

SOCIAL WELFARE SERVICES FOR ISRAEL'S ARAB POPULATION

AZIZ HAIDAR

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Social Welfare Services for Israel's Arab Population

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The Status and Condition of the Arabs in Israel
A project under the direction of Professor Henry Rosenfeld

The 750,000 Israeli Arabs are a national minority making up 17 percent of the population of Israel. In 1987 the International Center for Peace in the Middle East, together with Professor Henry Rosenfeld, director of the project, initiated a comprehensive research project on the status and condition of the Arabs in Israel. The focus of the research is on the Arabs' legal status, health and social services, and local authority in Arab communities. The books prepared by the project members report the empirical findings from the project and offer a penetrating analysis of the degree of social, economic, and political integration between Arabs and Jews, the extent of discrimination, and the degree to which rights and opportunities are shared by all.

Social Welfare Services for Israel's Arab Population
Aziz Haidar

In the mid-1980s, over 40 percent of Arab households fell below the poverty line. In this book, Dr. Haidar, a Palestinian living in Israel, presents the results of extensive fieldwork in Arab and Jewish localities on the social conditions and welfare service needs of Arab children, youth, and elderly in Israel.

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Preface

Anyone attempting to trace the development of social welfare services for the Arab population of Israel encounters great difficulty mainly because of a dearth of information. The governmental and public agencies responsible for conducting and interpreting surveys and disseminating information about the development of conditions of need provide an abundance of material on the Jewish sector; but the overwhelming majority ignore the very existence of the Arab population.

Heretofore no research has been conducted to investigate the mode of operation of the social welfare agencies serving the Arab population. A great deal of research has been done in this field in Israel, but even when the research was conducted in mixed (Arab and Jewish) cities or concerned agencies supposedly serving both populations, the researchers or investigatory commissions made no mention whatever of the state of services in the Arab sector. And the studies addressing the condition of specific population groups within the Arab sector, or services provided to a group considered distressed in a particular way, can almost be counted on the fingers of one hand.

Other than the commission that investigated housing needs in the Arab sector (Abukishk and Geraisy, 1977), all research studies of, or commissions of inquiry into, the state of social services in the Arab sector have been undertaken during the 1980s. In other words, material documenting the condition of the Arab population in general, and especially that of distressed sub-groups, is non-existent.

This situation transforms our work into a pioneering effort that undertakes to provide an overview of the social distress of the Arab population and of the framework of social welfare services. Even more difficult, of course, is to trace the historical development of distress and of the system of welfare services. Hence the quantity and nature of the existing literature dictated to a large extent the direction and character of our work and the presentation of the findings in the respective sections.

In Chapter 1, consideration is given to the welfare system serving the Arab population under the British mandate. This section is the shortest due to the dearth of obtainable information. The remaining sections of the report consider social needs and the welfare system after the state came into being. Also with respect to this period, as noted, we again encounter difficulties arising from lack of information, especially vis-a-vis the first twenty years. The available information relating to that period does not cover all the areas we had intended to investigate, and it appears even more scanty when compared to the information we were able to gather on present conditions. For this reason, we decided to differentiate between the two time periods in an arbitrary fashion.

The main part of the book thus begins with a section devoted to a survey of the development of social services during the 1950s and 1960s. The remaining sections (2-12) consider the existing conditions of distress and social services in the Arab population. We devoted three sections (4-6) to a consideration of needs in three areas (economic needs, housing, and health and disability). In three additional chapters (7-9), we consider distress among three age groups (children, youth, elderly). The demarcation among the subjects under scrutiny in these six chapters is to a large extent arbitrary. Each of the areas of need we will consider is related to each of the others and they all affect each of the age groups examined. On the other hand, however, it is useful to distinguish between types of need, because not only may there be diverse factors leading to disadvantage, but also the form in which distress expresses itself may vary; moreover, different kinds of needs require different treatment and the mobilizing of differing resources.

Even more arbitrary for us, and more difficult, was differentiating between social welfare services and other services such as education, health, and infrastructure services. The reader will note that in the body of the work, it was untenable not to address such social services and infrastructure services in order to examine the respective forms of distress we had chosen to consider, and in order to provide a complete and comprehensive picture of the ways in which the respective age groups are distressed. In any case, areas not within the framework of this report are touched on only briefly, sometimes merely superficially, and that only to round out the picture that would appear inadequate without such references in passing.

The difficulty in drawing boundaries to distinguish between types of need and different kinds of services is even more obvious in the last three sections of the work (10-12). Each of the chapters is meant to draw a comprehensive picture of the conditions of need and the types of treatment provided in one community. In order to get an idea of the situation in each community, there was no choice other than to address the structure of services in general. In each section, we have provided examples of actual population groups (or individuals) in need, and of the form of response by the authorities and institutions charged with assisting them. These three sections, based on fieldwork, fill in the picture drawn

in the previous six sections, especially with respect to the level and quality of services. In the six sections on types of need and on the respective age groups, we were unable to examine with any depth the level or quality of services because of the lack of preexisting research.

In choosing the communities for our fieldwork, we were guided by two facts: first, that the Arab population of Israel lives in different kinds of communities: (Arab) cities, mixed (Arab and Jewish) cities, and villages. Second, the Arab population received services from various social welfare departments that differ in status and scope of authority: local departments, the function of which is to serve only local residents, municipal departments in the mixed cities, which do not draw a distinction between the two populations; and consolidated departments. In the city of Nazareth, all the residents are Arab and all receive social welfare services from the city bureau. Lod is a mixed city and the Arab population receives services from the same social welfare department that provides services to the Jewish population. The village of Tarshiha is an important case because of the partnership between it and a Jewish community via a single local council. The investigation of the condition of social welfare services can presumably provide a general picture of the Arab population's share of social welfare services in different kinds of communities.

As noted, our study is a pioneering one on the subject of social welfare services. For this reason, it cannot be complete and all-encompassing nor can it cover all the areas related to the subject; there is a need for further studies of greater depth and breadth.

Aziz Haidar

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1

Social Welfare Services for the Arab Population During the British Mandate

This section addresses mainly information found in documents of the mandatory government concerning social welfare services provided to the Arab population. The information on this period does not make possible a broad consideration of the subject, especially with respect to rural areas. Hence this section will be brief and concise. The shortage of information comes about as a result of the following factors:

- 1) The department of welfare services was created only at the end of 1944, and there are no reports on activities in the sphere of social welfare during the period prior to its establishment.
- 2) Until the establishment of the separate department for welfare services, no distinction was made between them and other social services such as education and health, which do not fall within the framework of our study. Most of the material we found relates to these two fields.
- 3) The available information provides data mainly on services in urban areas, whereas data on rural areas is extremely rare with respect to this period during which most of the Arab population lived in such areas.

Until the establishment of the department of welfare by the mandatory government, welfare services were the responsibility of district authorities and of the private sectarian voluntary organizations, whereas in the Jewish sector these services were the responsibility of the National Council of Palestinian Jewry (HaVa'ad HaLeumi). Welfare services in the Arab sector were concerned principally with financial aid to the indigent. At first, such aid was limited to the families of detainees and prisoners held under state-of-emergency regulations. Later, the assistance was broadened to include families suffering from the economic conditions then obtaining in the country, such as families of unemployed persons and the chronically poor (Survey II, 1946:682).

Direct assistance to poor Arab families was provided mainly in the form of vouchers which could be exchanged for food in certain stores. In cases of dire emergency, aid was also given in the form of monetary stipends to cover specific expenses. In general, however, this form of aid remained the province of the voluntary organizations.

Toward the end of the 1920s, the villages began to assume a more significant role in national activities and in the calculations of the Arab national leadership. In 1929, the first conference of Arab villages was held in Jaffa. It raised a variety of demands which in the main consisted of demands for economic assistance and concerned themselves especially with landless families and with unemployed villagers. The number of such families was on the rise as a result of economic recession. The requests of those gathered at Jaffa also included a call for increased aid for agricultural development, for the establishment of schools, the building of roads, and the assurance of better sanitary conditions (Miller 1985:18).

Although the national Arab leadership increasingly emphasized the problems of village people, especially the problem of poverty, they did not themselves organize any type of welfare assistance whatsoever for the benefit of indigent villagers. Neither this leadership nor the mandatory government encouraged local initiatives for the provision of organized community services. The mandatory government assumed responsibility for the provision of social welfare services in the Arab community (Kanivsky 1942:33). The mandatory authorities, however, did not provide any basis in law for defining the right to services of those in need. Social welfare laws remained very few and very limited in scope. Principal among such laws was the Worker's Compensation Law of 1927. In 1931, the government named a "Committee for Labor Legislation," composed of four British clerks, two Jewish representatives, and two Arab representatives. The committee presented its recommendations only in 1935; they were never implemented.

The mandatory authorities never created a government framework for registering unemployed workers, collecting data on unemployment, or alleviating it.

During the war years, workers were in great demand and there was no unemployment problem. The government employed large numbers of laborers at army bases and for other work directly or indirectly related to the war effort. During the years of war, the demand for financial assistance dropped considerably, especially on the part of unemployed people capable of working. In fact, the provision of aid was limited to Jerusalem during this period (Palestine, 1946:682).

The problem of unemployment began to make itself felt again during 1944-45. As noted, the government did not have data on the extent of unemployment in the Arab sector, but a government report assumes that its dimensions were similar to those obtaining in the Jewish sector (Ibid.:734). The authorities were obliged to deal with the problem of finding employment for about 100,000 Jews

and Arabs who had been employed in war-related work. The governmental response took the form of finding alternative places of employment, financial assistance for the unemployed, vocational guidance and re-training, housing stipends, and temporary housing solutions for the homeless. The government set up a committee to deal with disabled workers formerly in government service. The committee provided services such as medical treatment, hospitalization, and greater financial aid. In the Arab sector, a special organization of former servicemen was set up which concentrated on the implementation of rehabilitation programs (Ibid.:773).

Aside from activities for rehabilitating the unemployed after the war, the organization of social welfare in the Arab community had barely started. The traditional forms of charity were still functioning, although the beginnings of their gradual disappearance were already evident, especially in the Muslim community.

Most of the Christian churches had charity and aid organizations, generally independent and functioning within a limited scope except for those in Jerusalem: there, wide-scale assistance was organized in the form of the distribution of bread and the provision of rent stipends. The institutions concerned with aid to poor children were affiliated with sectarian entities, with the exception of "The Arab Communities for the Orphans of Palestine."

It should be noted that during the 1930s until the outbreak of war, there was a special initiative to advance the welfare of the villages of Palestine. In 1930, the project "Welfare Service to the Village" began. The project's initiator was the Near East Foundation of the American University of Beirut. In the same year, the Foundation began coordinating its efforts with the department of education of the mandatory government. The project's goal was to contribute to the development of the villages and to equip educated Palestinians to take responsibility for village development for the benefit of the weak and indigent.

Project volunteers set up summer camps and assisted villagers in solving urgent problems in the fields of education, health, personal hygiene, agricultural development, and the development of local handicrafts. Youths from the villages were recruited for scout camps and sport programs. Volunteers also helped out with the paving of roads, planting of olive trees, and cooperative marketing of produce (Dodd, p. 87). The project did not, then, address specific social welfare problems but rather promoted village development in general. We have no data that would allow us to evaluate the contribution made by the project to the welfare of the villages of Palestine, and the available information does not report on its scope nor on the results of its activities in terms of the problems of disadvantage. As noted, the project ended with the outbreak of the Second World War.

The development of social welfare services in the Arab sector took a great leap forward in November of 1942 with the publication by the mandatory government health department of a report on the extent of malnutrition among

children. A departmental memorandum called for the creation of local welfare committees for the purpose of aiding children suffering from malnutrition.

The immediate response of the Arab population was to set up welfare committees in fourteen Arab cities and towns. During 1944, a total of 11,569 children received food packets in the fourteen combined localities. The government undertook the burden of expense for the food for children in areas where local funds were sufficient only to cover basic costs. There is no information on how widespread this form of aid became among the villages.

The government's policy was to contribute half the expenses for implementation of approved welfare programs and to hand over the responsibility for welfare services to the city or local council. This type of council existed in a very small number of Arab villages. The policy of setting up councils in the villages was a failure: of 20 councils (Arab and Jewish) established in the year 1921, only 9 were functioning in 1945 (Miller 1985:74). The mandatory government aided private institutions such as orphanages, old-age homes, and institutions of the physically or mentally handicapped. In 1944, thirty-four institutions of this type received aid. Because of the relative lack of such institutions in the Arab sector, most of the assistance actually went to the Jewish sector, and of course the rural areas got no aid since these institutions were located only in cities. Of the assistance provided by the government to local committees during the years 1944-45 (which amounted to 141,250 pounds), the Arab sector received 35.7%, not including direct financial assistance to the needy, of which the Arab sector received two-thirds (Palestine, 1946:690).

The department of social welfare of the mandatory government which was created in October 1944 can be viewed as a further development of the probation services already established during 1933 with the appointment by the government of a single probation officer.

The new department included two principal branches:

- 1) probation and social work services of the courts; and
- 2) social welfare.

Welfare bureaus were set up in six regions of the country. The official reports do not reveal the extent or scope of activities of these district bureaus.

Probation services in the Arab sector were not structured to deal with juvenile delinquents of whom, by 1944, there were some 2,564 (with an average age of 13.35 years) (Ibid.:680-81). Young Arabs found guilty of security offenses were sent to prison and to government institutions, but due to lack of space, many of them were placed in institutions for delinquents established and operated by the Jewish community for the purpose of serving Jewish children and youth (Jaffe:12).

Summary

It appears that in the Arab sector, during the mandate, social welfare services were not established, with the exception of services provided by the sectarian organizations. These were mostly church organizations which served mainly the Christian population.

In rural areas, the traditional social structures — the family and the clan (*hamoula*) — carried the burden of assistance to those in distress. When the government's department of social welfare was established in the mid-1940s, it served mainly the population of urban areas so that rural areas experienced discrimination with respect to all forms of welfare services, although even in the cities the services remained extremely limited in scale and in terms of the kinds of needs for which assistance was provided.