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Brookdale

Barriers Preventing Arab Mothers from Enrolling Their Young Children in Licensed Early Childhood Care Settings and Their Considerations in Selecting Early Childhood Care

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Abstract

Background

The participation rate of Arab children aged birth to three in licensed and supervised public early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings (hereafter: settings or facilities) is significantly lower than that of Jewish children. This gap is mirrored in the relatively low employment rate among Arab women.

In 2022, the Daycare Support for Working Parents Division at the Ministry of Labor, in collaboration with JDC–TEVET, launched a pilot initiative to increase the proportion of Arab families exercising their entitlement to subsidized tuition in supervised ECEC facilities. As part of this effort, the Ministry and JDC–TEVET commissioned the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute to map the factors influencing families' decisions regarding childcare arrangements for young children, with the aim of informing the planning and delivery of services tailored to their needs.

Research Objectives

- To identify the key considerations guiding Arab mothers in choosing early childhood care settings for their children.
- To map the barriers that prevent mothers from enrolling their children in supervised facilities under the Ministry of Labor and from exercising their entitlement to tuition subsidies.

Methodology

1. Quantitative survey of 149 mothers whose children were not enrolled in supervised settings (although they were eligible for subsidies) and 200 mothers whose children were enrolled in such facilities (not including those enrolled under the *Toddlers at Risk Law*). Survey data were weighed using conversion coefficients to represent the target population.
2. Qualitative in-depth interviews with ten mothers and six early childhood care professionals.
3. Analysis of administrative data records and of Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) survey data.

Key Findings

Main Considerations in Choosing a Childcare Facility

- Quality of care: Between 67% and 84% of mothers in both study groups mentioned aspects reflecting the *quality* of the facility and the care provided.
- Child development: Between 23% and 35% cited factors related to the facility's contribution to their child's *cognitive and social development*, and 14–35% referred to *certainty about their child's well-being and physical safety*.

A correlation was found between the family's sociodemographic factors and the childcare setting chosen: The likelihood of choosing a supervised facility increased with the child's age—by 9% for each additional month—and was 22% higher among mothers with an academic education than among those without.

Main Barriers to Enrollment in Supervised Settings

- **Lack of information about tuition subsidy eligibility:** 41% of mothers whose children attended unsupervised facilities and 28% of those in supervised ones were unaware of their eligibility for subsidized tuition.
- **Administrative and bureaucratic burden related to registration and subsidy applications:**
 - 40% of mothers whose children were in unsupervised facilities reported that the large number of required documents discouraged them from enrolling in supervised facilities; 36% did not wish to disclose their salary slips.
 - Among mothers whose children were in supervised settings, 10% did not apply for the subsidy because of the complex application process and the need to share sensitive information.
- **High cost of tuition:** In 2022, tuition costs in supervised facilities amounted to 13–49% of the mother's average salary among Arab women, compared to 8–30% among non-Haredi Jewish women. 67% of mothers whose children were in unsupervised settings reported that high tuition fees discouraged them from enrolling in supervised facilities.
- **Perceived low quality of supervised facilities:** 69% of mothers of children in unsupervised settings did not enroll their children in supervised facilities because they were concerned about inadequate care due to frequent staff turnover, and 64% were concerned about high child-to-caregiver ratios.
- **Preference for small, intimate, and flexible settings:** 64% of mothers whose children were not in supervised facilities preferred home care. About half indicated that they avoided supervised facilities because the hours of operation did not meet their needs and because partial enrollment was not possible (48% and 47%, respectively).

Unlike earlier studies, the lack of supervised facilities near the families' homes or the perception that such facilities are primarily intended for families served by social welfare departments were not found to be major barriers to enrolling children in supervised settings.

Recommendations

- Enhance awareness among Arab families of the availability of tuition subsidies. This can be done through accessible service channels familiar to the community, such as family health centers (*Tipat Halav*).
- Reduce bureaucratic barriers related to registration and subsidy applications:
 - Assign a designated staff member in each childcare facility to assist parents with registration and subsidy applications and provide referral details via the Ministry's website.
 - Continue strengthening the existing system for automatic data transfer between the National Insurance Institute and the Ministry of Labor and simplify the Ministry's website interface.
- Improve the quality of employees in public supervised early childhood facilities:
 - Expand and standardize training programs to include practical experience and apprenticeship in the public frameworks, and ensure accreditation of training.
 - Develop mechanisms for *retaining skilled caregivers* over time (as well as reinforcing existing mechanisms), to maintain quality and stability of care.
- Prioritize expansion of *home-based daycare frameworks* in Arab localities, increase flexibility in operating hours, and align tuition fees with the number of care hours.
- Highlight the added value of public supervised settings over the alternative private frameworks, for example, through public awareness campaigns emphasizing:
 - Their contribution to children's *social and cognitive development*,
 - The *higher socioeconomic profile* of mothers who enroll their children in supervised settings, who are more likely to be employed and have higher educational achievements.