

E. THE HEALTH STATUS OF THE PALESTINIAN ARAB COMMUNITY IN ISRAEL IN RELATION TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF ISRAEL

Khaled Suleiman, MD; Basel Ghattas, PhD; Cameel Makhoul, PhD

Extensive literature documents substantial differences between the health of minority and majority populations in developed countries. The Palestinians are an indigenous minority in Israel, an eastern, conservative community with a unique culture living in a western and modernized state. This study aims to examine the health status of this community vis-à-vis the Jewish majority.

METHODS

The study is based on results of the Galilee Society Health Conference 2002, data from GS Rikaz databank, the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Israeli Ministry of Health, and the National Insurance.

RESULTS

Arabs, constituting 19% of the total population in Israel, are a young society, with only 3.3% aged 65 years or older, compared to 11.6% in the Jewish population. Fertility rate among women is 4.8 children per Arab family vs 2.7 for Jewish women; this rate has declined about 50% in the last 30 years. Arab infant mortality is 8.2/1000 per year vs 4.7/1000 per year for Jews. Marriage between relatives of the same family reaches

50% in Arabs, vs 1% among Jews, leading to a higher rate of genetic diseases, most of which are not covered by governmental health packages. Life expectancy for Arab men is 73.9 years vs 76.4 years for Jewish men, 77.3 years for Arab women vs 80.5 years for Jewish women.

Diabetes mellitus incidence is higher among Arabs especially women, 25% aged 55–64 years suffer from diabetes, compared to 12% of Jewish women. Hypertension incidence is similar in both populations. Adjusted cardiac mortality is 12% higher among Arab men and 42% higher among Arab women. Stroke incidence is 32% higher among Arab men and double for Arab women. While historically cancer mortality has been lower by 10%–30% among Arabs compared to Jews, recent data suggest rising cancer mortality among Arabs while remaining stable for Jews. Among Arab elderly, 22% are disabled according to the Activities of Daily Living scale vs 12.7% of Jewish elderly.

CONCLUSION

Substantial differences exist between the health of the Arab minority and Jewish majority in Israel, reflecting socioeconomic disparities: poverty, unemployment, the amount and quality of health care, and deteriorating environment.

From the Galilee Society: The Arab National Society for Health Research and Services, Israel.