4% or 172,370 households)

1. Questions concerning age, presence of disability, and need for daily assistance were asked of all respondents in the survey. However, for purposes of comparability, only the responses of those in the one-third subsample who were also asked questions about social service needs are analyzed here. Respondents were not asked why they did not contact a Jewish agency for assistance for elderly or disabled persons.

includes at least one person who is both elderly and disabled; approximately one in 16 (6.3% or 202,090 households) includes at least one person who is disabled, but not elderly; and nearly a quarter (23.7% or 757,220 households) include someone who is elderly, but not disabled. Whatever their composition, a respondent from each of the households that included a member who is elderly or disabled was asked a series of questions concerning what assistance, if any, is needed and the use of a Jewish agency to meet existing needs.

Of the households in which an elderly and/or a disabled person lives, just over 5% (5.3% or 59,920 households, 1.8% of total sample) include somebody who needed services or programs for the elderly or disabled within the past year. In addition, about one in eight (12.7% or 145,050 households, 4.5% of total sample) report knowing of a relative or friend living in the same city or town who needed such services or programs within the past year.

Respondents were asked if the assistance or program in question includes (1) assistance with cooking, cleaning, or personal care, (2) special housing, (3) special transportation, or (4) social activities for the elderly or disabled.² Nearly seven in ten (69.2%) know of somebody who has availed themselves of assistance with household chores or personal care (4.5% of all households); almost 45% (44.7%) know of somebody who used special housing (2.9% of all households); almost four of ten (38.7%, 2.5% of all households) know of somebody who used special transportation; and a bit over two in ten (21.3%, 1.4% of all house-

holds) know of somebody who avails themselves of social activities programs.

About two out of every nine households (22.1%) indicate that the person involved used a Jewish agency for the service in question. In addition, about one in 25 (4.1%) indicate that a Jewish agency was contacted, but not used. All of those who used a Jewish agency are reported to have received all (79.9%) or some (21.1%) of the help they needed. Nearly half (49.3%) know of persons who received assistance from a non-Jewish agency. Of these, nearly all received all (71.0%) or some (25.1%) of the help needed, but a few (4.0%) received none. In addition, about one in 13 households (34.0%) indicate that help has been received from family, friends, or another source along with or instead of help from some agency, whereas about 2 of every 15 households (13.4%) indicate no help was received.

PROGRAMS FOR SINGLES

Nearly four in every ten households (38.6% or 1,229,850 households) includes at least one single person between 18 and 55 years of age. Respondents in these households were asked if any household member had participated in a program for singles during the past year. About 18% of the households (17.9% or 219,540 households, 6.9% of all households) including a single person indicate that at least one household member had participated in such a program. In over two-thirds (67.8%) of these cases (4.7% of total population or 148,950 households), a Jewish organization is said to have sponsored the program. However, when asked about preferences concerning the sponsorship of a singles program, whether or not one had participated in any, only about a quarter (24.7% or 303,690 households) indicate a preference for sponsorship by a Jewish organization, whereas over two-thirds either had no preference (67.2%) or did not know what their preference would be (3.9%), and a few (3.9%) would prefer non-Jewish sponsor-

2. Since these questions are asked only in households with an elderly or disabled member, the responses are not those of a random sample of all respondents. Furthermore, it should be noted that responses refer not just to one's own household members, but to friends and relatives in the same town or city. Analysis of those respondents referring to members of their own household was not undertaken because they constitute too few, less than 5%, of the subsample.

ship. Respondents were not asked about the reasons why the person in question did not prefer Jewish sponsorship.

CONCLUSION

Overall then, only a minority of households report seeking assistance for a personal or family problem, the needs of the elderly or disabled, or a program for singles. Moreover, it appears that only a minority of those who do seek such assistance contact a Jewish agency in hopes of receiving it. The primary reason for not seeking a Jewish agency is apparently that there is no interest or perceived value in doing so. However, of those who do contact a Jewish agency, the great majority receive it and are satisfied with the assistance they get.

Obviously, future research should seek to determine whether there are demographic, regional, and socioeconomic differences between those who use Jewish agencies and those who do not. It would also be helpful to determine how, if at all, the Jewish identity and practices of those who use Jewish agencies differ from those who do not. Presumably, those with a weaker Jewish identity are more likely to abstain from using a Jewish agency because they have no interest in doing so than are those with a stronger Jewish identity. Future research might also seek to determine how those who contact a Jewish agency concerning one problem area differ, if at all, from those who contact it for another. Unfortunately, the unweighted (real) number of respondents in the 1990 NJPS who report

using Jewish agencies is rather small, under 100 for all but one of the problem areas studied. Consequently, using NJPS data for such analysis must be undertaken with great care and with due regard for the small number of cases in each category. It may, of course, be possible to combine various categories—for example, all those involving services to or about youth—to avoid the problems of small numbers. Unfortunately, however, it might prove necessary to undertake new research to investigate further the use of Jewish social service agencies and programs. Given the small percentage of households that are likely to use such services, it could be necessary for such research to use sources, such as agency lists, to oversample actual clients. In any case, whether attempts are made to further analyze the NJPS data itself or to undertake new studies, it would be well to design such future analysis to enable assessment of the advisability of specific agency policies, such as expanding adoption services or those that define the population-at-risk or the agency's potential clientele. It would also be worthwhile to delve into the sources of satisfaction among those who do use Jewish social services. For, although not many actually avail themselves of the services of Jewish social service agencies, those who do are quite apt to be satisfied with the service they receive. That is, Jewish agencies do open their hands to the needy, and when the needy extend their hand in return, a positive relationship results.