

Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute
Engelberg Center for Children and Youth

Utilizing Research to Promote Opportunities for Arab Children and Youth in Israel



**Proceedings of a Conference Held on March 4-5, 2003
under the auspices of the Municipality of Nazareth**

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Table of Contents

Preface	1
Opening Remarks	3
<i>Ramaz Grissy</i>	5
<i>Prof. Jack Habib</i>	7
<i>Dr. Khaled Abu-Asbah</i>	8
First Session: Children with Disabilities	11
• Opening Statement	
<i>Dr. Cameel Makhoul (Chair)</i>	13
• Arab Children with Special Needs – Needs and Responses	
<i>Denise Naon</i>	15
• Developing a Model for Enhanced Coordination among Services for Disabled Children – Deir Hanna	
<i>Dr. Hatim Kanaaneh</i>	23
• Panel	
<i>Ainat Beitran, Ruhi Huri</i>	27
• Discussion	32
Second Session: Preschool Children	39
• Opening Statement	
<i>Dr. Jihad Eraki (Chair)</i>	41
• Arab Preschool Children in Israel: Preliminary Findings from a National Comparative Study	
<i>Randi Garber</i>	43
• The Contribution of Maternal Child Health Clinics Nurses to Children at Risk and Their Families	
<i>Prof. Jona Rosenfeld, Huvieh Hamis</i>	53
• Panel	
<i>Riad Tibi, Nadia Hilu</i>	61
• Discussion	69
Third Session: The Formal and Informal Education Needs of Youth	73
• Opening Statement	
<i>Noah Shalev (Chair)</i>	75
• School Atmosphere, Changes in the Family, and Violence among Arab Youth	
<i>Dr. Khaled Abu-Asbah</i>	77

• Identifying Needs and Planning Services for Youth in Nazareth: Findings and Initiatives in Informal Education <i>Samia Basoul, Mahmoud Nasseer, Dr. Bashir Abdo</i>	81
• Panel <i>Hassan Aid, Sallach El-Sheikh</i>	87
• Discussion	92
Fourth Session: Dropping Out and Disengagement among Arab Youth	95
• Dropouts and "Hidden Dropouts" among Arab Youth <i>Miriam Cohen-Navot</i>	97
• Youth in Tamra: Identifying the Needs of Students and Dropouts, and Strategies for Municipal Planning <i>Dr. Musa Abu-Romi, Yassar Awad, Arin Omari</i>	109
• Panel <i>Prof. Majid al-Haj, Zion Gabai, Navul Hatum</i>	117
• Discussion	126
Fifth Session: Children at Risk – Neglect and Abuse	133
• Opening Statement <i>Motti Winter (Chair)</i>	135
• Identifying Children at Risk at Maternal Child Health Clinics: Findings from a National Comparative Survey <i>Dalia Ben-Rabi</i>	137
• Needs of Neglected and Abused Arab Children in the North: Information as a Basis for Planning Services <i>Talal Dolev</i>	145
• Panel <i>Dr. Alean Al-Krenawi, Ava Smaaen</i>	157
• Discussion	163
Concluding Session: Research as a Basis for Identifying Needs and Developing Strategies for Action	167
• Opening Statement <i>Prof. Jack Habib (Chair)</i>	169
• Panel <i>Raji Mansur, Tamar Gozhansky, Dr. Ganam Yacoubi, Shlomit Amichai</i>	171
Preface and Opening Remarks in Arabic	191

Preface



This volume presents the proceedings of a national conference on "*Utilizing Research to Promote Opportunities for Arab Children and Youth in Israel.*"

This conference was held under the auspices of the Municipality of Nazareth and organized by the Center for Children and Youth of the JDC-Brookdale Institute¹. It offered 250 Arab and Jewish professionals and policymakers a unique opportunity to engage in a dialogue on the major trends and challenges regarding Arab children and youth in Israel today. This conference represented an important watershed in raising the awareness of the extensive unmet needs as well as the effective ways of addressing them. The conference has served as a stimulus for important policy and program initiatives.

The conference focused on a number of key themes:

- ◆ Creating positive partnerships in policy and program development between the Arab community and national policymakers
- ◆ The shift from adapting programs developed for the Jewish community to the Arab community to developing policies and programs within the Arab community that reflect its specific needs and culture
- ◆ The Arab community as an innovator at the local level, whose innovations can also benefit other communities throughout Israeli society
- ◆ The implications for service development of the dramatic social transition in the Arab community
- ◆ The importance of developing objective criteria for resource allocation at the national level in order to assure more equitable distribution of resources
- ◆ The role of research as a catalyst for program and policy development.

We would like to express our deepest appreciation to Marshall Weinberg for his support of the conference and this publication. Marshall, who is a leading member of the Board of the JDC-Brookdale Institute and the American Jewish community, is strongly committed to the advancement of the Arab population in Israel and to creating opportunities for all of Israel's citizens. Marshall's belief in

¹ In June 2004, the Institute was renamed the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute and the Center for Children and Youth was renamed the Engelberg Center for Children and Youth. Since the conference was held prior to this date, the references in the text are to the previous names.

promoting a frank and honest dialogue was reflected in the spirit of this conference.

Special thanks are due to the Mayor of Nazareth, the honorable Ramaz Grissy, for his partnership in hosting the conference and to Rajy Mansour, Director of the Education Division of the Municipality of Nazareth, for his contribution to the program.

Special thanks are also due to Dr. Khaled Abu-Asbah and Miriam Cohen-Navot who served as co-chairmen of the conference and co-editors of this volume.

Khaled was a founding member of the executive committee of the Center for Children and Youth established in 1995 and the founding director of the research program for Arab children and youth at the Institute. The work done over the last eight years in the children's center and the broad partnership established with the Arab community in Israel were reflected in many of the presentations in the conference. Khaled provided outstanding leadership and vision in developing and implementing the program and a unique capacity to establish strategic partnerships with all echelons within the Arab population in Israel and the society at large.

Miriam Cohen-Navot, a senior researcher in the Center for Children and Youth, has played a major role in the professional development of the research program for Arab children and youth since its inception. Miriam played a leading role in many Institute studies in the Arab sector and has been instrumental in promoting cooperation among Arab and Jewish researchers.

We would like to thank Talal Dolev, Director of the Center for Children and Youth, whose broad expertise on children has been a critical component in the successful development of the research program. She made a very important contribution to planning the professional program of the conference.

Thanks are also due to Fida Nijim, Tali Shlomi and Susan Sawicki, who helped in the organization of the conference and to Jenny Rosenfeld and Bilha Allon who edited these proceedings.

We would like to thank all the lecturers and panelists for their important contribution to the conference, which is reflected in the papers in this volume. The conference afforded considerable time for discussion among the participants, and highlights of those discussions are included at the end of each chapter.

Professor Jack Habib
Director, Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute

Opening Remarks



Ramaz Grissy,
Mayor of Nazareth

Prof. Jack Habib
Director, JDC-Brookdale Institute

Dr. Khaled Abu-Asbah
Founding member of the executive committee of the Center for Children
and Youth, JDC- Brookdale Institute, and Director, Maasar Institute

Dr. Khaled Abu-Asbah: I am honored to open this conference. On the podium are two people without whom this conference would not have taken place – the Mayor of Nazareth, Mr. Ramaz Grissy, and Professor Jack Habib, the director of the JDC-Brookdale Institute.

Ramaz Grissy: I am delighted to be here with you at the opening of this important conference, and to greet you on behalf of the city of Nazareth. This conference is about an issue that is raising increasing concern and public interest in the Arab sector.

Arab society is developing from a traditional society. As in most traditional societies, the issue of children and youth at risk and with special needs was neglected and not openly addressed. Often these problems were a source of shame and unease. Slowly, the situation began to change. On the one hand, traditional frameworks became more open and more receptive to outside influences; on the other hand, there has been growing interest in meeting the needs of these children and youth through the established system of services. In addition, there is increasing awareness of these needs among policymakers, heads of local authorities and other institutions.

Ten years ago, there were few frameworks that met these children's needs. The change in traditional Arab society led to a process of positive social development in the Arab sector, which is attempting to fill this void.

Undoubtedly, with this development, the demand for services to meet these needs is very high at this point in time. The difficulties we encounter reflect the general socio-economic situation. Weaker populations are the first to suffer from the economic crisis because it is easier to cut the services that benefit them. These groups are not accustomed to raising their voice and have limited political influence. The struggle for the disadvantaged is usually conducted by others, such as voluntary organizations and social service departments.

It is extremely sad that in the present situation it is impossible to provide adequate solutions and develop the services that will meet the pressing needs.

Delinquency and negative social phenomena are becoming more and more prevalent. One of the reasons for this is, of course, the economic situation of the families. Another stems from the lack of adequate opportunities for youth to spend their free time in a positive way. In addition, the situation of the education

system and the gaps and inequalities in that system also contribute significantly to the problem. In particular, the education system does not fulfill its appropriate role in providing opportunities for enrichment and personal growth.

In the Municipality of Nazareth, we have conducted a multi-year and comprehensive study of youth led by Dr. Khaled Abu-Asbah of the JDC-Brookdale Institute. I closely followed the various phases of the study and today we have at our disposal the full findings and recommendations. The findings of the study highlight the seriousness of the problem in Nazareth and give us many insights on how best to address these issues. This landmark study has implications well beyond the boundaries of Nazareth since the situation in Nazareth is typical of many other Arab villages and cities. It is therefore possible to learn and try to draw operative conclusions from this study not only for Nazareth, but for other localities as well.

The study has already contributed to our efforts to develop new programs about which you will hear more during the conference. I would like to note the collaboration with Ashalim and JDC-Israel in establishing a center for child development in Nazareth that has been made possible by a grant from Irwin Green, a Jewish American lay leader and philanthropist.

There is no doubt that promoting the awareness of the needs of children in the Arab sector is of prime importance. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Marshall Weinberg for his support of this landmark conference and for sharing our concern and our vision. We are very proud to be hosting the conference and wish all of us productive and successful deliberations on behalf of the future of our children.

Prof. Jack Habib: I am very happy to participate in the opening of this conference. The JDC-Brookdale Institute is committed to promote equal opportunities for all children to fulfill their potential. Addressing these goals for Arab children in Israeli society has been an important priority of the Institute since the establishment of its Center for Children and Youth in 1995.

In that year, the Institute initiated an extensive multi-year research program devoted to the advancement of Arab children in Israel that has focused on obtaining a deeper understanding of the needs and the appropriate responses, and on developing a partnership between Arabs and Jews in conducting research and

in its utilization to better the lives of children. Our studies either focus exclusively on the Arab population or, equally important, Arab children are included as an identifiable group in national studies of children in Israel which provides a critical comparative perspective.

I am very pleased that this conference is held in Nazareth. This city has special significance in many ways. It has also played a unique role in the efforts of the Institute to develop its research program for Arab children and youth. One of the first studies we conducted was implemented in Nazareth at the invitation of Mayor Grissy. We learned much from the collaboration with the highly professional staff of the Nazareth municipality which has contributed to all our subsequent studies. Moreover, we had the opportunity to get to know a wonderful group of people in Nazareth, who are deeply committed to advancing children and youth and whose work continues to inspire us. For this, we would like to thank the mayor and all our friends in Nazareth.

This conference is held at a time of economic crisis and severe budget cuts in social services. In his opening remarks, Mayor Grissy spoke of having to be a realist in the current situation. In today's conditions, many children may not only fail to progress but are at severe risk of falling farther behind. Therefore the immediate imperative is to stand by the families and the children in these difficult times. However, even in these difficult conditions, it is essential to seek opportunities to make things better and not only hold the line. This involves reallocating resources to those most in need as well as making efforts to use resources much more effectively. Many of the presentations in this conference point to directions that are very relevant to the current situation.

The concluding session of the conference addresses the contribution of research to the development of programs and policies. Among all the domains of civil and individual rights, there is one that is not often mentioned: the right of a person or a group to be studied. That is, the right that their needs and priorities be accurately assessed and understood and that the decisions affecting their lives be based on reliable information rather than on assumptions or prejudices. Research is one of the effective means to ensure that the voice of individuals and groups is heard. We must try to ensure that the groups that are at the greatest risk will be the ones to particularly benefit from the protection and assistance that research can offer.

Marshall Weinberg, the sponsor of this conference and a member of the Board of the Institute, has been a strong supporter of the Institute's activities on behalf of the Arab population in Israel. He asked me to convey to you today the following: "I am proud to be involved in this conference because it reflects the deep concern of the Institute and its Board for the advancement of all members of Israeli society, non-Jewish and Jewish alike. It is important and encouraging that such a serious group of Jewish and Arab professionals comes together to address the future of Arab children in Israel for the benefit of everyone in Israeli society."

In conclusion, I would like to express the hope that the conference will inspire us all to do more and help us to do things better on behalf of Arab children and youth in Israel.

Dr. Khaled Abu-Asbah: This conference is a very important event in the effort to promote opportunities for Arab children and youth. For the first time it provides an opportunity to take a broad multi-disciplinary and multi-dimensional perspective with respect to where we are and what we need to do and what are some of the important ways in which we can bring about change. This is also an important event in the development of the JDC-Brookdale Institute's program for Arab children. I would like to take the opportunity to highlight some of the work that we have carried out with respect to Arab children at the JDC-Brookdale Institute since the establishment of the Center for Children and Youth in 1995. You will have the opportunity to learn more about these projects in various sessions of the conference.

When I joined the Institute's newly founded children's center in 1995 as part of the executive committee, we initiated discussions regarding the research program in the area of Arab children and youth. We decided to hold a two-day seminar for Arab and Jewish researchers, leaders from the field and policymakers. The goal of the seminar was to build a national agenda for Arab children and youth that could also serve as a basis for developing the Institute's research program, as well as to promote broad cooperation in pursuing that agenda. The seminar took place in December 1996 and the agenda that was developed and the proceedings of the seminar were widely publicized.¹

¹ Abu-Asbah, K. (Ed.). 1998. *Arab Children and Youth in Israel: From the Current Situation toward an Agenda for the Future*. JDC-Brookdale Institute, Jerusalem. (Hebrew and Arabic)

The Institute went on to develop an extensive program. The Institute program operates on two levels: conducting studies exclusively for Arab children and youth; and including Arab children and youth in general population studies.

The first study that was implemented was the development of a plan for youth in the framework of Nazareth's municipal plan for the year 2000, which mayor Grissy has referred to. The Nazareth project led directly to the initiation of a similar project in the Arab city of Tamra. Both projects comprehensively survey the needs of children and youth in order to plan service strategies that integrate the formal and informal education systems as well as health and social services.

One of our important studies was a national study of risk behaviors of children and youth in conjunction with an international 36-country WHO study (HBSC – Health Behavior of School-aged Children). The study was led by Professor Yossi Harel of Bar-Illan University. I coordinated the survey of the Arab population on behalf of the Institute and based my doctoral dissertation on it. The study provided critical comparative information about many areas of risk behaviors among children and youth.

One of the important issues addressed in the HBSC study was youth violence. The study indicated that violence in Arab schools was highly prevalent and was more severe than in schools in general in Israel. These findings led to a number of initiatives both at the local and national levels. These efforts included the publication of a major book on school violence (in Arabic) in collaboration with the Psychological Counseling Service of the Ministry of Education. This book provides the conceptual background and practical guidelines that can serve as a basis for communities and schools to develop successful intervention programs.²

The last study that I want to mention addresses the issue of children with disabilities. The Institute examined the needs of Arab children in the framework of the first national study of disabled children conducted by its Research Program on Disabilities in cooperation with the National Insurance Institute. The study findings had a significant impact on the development of services for disabled Arab children. Moreover, they provided the basis for a further Institute project focused on the development of a program in the village of Dir-Hana in collaboration with the Elrazi Center in Arabah and with the support of the Helen

² Abu-Asbah, K. (Ed.). 2001. *Coping with Violence in Arab Schools: Between Theory and Practice*. Ministry of Education and JDC-Brookdale Institute, Jerusalem. (Arabic)

Bader Foundation. This project has developed a unique model of coordination among all the organizations that provide care for children with special needs that can serve as a model for communities throughout the country.

The examples that I have shared also illustrate the broad principles that have guided the development of our research program. There are three central principles.

One was broad cooperation with organizations and entities and municipalities in the Arab community in implementing the research program and in disseminating the findings. At the same time, there was a very strong focus on creating cooperation between the Arab sector and national entities and organizations through the research program.

The second principle was to use the program as an opportunity to cultivate young Arab professionals. This was reflected both in the opportunities given for young Arab professionals to work in or with the research program, as well as in a multi-year program to expand opportunities for Arab students to pursue masters and doctoral degrees in the area of children, and to focus their thesis on an important issue related to children. The students also participated in an ongoing seminar at the Institute to provide practical training in applied research and help them develop their thesis.

A third principle was a very strong emphasis on promoting the utilization of the research findings to effect change at the local and national levels. Therefore, we engaged in very active dissemination in a wide variety of forums and used many different methods of dissemination. The Institute's extensive ongoing contacts with policymakers at all levels have contributed significantly to our ability to broadly disseminate the findings with respect to Arab children. This conference represents another important step in this dissemination effort.

At the end of the conference, I hope that we will all leave with enhanced knowledge, new contacts and relationships, and a renewed commitment to act.