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# **Fertility and marriage behavior in Israel: Diversity, change, and stability**

By [Barbara S. Okun](#)

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## Abstract

**Background:** Based on aggregate statistics, the population of Israel, as compared to all or most other developed societies, has very high levels of fertility and marriage (e.g. TFR of 2.96 in 2009 and only 9.7% never married among women aged 40-44 in 2009). However, studying aggregate demographic measures is problematic, because Israel is an extremely heterogeneous society, with family formation patterns differing greatly across numerically important social groups. Until now, little has been documented about the basic fertility and marriage behavior of different population groups.

**Objective:** We describe the fertility and marriage behavior of populations in Israel, broken down by nationality, religion, religiosity and nativity-status. Although our main focus is on a detailed presentation of fertility patterns, we also look at marriage behavior, as it is closely related to fertility in Israel.

**Methods:** We analyze recently available annual data from the Israel Social Surveys for 2002-2009, which, for the first time in several decades,, provides detailed information on family and household demographic behavior and direct information on level of religiosity. We focus primarily on comparisons across cohorts born from the late 1940s to the late 1960s and between periods in the early and late 2000s.

**Results:** We provide a detailed portrait of striking diversity in fertility and marriage behavior across population groups, along with important patterns of change and stability across cohorts and over time. We document findings and differential patterns, some unexpected, regarding comparisons across groups and across cohorts.

**Conclusions:** The descriptive findings form the basis for a clearer understanding of fertility and marriage patterns in different population subgroups in Israel. In addition, the reported results suggest many questions for future research, which are outlined in the paper.

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