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Children with Disabilities in the Bedouin Population in the Negev

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This study was part of a multifaceted research program for the Government of Israel's five-year plan to promote the well-being of the Bedouin in the Negev, carried out in cooperation with the Department for the Socio-Economic Development of the Bedouin Society in the Negev



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This study was commissioned by the Senior Department for Socioeconomic Development of Bedouin Society in the Negev at the Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs and funded with its assistance

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Jerusalem | January 2022



About the research program of the five-year plan for the Bedouin in the Negev

The research program was jointly funded by the Department for the Socio-Economic Development of the Bedouin Society in the Negev and the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute. It spanned 3.5 years and includes an array of topical studies, including education, children with disabilities, employment, and local government, as well as cross-cutting studies evaluating the five-year plan work programs; the values, strengths, and challenges of the Bedouin population and their leaders; key indicators of the health, economic, and social well-being of the Bedouin population; and an integrative assessment of the five-year plan.

The research program was carried out as a cooperative effort between the Department for the Socio-Economic Development of the Bedouin Society in the Negev and the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute (MJB). The Department led the choice of issues to be studied and provided feedback on the research. MJB coordinated the research program and was responsible for the quality of the studies.

Abstract

Background

Information on children with disabilities in the Bedouin population in the Negev was collected more than a decade ago in a study conducted by the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute.¹ That study found that service usage by children with disabilities among the Bedouin population was lower than among the Jewish population. The study also pointed to significant shortage in services for Bedouin children with disabilities. Since a decade went by, and following changes in the disabilities area, we found it necessary to conduct an up-to-date study.

Objectives

1. Map available services for children with disabilities and their family members in the Bedouin population in the Negev, in the education, health and welfare areas
2. Identify barriers to service take-up and unmet needs in these areas, in routine times as well as during COVID-19.

Method

The study relied on several data sources: official websites of entities providing services for children with disabilities; analysis of administrative data provided by the National Insurance Institute, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs, Israel's 360° National Program for Children and Youth at Risk, and Clalit Health Services; and semi-structured in-depth interviews with professionals as well as parents of children with disabilities in the Bedouin population in the Negev.

Findings

- **The identification rate of children with disabilities** in the Bedouin population in the Negev is **lower** compared to both the Jewish and the Arab population.

¹ Strosberg, N., Naon, D. & Ziv, A. (2008). *Special-needs Children in the Bedouin Population of the Negev: Characteristics, Patterns of Service Use, and the Impact of Caring for the Children on the Mothers*. RR-08-503, Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute (Hebrew). <https://brookdale.jdc.org.il/en/publication/special-needs-children-bedouin-population-negev-characteristics-patterns-service-use-impact-caring-children-mothers/>

- **The services available to children with disabilities** in the Bedouin population in the Negev are **limited** compared to both the Jewish and the Arab population.
- **The services available to children with disabilities** in the **unrecognized Bedouin villages** are **limited** compared to the recognized towns and villages.
- **The service utilization of children with disabilities** in the Bedouin population in the Negev is affected by the following **barriers**:
 - *Professional human resources*: Low availability of professionals – particularly Arabic speakers – and insufficient professional knowledge.
 - *Low availability and accessibility of services* – in geographic, transportation, language, cultural, economic, and technological terms.
 - *Personal, family and community aspects*, including prejudices regarding disability; lack of knowledge and awareness of disabilities; difficulties completing bureaucratic procedures to take up rights and utilize services; family burden; and cultural perceptions regarding the division of roles within the family and the commitment to the extended family.
 - *Limited information and inter-authority coordination*. There is not enough information about children with disabilities, and the authorities responsible for them are not coordinated enough.
- **The COVID-19 crisis exacerbated service these take-up barriers**, which reduce rights take-up also in routine times.

Recommendations

- **Formulating a professional development policy:**
 - Professional enhancement and empowerment of the existing staff
 - Incentivize professionals, primarily Arabic speakers, to work in Bedouin towns and villages
 - Create programs to encourage, direct and incentivize youngsters from the Bedouin community to study the professions related to child development
 - Develop programs for training Bedouin professionals
- **Service provision:**
 - Compensate for the service shortage by providing preparatory programs for matriculation and employment, leisure programs and solutions for children with mental, intellectual and developmental disabilities, as well as with conduct and autism spectrum disorders

- Ensure service accessibility from the geographic, linguistic, cultural, economic and technological aspects
- **Personal, family, and community aspects:**
 - Encourage the population to take prenatal genetic tests and examine the possibility of creating a genetic database to test the compatibility of potential partners prior to their engagement or marriage
 - Initiate a public information campaign to reduce the negative stigma of disabilities as well as heighten awareness of the importance of care and its contribution to improving daily functions
 - Follow-up on children with disabilities and provide ongoing support to their parents by treatment coordinators
- **Policy:**
 - Add dedicated fields to the databases of the relevant ministries in order to identify disabilities and other relevant characteristics

To implement these recommendations, we propose creating an interministerial and interdisciplinary regional team to promote a regional policy to develop solutions for children with disabilities and their families, as well as local multidisciplinary teams to develop local solutions, including models of treatment continuity, and promote an Arabic-language public information system.