

Economic and Market Determinants in Israeli Adoption Practices

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Perhaps of all the policy responses to the problems created by supply and demand factors in adoption work, one of the most controversial, or overlooked, concerns the definition of the professional responsibility and services due to candidates for adoption who have been rejected and those who, having been approved, will have to wait years before they receive a child. To these categories we may now add a third category, those who are now ineligible to even apply. In a sense, the logistics of supply and demand in adoptions and the social policies formulated in response to this situation have resulted in the creation of a relatively large number of new clients for the social services.

IT is no great revelation to note that child care services, like any other area of social activity, are strongly influenced by economic determinants. What may be surprising to the average social work practitioner, however, is the extent of these influences and the conflicts they may present regarding professional standards and ethics. Our assessment is that social work practices are often far more a result of prevailing fiscal and market forces than carefully thought-out professional consideration of what may be helpful for people and for society. Sometimes these economic and supply and demand influences are very subtle, and only over a period of time can one discern resultant changes in social work policies and practices which may not have been acceptable or moral under other circumstances. The danger in not understanding or evaluating the influences of economic and market factors on trends in welfare services lies in the possible *post facto* professional rationalization of the need for the change, thus creating barriers to innovate dis-

cussion and conceptualization of other alternatives. Regardless of whether social policy changes due to market forces are "positive" or "negative", it is important to appreciate just how they evolve, and to decide whether to "drift" with them, try to seek more control over them, or accept them.

Examples of Economic Determinism in Child Care

One classic example of economic determinism in Israeli child care can be seen in the case of the WIZO Baby Home in Jerusalem. This institution, founded in 1924 by Dr. Helena Kagan, a Jerusalem pediatrician, and subsidized by members of the Women's International Zionist Organization (WIZO) in Palestine, England and Ireland, was the bastion of institutional care for infants and pre-school children for many decades. A huge new, four-story building built with funds from WIZO women abroad provided placement for over 350 dependent infants, based primarily on nursing care and ward-living. Social services in the institution were sparse and overstay was very common.¹ De-

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¹ Gila Rosner, *Interim Report on Demonstration in Social Work Services in the WIZO Baby Home Jerusalem*. Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1965, pp. 1-14.

spite the literature on congregate care, three critical research studies done at WIZO by Hebrew University faculty and social workers' prodding for change, the WIZO women's organization steadfastly refused to close the place down. During the early 1970's the Jerusalem Department of Family and Community Services (headed by this author, on loan from the Hebrew University) sharply decreased the number of babies placed at Wizo and expanded foster home care placements and services to children in their own homes. The drastic reduction in income from board rate fees, plus the disastrous increase in heating expenses, and the overhead expenses for nursing and other staff, caused the WIZO leadership in 1975 to close the institution as a baby-home, discharge the staff, and open up a large, and somewhat profitable day care center on the same premises.²

The very high rate of institutional placement for dependent children of all ages in Israel today (Table 1 and 2) is only partially a function of child-care planning and social ideology. The other major reason for the disproportionate use of this type of care is the financial subsidy provided by non-profit (mostly women's) volunteer organizations from abroad such as Hadassah women, who support Youth Aliyah's 15,870 children in care, WIZO women, Pioneer women, Mizrachi women, Agudah women, and Chabad. This symbiotic financial relationship has for many decades influenced the direction, division of labor, and the content of Israeli child care services. One of the memos recently found in the archives of Henrietta Szold, the first director of the Jewish community's social work department established in

² Eliezer D. Jaffe, *Israelis in Institutions*. London: Gordon and Breach Publishers, 1982, pp. 167-223.

1931, tells of Szold's strenuous efforts to avoid institutional placement of dependent children and her failure to convince members of the Advisory Council of the Department to reject a significant philanthropic gift earmarked exclusively for building a large institution.³ That incident set a pattern that exists even today, where uninformed, foreign earmarked philanthropy can be counterproductive to changing welfare needs.

Economic factors in Israel have often led to painful, paradoxical situations where many important child care practices, encoded in the directives of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, cannot be implemented due to fiscal restraints.⁴ The resulting impact on clients, social work practice, and the organization of social services, are often painful to witness.

On the other hand, astute utilization of fiscal power has frequently served to enhance child care services. One example of this was the provision of higher board rates to directors of children's institutions who agreed to hire professional social workers as part of their regular staff.⁵

Market Factors and Adoption Policies.

Perhaps one of the most striking areas of social work practice that reflects the influence of economic and market fac-

³ Anita Wiener, *Differential Trends in Child Placement in the Land of Israel, 1918-1945*. Jerusalem: Doctoral dissertation, The Hebrew University, 1979.

⁴ Foster Care Division. "Work With Foster Families", Directive 8.18. Jerusalem: Israel Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, 1980; Elisheva Shalev, *Interim Report on Contracting with Social Workers for Foster Care Treatment in the Tel Aviv District*. Jerusalem: Israel Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, 1981.

⁵ Yisrael Goralnik, *Financial Participation in Foster Care and Institution Board Rates: Employment of Social Workers*. Jerusalem: Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. Directive 8.18, Appendix 8, 1979.

Table 1
Israel Trends in Placement of Children Under Age 17 Out of Their Own Homes
(in percentages)

| Placement Settings | 1957 | 1960 | 1964 | 1965 | 1978 |
|-------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Dependency Institutions | 78.5 | 68.2 | 76.4 | 76.8 | 76.4 |
| Foster Care | 9.0 | 16.8 | 15.7 | 16.1 | 20.4 |
| Group Homes | — | 7.7 | 1.8 | 1.8 | 1.3 |
| Kibbutz | 6.0 | 6.9 | 6.1 | 5.3 | 1.9 |
| Other | 6.5 | 0.4 | — | — | — |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Source: Eliezer D. Jaffe. *Child Welfare in Israel*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1982, p. 244.

Table 2
Child Placements* For Youth Aliyah and the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs

| Type of Placement | Youth Aliyah (1979) ¹ | | | Labor and Social Affairs (1978) ² | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------|--------------|---|-------|--------------|
| | Children | % | No. Settings | Children | % | No. Settings |
| Boarding schools/institutions | 13,470 | 84.9 | 138 | 7,526 | 69.5 | 159 |
| Kibbutzim | 2,250 | 14.2 | 87 | 260 | 2.4 | 121 |
| Group Homes | 117 | 0.7 | 3 | 180 | 1.7 | 18 |
| Foster Families | 33 | 0.2 | 15 | 2,862 | 26.4 | 1,865 |
| Totals | 15,870 | 100.0 | 248 | 10,828 | 100.0 | 2,163 |

* Dependent and disadvantaged children only; not including day care.

Sources: 1. Department of Children and Youth Aliyah. "Statistical Summary for April 1, 1979", *Annual Report of the Youth Aliyah Department*, Jerusalem: The Jewish Agency, 1979, pp. 8-11.
 2. Tanchum Merari. "Placement of Children Away From Home", *Society and Welfare*, 1: 4, (1978), pp. 490-497.

tors, is the field of adoptions. Here, the changing relationship between "supply and demand", i.e. children available vs. couples wanting to adopt, has consistently led to changes in adoption policies and practices. Kadushin⁶ noted this fact:

One of the most significant statistics determining agency practice and procedure is the ratio of adoptive applicants to children available for adoption. When the ratio is high, the agency can be highly selective; when it is low, the agency tends to modify, relax, or eliminate various eligibility requirements.

In Israel, the single-minded focus and emphasis on "the best interests of the child" and the change in the name of "The Adoption Service" to "The Service

for the Child"⁷ at the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, clearly reflect the influence of current supply and demand forces. The steadily decreasing number of children available for adoption relative to the increase in the number of couples applying for children has resulted in a somewhat different relationship with applicants. Aviva Leon,⁸ Director of the Service for the Child, elaborated on this point:

The dilemma is, who is the focus (the major client) when needs (of different people) are in conflict? In choosing the name of our Service, "The Service for the Child", we have provided the answer. The needs of the child are pre-

⁷ Avraham Lavine, *Israel's Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs*. Jerusalem: State of Israel, 1979.

⁸ Aviva Leon, *The Children's Service: Statistical Summary for 1970-1979*. Jerusalem: Israel Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, 1982 (Preface).

⁶ Alfred Kadushin, *Child Welfare Services* (3rd edition). New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1980, p. 472.

ferred, and he is the focus even while we work with related adults up to the day of his birth. Until the child is born, the needs of the pregnant woman are the focus. Nevertheless, this statement does not release the social workers from constant consideration of how best to help all of the parties involved. This is not always possible, since the means available to the Service are limited, particularly regarding manpower, and because the priority of finding a home for every child hurts (some of) the population who apply to adopt. Also, the continually decreasing number of infants available for adoption causes painful and lengthy waiting, a trend which has been increasing in recent years.

Before we look at the *effects* of market determinants on adoption practices, it is important to review some of the statistical trends and data in this field concerning biological parents, children available, and couples applying to adopt. Fortunately, the Israel Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs⁹ has recently published a Statistical Summary covering ten years of adoption work, from 1970 through 1979. Unfortunately, however, the data have not been separated by relative and non-relative adoptions, which hampers a more precise assessment of the data.

Decreasing Availability of Adoptive Children

Table No. 3 shows a steady annual increase in the number of couples applying to adopt, and a decline in the number of children relinquished for adoption. This latter trend seems paradoxical, in view of the gradual increase in pregnant women turning to the Adoption Service for aid and care.

Approximately 36 percent of the difference between the number of mothers in care of the Adoption Service and number of children relinquished is ac-

counted for by the fact that two percent of the babies were stillborn or died soon after birth, 16 percent decided to raise the child themselves, six percent were not relinquished due to medical, clerical or legal reasons, and approximately 12.3 percent of the women underwent abortions while in the care of the Service.¹⁰

Thus, while demand is growing steadily for more children, the percentage of biological mothers relinquishing their children is decreasing rapidly. Table No. 4 shows these changing norms for single, married, divorced, separated, or widowed mothers served by the Adoption Service of the Ministry.

The trend noted above is apparently becoming normative for women of all age groups, occupation groups, and educational backgrounds. While in the late 1960's and early 1970's more than 60 percent of the women in care relinquished their child for adoption, by 1980 the percentage was down, on the average, to only 24 percent.

It is no wonder that during the 1970's decade, only 44 percent of the couples wishing to adopt actually received a child. Data from the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs show that only 7 percent of all couples applying between 1970 and 1977 either withdrew voluntarily or were rejected. This means that nearly half of the acceptable applicants were slated to wait quite a while before receiving a child, if at all. By April, 1982 the waiting period stretched to four years and was well on the way to six years.¹¹ In 1981, only 150 children were available for adoption, while the number of approved adoptive couples on the waiting list *since 1978* alone was 124 couples.

⁹ Israel Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. *The Service for the Child: Statistical Summary, 1970-1979*. Jerusalem: Division for Planning and Research, 1982.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

¹¹ *Haaretz*. "Age Limitation Placed on Adoption Candidates", May 4, 1982.

Table 3
Women In Care of the Adoption Service, Children Relinquished, and Couples Requesting to Adopt (1970-1979)

| Year | Biological Mothers in Care | Children Relinquished | % Relinquished | Couples Requesting Child | Couples Receiving Child | Couples Receiving |
|------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| 1970 } 1971 } | 582 | 404 | (69) | 668 | 529 | (80) |
| 1972 | 419 | 232 | (55) | 434 | 298 | (69) |
| 1973 | 445 | 201 | (45) | 347 | 222 | (64) |
| 1974 | 513 | 265 | (52) | 457 | 298 | (65) |
| 1975 | 507 | 258 | (51) | 494 | 340 | (69) |
| 1976 | 655 | 272 | (42) | 613 | 306 | (50) |
| 1977 | 718 | 235 | (33) | 575 | 174 | (30) |
| 1978 | 733 | 221 | (30) | 801 | 33* | (—) |
| 1979 | 707 | 171 | (24) | 686 | 7* | (—) |
| Totals | 5,279 | 2,259 | (43) | 5,075 | 2,207 | (44) |

* Incomplete data.

Source: Data compiled by author from Israel Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. *The Service for the Child—Statistical Summary, 1970-1979*. Division for Research and Planning, Jerusalem, 1982, p. 2, 16-17.

Coping With Supply and Demand Realities

In order to cope with the increasingly harsh realities of supply and demand, several policy decisions were made by the Adoption Service.

On the one hand, a new source of potential adoptees was tapped, namely, parentally-neglected and abandoned

Table 4
Percent of Single, Married, Divorced, Widowed and Separated Mothers Served by the Adoption Service Relinquishing Children for Adoption, 1970 through 1977

| Year | Single | Married | Divorced, Widowed, Separated | Averages |
|----------|--------|---------|------------------------------|----------|
| To 1971 | 64.7 | 61.5 | 57.8 | 63.8 |
| 1972-'73 | 43.0 | 48.5 | 40.7 | 43.2 |
| 1974-'75 | 45.1 | 47.2 | 37.7 | 44.5 |
| 1976 | 40.4 | 19.0 | 21.0 | 45.8 |
| 1977 | 27.3 | 20.8 | 13.8 | 23.8 |
| Averages | 46.5 | 37.0 | 34.1 | 45.4 |

Source: Compiled from Israel Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. *The Service for the Child—Statistical Summary, 1970-1979*. Division for Research and Planning, Jerusalem, p. 38.

dependent children living in institutions and foster homes. The Adoption Service was instrumental in "discovering" these children and in lobbying for a new adoption law that would more clearly define "neglect" and ease the way for judges to approve adoption of children despite the objections of their natural parents. The new law was passed by the Knesset on May 21, 1981, and although child welfare workers are hesitant to utilize it extensively so far, it may eventually increase the number of "older" children available for adoption. Ironically, young children had been neglected in institutions and foster care for decades, but research studies about this situation went relatively unheeded.¹² It

¹² Yehuda Epstein, "Care of Infants and Toddlers in Israeli Closed Institutions", *Megamot*, 1:4 (1950), pp. 347-364; Eliezer Jaffe, *De-Institutionalization of Babies*. Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1969; Maxine Cohen. "A Survey of Young Children in Institutions Who Need Parents", *Saad*, 16:6, (1972), pp. 91-102; Miriam Barasch and Eliezer J Jaffe, *Preliminary Report of a Survey of Children Resident in the WIZO Baby Home in Jerusalem, Summer, 1973*. Jerusalem: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1974; Miriam Rosenthal, *The WIZO Baby Home at Beit*

took a crisis in adoption supply to bring attention to these children.

Another effort to cope with supply problems involved an intensification and lengthening of the screening procedures. Some candidate couples began speaking in terms of "screening exhaustion" and being worn down emotionally during the process. The Ministry was convinced, however, that the lengthy individual and numerous group discussions were absolutely essential.¹³

As in America and other countries, Israel also applied less stringent criteria and shorter waiting periods for couples who were willing to adopt "older" or handicapped children with special needs. This group, made up of children over one year of age or handicapped, accounted for approximately 15 percent of all adoptions from 1970 through 1977. Table No. 5 compares background characteristics of couples who adopted infants under one month old, and couples who adopted children over one year old and handicapped children.

Compiled by Israel Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (1982). *The Service for the Child, Statistical Summary, 1970-1979*, Jerusalem, pp. 28-29.

From Table No. 5 it is clearly evident that older or handicapped children were significantly more often placed with couples who had biological children of their own, where mothers were over age 40 and fathers over age 50, and with couples that had relatively little formal education. Some comments have been raised about the advisability of giving the difficult job of raising older and handicapped children to older, less

educated adoptive parents who may have trouble coping with problems that can arise such as sibling rivalry, emotional disturbances, testing-out, grieving over prior emotional loss, and resistance to re-socialization. Although American research¹⁴ shows that adopted older children do develop strong relationships and learn to accept the ways of the new family, the adoptive parents can use a great deal of consultation and support during the initial post-adoption stages. Unfortunately, in Israel no research has been conducted or published yet on this important topic.

Although it may be "easier" and faster procedurally to adopt an "older" or handicapped child, there is no great rush among young couples and adoptive couples in general, to do so. Of the 1,538 couples registered as of January, 1980, who were approved and waiting for an adoptive child, 1,214 of them (79 percent) were candidates for infants only.

The increasing inability to provide children for adoption and the frustration which this situation created among approved couples, led The Service for the Child to announce a new policy effective in April, 1982, whereby no new applications would be accepted from couples where the woman is over age 35 and the man is over age 40, versus the previous age limits of 40 and 45 respectively.¹⁵

Responsibilities to Childless Couples

Perhaps of all the policy responses to the problems created by supply and demand factors in adoption work, one of the most controversial, or overlooked, concerns the definition of the

Hakerem in Jerusalem. Jerusalem: The WIZO-Hebrew University Early Child Care Project, 1974; Yehudit Selai. *Long-Term Institutional Care of Children*, Jerusalem: Israel Ministry of Social Welfare, 1975.

¹³ Eliezer D. Jaffe, *Child Welfare in Israel*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1982, pp. 196-200.

¹⁴ Alfred Kadushin, *Adopting Older Children*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1970.

¹⁵ *Haaretz*, *op. cit.*

Table 5
Characteristics of Couples Adopting Infants and Couples Adopting One Year Olds or Handicapped Children, by percent

| Characteristics of Adopting Couples | Age or Type of Child Placed* | |
|--|------------------------------|----------------------|
| | Under One Month Old | One year/Handicapped |
| <i>Family Status</i> | | |
| Barren couples | 46.1 | 15.0 |
| Couples with children | 32.2 | 34.3 |
| Couples with adopted children | 47.9 | 8.4 |
| <i>Age of Adopting Mother</i> | | |
| Under age 30 | 54.3 | 6.7 |
| Over age 40 | 19.9 | 47.7 |
| <i>Age of Adopting Father</i> | | |
| Under 30 | 53.6 | 10.6 |
| Over 50 | 25.7 | 55.7 |
| <i>Adoptive Father's Ethnic Origin</i> | | |
| Israel | 50.1 | 8.9 |
| Asia-Africa | 43.4 | 15.4 |
| Europe-America | 42.3 | 19.1 |
| <i>Adopting Father's Education</i> | | |
| Less than 8th grade | 41.0 | 20.2 |
| More than 13 years | 50.8 | 13.1 |
| <i>Adopting Mother's Education</i> | | |
| Less than 8th grade | 40.9 | 19.3 |
| More than 13 years | 47.2 | 16.0 |

* Data for the variables presented do not add up to 100% since intermediate categories are not included, only polar categories of each characteristics.

professional responsibility and services due to candidates for adoption who have been rejected and those who, having been approved, will have to wait years before they receive a child. To these categories we may now add a third category, those who are not eligible to even apply. In a sense, the logistics of supply and demand in adoptions and the social policies formulated in response to this situation have resulted in the creation of a relatively large number of new clients for the social services. While no one is challenging the primacy of the child's needs in adoption work, the "best interests of the child"¹⁶ never suggested that candidate couples are not *clients* entitled to social services. There are many social workers and candidate couples who believe that the major focus

on the child as client in adoption work has reached near-obsessive proportions and led to moral, ethical, and professional questions about what services should be provided to rejectees and whether the rights of candidate couples, both rejected and waiting, have adequately been spelled-out and preserved.

For example, in Israel, there is no legal, binding appeal procedure for rejected couples. Neither the new or the former Adoption Law contains such a provision.¹⁷ There does exist an "Advisory Committee to the Director of the Adoption Service", appointed by the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs selected from a list of candidates submitted by the Director of the Adoption Service, but their decisions are not binding, nor is the procedure anchored

¹⁶ Joseph Goldstein, Anna Freud, and Albert Solnit, *Beyond the Best Interests of the Child*. New York: Free Press, 1973.

¹⁷ Sefer Hachukim, *The Adoption Law, 1981*. Jerusalem: Government Printing Office, No. 1028, 1981.

in law. Although the Committee's advice has been accepted in the three "appeals" heard thus far, this is not the same as a legal, binding appeals procedure or a satisfactory method for appointing a non-partial committee. Since there are no professional, non-profit private adoption agencies in Israel, and since all adoption work is a function of government social workers, there is absolutely nowhere else for couples to turn for adopting a child in Israel. Thus, there must be a provision for an appeals procedure added to the Adoption Law. Barring that, there should be greater use of the courts to hear appeals and procedural complaints concerning adoption work.

Although the adoption service is so largely focused on the child, one wonders why more thought, effort and government financial resources cannot be spent on attempting to expand sources of children for adoption. For example, why cannot the Social Affairs Ministry explore the possibilities of developing a government or private international adoption program for bringing dependent Jewish children to Israel for adoption? What are the possibilities of establishing an international adoption information pool in Jewish communities around the world? Why cannot a couple seeking to adopt abroad come to an Advice and Counselling Service of the Ministry for information and details about procedures, risks, and benefit from accumulated experience with this subject? Why shouldn't there be an outreach program to Israeli couples who cannot adopt, cannot apply, or have to wait many years for a child? Why should they be left with a sense of personal failure and rejection by the social work profession, without any real understanding of the relativity of adoption decisions and the supply-demand forces which determine adop-

tion policy. Moreover, why do rejected candidates not have a right to follow up counselling, support, and clarification? These are not private or superfluous issues, but should be an inextricable part of the social service system.

Unfortunately, these aspects and potential services of adoption work have not been thoroughly explored in Israel, and the market and economic forces seem consistently to funnel us into reactive responses that become more punitive as time goes on.

Time For A Citizen's Lobby?

Perhaps the time has come in Israel for couples who have obtained children for adoption, couples who are still waiting, couples who cannot apply, and couples who have been rejected to band together and establish a self-help "Adoption Rights" lobby. Such a lobby might press for more dialogue concerning the management of adoption services, more counselling services, and more outreach work. It might fund legal counsel for members, and establish its own clearing-house and information service concerning adoption of children abroad. It could support financially artificial insemination research and perhaps press to end the State monopoly over adoption work. It would be able to speak out as a group on behalf of couples who are afraid to do so and at the risk of jeopardizing their present or future candidacy for adopting a child. Such a grass roots organization might also provide important feedback to the social services and be a support-group for adoptive couples who may need their help. No one can forecast where such a grassroots development could lead to, but it does seem timely in view of past experiences and future forecasts concerning Israeli adoption policies.