

JEWISH FEDERATION OF GREATER HOUSTON

A DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY REPORT:

PERSPECTIVES ON THE OLDER ADULT JEWISH POPULATION IN HOUSTON

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1. SOME NATIONAL TRENDS\*

The graying of Jewish society has been predictable for several decades. The rising numbers of elderly Jewish persons in North America are the result of past trends in the size of birth cohorts, combined with a greater longevity and lower mortality, which are in turn the result of the much improved living standards, health and medical facilities of the last fifty years.

Changes in the proportion of elderly in a population are modified by the changing numbers of younger persons due to fluctuations in the birth rate. The aging of the North American Jewish population has been due to the decreasing proportion of children and young adults which has been determined by a reduction in Jewish fertility in recent decades. Assimilatory losses also play a role in this process for sociology teaches us that assimilation is more likely among the young than the older elements in a population.

To understand the dynamics of changes in the absolute numbers and the proportions of the Jewish elderly population we must be aware of recent social history. Comparatively large cohorts were born in mainly immigrant parents who had large families in the period 1900-30. The life chances of these children were superior to those of their parents so that more survived into later life and, as they began to reach age 65, the number of elderly Jews rapidly increased.

Social and attitudinal changes towards family size along with the impact of the economic recession of the 1930s led to smaller families and cohorts being born in the period 1930-50. As a result a temporary reduction in the absolute numbers of elderly may be expected during the period 1995-2015.

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\* Excerpted and adapted from "The Older Adult Jewish Population of North America," published by the Council of Jewish Federations, 1987.

Around 1950, a "baby boom" was experienced which will again boost the number of elderly around 2020. However a steep decline in the birth rate and fertility occurred after 1965. This is the cause of an anticipated shrinkage in the Jewish population. This fall in the birth rate has already contributed to aging by raising the proportion of elderly in the current Jewish population.

Findings from the 1971 National Jewish Population Study conducted by the Council of Jewish Federations indicated we could expect rapid rises in the number of "young-old" during the 1970s as the large cohorts of Jews born in the years 1906-16 reached retirement age. Professor U. O. Schmelz of the Hebrew University estimated the total number of people over age 65 among American Jews would rise from 670,000 in 1971 to 775,000 in 1975 to 960,000 in 1985 and on to 975,000 around 1991. Thus the proportion of elderly Jews probably rose from 12.0% in 1971 to 16.5% in 1985 whereas for the total American population the rise of the over-65 age group was only at half the Jewish rate from 9.8% in 1971 to 11.9% in 1985.

It is important to note that most demographic studies do not attempt to survey the institutional populations. They are restricted to either the population in private households or for telephone surveys to the population with access to telephones. This often leads to the population resident in nursing homes and hospitals being excluded from most local population counts. Thus the figures in this report and other reports are probably under counts of the elderly population particularly among those aged over 75 years.

## 2. THE CURRENT OLDER ADULT POPULATION (AGE 65+)

In contrast to a number of communities throughout the United States, the Jewish population over the age of 65 in Houston is relatively small. This age group, which accounts for only 6.6 percent of the total Jewish population in the metropolitan Houston area, consists of approximately 2800 individuals.

### A. Geographic Distribution

The population over the age of 65 is the most geographically concentrated group among the Jewish population. 70 percent reside in Southwest Houston, and an additional 22 percent reside in the adjoining areas of Memorial and the Central City.

#### Population Over age 65 by Planning Area

| <u>Planning Area</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|----------------------|----------------|
| Central              | 14%            |
| Memorial             | 8%             |
| Southwest            | 70%            |
| West                 | 5%             |
| North                | 0%             |
| Balance              | 3%             |

Given the current geographic distribution, the Southwest Houston location of communal agencies which deliver services to the population over the age of 65 is optimal.

Indicators of residential stability suggest that the current distribution of the population over the age of 65 is likely to remain unchanged. 73 percent of this population has lived in the Houston area for 15 years or more. 9 percent arrived in Houston in each of the five year periods since 1970 so that less than 10 percent of this group have resided in the Houston area for less than 5 years. Further, over half of the population over age 65 have resided in their current residence for 10 years or more.

Residential stability is also indicated in opinions and intentions expressed by the population over the age of 65. Almost 80 percent of this group stated that they are very satisfied with the area in which they live, and 90 percent state that they expect to remain in the same area for the next 3 years. 6 percent indicated intentions to move to another city or country, and only 4 percent indicated intentions to move to another area within

metropolitan Houston. As such, the population over the age of 65 can be considered residentially stable.

B. Household Composition

Household data indicate that the Jewish population over the age of 65 in Houston are a relatively isolated population with large percentages residing alone. Approximately 40 percent of males and two thirds of females in this age group live alone. The percentage residing alone can be accounted for largely in terms of the percentage in this age group who are widowed.

Marital Status

| <u>Status</u>          | <u>Over 65%</u> | <u>Population</u> |
|------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Married                | 49.2%           | 69.2%             |
| Widowed                | 45.0%           | 5.8%              |
| Divorced/<br>Separated | 4.1%            | 4.4%              |
| Never Married          | 1.7%            | 20.6%             |

While only 6 percent of the total adult population is currently widowed, almost half (45%) of the population over the age of 65 are widowed.

Differences in life expectancy are also evidenced in the gender distribution of this age group. Projections from demographic survey data indicate that 64 percent of the population over the age of 65 is female. The higher percentage of females in the population becomes more pronounced among this group as age increases.

The population over the age of 65 is composed largely of first generation Americans. 78 percent of the mothers and fathers of respondents and their spouses over the age of 65 were foreign born. A total of 6 percent of the population over the age of 65 came to the United States subsequent to the onset of World War II and 5 percent are Holocaust survivors.

C. Education and Income

Consistent with general population trends, a smaller percentage of the Jewish population over the age of 65 is college educated than the percentages found in younger cohorts. 26 percent of this group hold a Bachelor's or advanced degree as compared to 60 percent of the total adult population. The percentage of college educated females in this age group is particularly small, reflecting differences in educational opportunities.

As expected, the population over the age of 65 is largely a retired population. 73 percent of this age group

classify themselves as retired. 13 percent are working full time, and 8 percent are working part time. The remaining 6 percent classify themselves as keeping house.

On average, household income among the population over the age of 65 is lower than the levels found for the total adult population. 17 percent of this group reported annual household incomes in excess of \$50,000 as compared to 39 percent of the total adult population. Conversely, 39 percent of the respondents over the age of 65 reported annual incomes of less than \$20,000 as compared to only 13 percent of the total adult population. The mean annual income for persons over the age of 65 is \$21,464.

D. Religious Background and Education

The households of persons over the age of 65 are predominantly Jewish. 90 percent reside in households that are composed entirely of Jewish members as compared to 74 percent of the entire adult population. Both parents of 96 percent of this age group were born Jewish, and 97 percent were raised in the Jewish religion. Of those who are currently married, 88 percent of the respondent's spouses were born to parents who were both Jewish. Similarly, 86 percent of respondent's spouses were raised Jewish. 93 percent of respondents over the age of 65 who had children raised them in the Jewish religion, and only 4 percent raised their children in the faith of their spouse.

On average, the population over the age of 65 had a somewhat lesser level of Jewish education than the total adult population.

Religious Education

|                   | <u>Over 65</u> | <u>Total Population</u> |
|-------------------|----------------|-------------------------|
| Bar/Bat Mitzvah   | 26%            | 44%                     |
| Confirmation      | 41%            | 57%                     |
| Jewish Day School | 21%            | 24%                     |
| Weekend Religious | 38%            | 58%                     |
| Afternoon Hebrew  | 32%            | 50%                     |

Significantly smaller percentages of the population over the age of 65 participated in all of the forms of religious education with the exception of Jewish day school. This may well reflect the popularization of some forms of Jewish education and differences in opportunity over recent decades.

Higher levels of congregational affiliation were found in the population over the age of 65 than in the total adult population. 61 percent of this group are affiliated with a synagogue or temple as compared to 51 percent of the total adult population. The population over the age of 65 also shows a greater propensity to identify with

the Orthodox and Conservative movements than the general adult population. 12 percent of this group identifies with the Orthodox movement as compared to 5 percent of the total adult population. Similarly, 35 percent identify with the Conservative movement as compared to 29 percent of the total adult population. Accordingly, there is a somewhat smaller percentage (42%) who identify with the Reform movement among those over age 65 than in the total adult population (47%).

Demographic survey data also indicate that the population over the age of 65 tends to be more observant of religious practices than the total adult population.

#### Religious Observances

|                          | <u>Over 65</u> | <u>Total Population</u> |
|--------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|
| Attend Passover Services | 86%            | 81%                     |
| Light Candles on Friday  | 52%            | 40%                     |
| Work on Yom Kippur       | 15%            | 28%                     |
| Have Mezzuzah on Door    | 68%            | 59%                     |
| Buy Kosher Food          | 18%            | 8%                      |
| Light Chanuka Candles    | 73%            | 79%                     |
| Ride on Sabbath          | 88%            | 93%                     |

With the exception of lighting Chanuka candles, which tends to be associated with parent-child activities, higher percentages of the population over the age of 65 observe the holidays and traditions.

#### E. Communal Engagement

Demographic survey data provide several indications of a high level of engagement in communal life. Overall, 40 percent of the population over the age of 65 participate in communal activities. Among this group, 38 percent participate through the Jewish Community Center, 11 percent participate through congregational activities, and the balance participate through other communal programs. Among those who do not participate in communal activities, 20 percent cited lack of transportation as the primary deterrent.

Among this group, 36 percent stated that they would like transportation to attend Jewish activities, 29 percent for general entertainment, 14 percent for shopping, and 7 percent for medical appointments.

In general, organizational membership is more prevalent among the population over the age of 65. 80 percent of this age group are members of at least one organization as compared to 53 percent of the total adult population. Higher levels of organizational membership among this age group may well reflect the high proportion of females, who show a greater propensity to participate in communal life at all ages.

Survey data also indicate some notable differences in organizational preference among the population over age 65 as compared to the total adult population. Membership in Hadassah and ZOA is almost twice as prevalent among those over the age of 65 than among the total adult population. In contrast, membership in the Jewish Community Center is highly comparable to membership levels found in the total adult population. This may reflect the success of the Jewish Community Center in offering a service and program mix which is equally attractive to adults of all ages. Survey data indicate that membership outreach has been more comprehensive among the population over the age of 65 than among the total adult population. While 34 percent of the total adult population who are not members of organizations have been approached to join an organization, 46 percent of nonmembers over the age of 65 have been approached.

The Jewish Herald Voice is the primary source of information about Jewish activities among the population over the age of 65. The Jewish Herald Voice is received by 65 percent of this population as compared to 53 percent of all Jewish households. In addition, regular readership among those receiving the Jewish Herald Voice is higher among those over age 65. 69 percent of the total adult population who receive the Jewish Herald Voice indicated that they read it regularly as compared to over three quarters of those over age 65 who receive the publication.

Patterns of philanthropy provide a final indication of a high level of engagement in communal life. While 47 percent of the total adult population contributes to the United Jewish Campaign, 62 percent of those over the age of 65 are contributors. Conversely, a smaller percentage of this age group are contributors to the United Way. This, however, may be due to the high percentage of retired individuals in this age group who are not exposed to the work place channels for giving to the United Way that their younger counterparts are exposed to.

### 3. The Emerging Older Adult Population (Age 50-64)

Consistent with national population trends, larger numbers of the Jewish population of metropolitan Houston will be reaching the age of 65 in the next decade than in previous decades. Projections from demographic survey data indicate that the population in this age group is 1.7 times as large as the current population over the age of 65. While the total population over the age of 65 is estimated to be approximately 2,800, adults between the age of 50 and 64 number approximately 4,800 in the greater Houston area. As such, the Jewish population over the age of 65 is projected to more than double within the next 15 years.

While the needs of the emerging older population will be different than those found among the elderly who arrived prior to and during World War II, the increasing proportion of older adults will obviously impact the range of services provided by the Jewish Federation of Greater Houston and its constituent organizations. In projecting the service needs of the emerging population of senior adults, several distinctions must be made between this group and previous elderly cohorts. In contrast to previous elderly populations, the currently emerging older Jewish population is primarily English speaking. In addition, this group has substantially more material possessions than its predecessors, and has an increased life and health expectancy than previous elderly populations. Due to these factors, the demand level of the emerging older adult population on institutions is likely to be lower than the level of prior cohorts. This group, however, may well need facilities in their advanced years when personal and medical care become larger issues.

#### A. Geographic Distribution

Numerically, the Jewish population between the ages of 50 and 64 are largely concentrated in the Southwest Houston planning area. Almost two thirds (65.7%) of the population in this age group reside in Southwest Houston as compared to 48 percent of the total population. When the percentage residing in the adjoining Memorial planning area is added, almost 80 percent of the population between the ages of 50 and 64 is accounted for.

## Age 50 to 64 Population by Planning Area

| <u>Planning Area</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|----------------------|----------------|
| Central              | 4.0%           |
| Memorial             | 13.9%          |
| Southwest            | 65.7%          |
| West                 | 8.4%           |
| North                | 5.0%           |
| Balance              | 3.4%           |

The only group more concentrated in Southwest Houston than the population aged 50 to 64 is comprised by the population which is currently over age 65. Given that 73 percent of those currently over the age of 65 and 66 percent of those aged 50 to 64 reside in Southwest Houston, current and planned services for the older Jewish population can effectively reach the target population for the next two decades by concentrating in this area.

The assertion that services can continue to effectively reach the target population by concentrating in Southwest Houston is further supported by the past and projected residential stability of the population aged 50 to 64. Most of the population in this age group are long term residents of the Houston area. Almost three quarters have resided in the Houston area for more than 15 years, and 8 percent are native to the city.

Length of time in current residence provides another indication of the residential stability of the 50 to 64 year old cohort. Almost two thirds (64%) of this population have resided in their present residence for more than 10 years. The residential stability of the 50 to 64 year old cohort can be explained largely as a function of home ownership among this group. While 85 percent of the respondents in this age group own their current residence, only 59 percent of the respondents over the age of 65, and 69 percent of the total adult sample own their current residence.

Plans for retirement also indicate the residential stability of the 50 to 64 year old cohort. 89 percent expect to remain in the area in which they currently live during retirement. 3 percent stated plans to move to another area within metropolitan Houston for retirement, and the balance expect to move to other cities, states, or countries.

B. Household Composition

Household size among the 50 to 64 year old cohort reflects national trends with respect to a reduction of average household size in the post child rearing years. Average household size among this group is 2.3 persons per household as compared to an overall Jewish average of 2.63 persons per household. Household size is even smaller among those over the age of 65, who averaged 1.6 persons per household. While the smaller household size of persons over the age of 65 is primarily a function of the high percentage (45%) of widowed individuals in this category, smaller household size among the 50 to 64 year old cohort largely reflects the absence of children in the household.

The population, aged 50 to 64 is largely a married population, with 86% of the households being married households.

Consistent with the population over the age of 65, the households of persons aged 50 to 64 are composed predominantly of Jewish members. A full 90 percent of the households of respondents in this cohort are composed entirely of Jewish members as compared to 74 percent of the households for the total adult sample.

C. Education and Income

Consistent with national population trends, the level of education of the adult Jewish population of greater Houston decreases as age increases. Accordingly, the educational level of adults aged 50 to 64 years old is slightly lower than that of younger adult cohorts. Slightly more than half (52%) of this cohort have at least a college education as compared to 59 percent of the total adult sample.

The 50 to 64 year old cohort includes both those who are at the peak of their careers, those who are preparing for retirement, and those who have taken early retirements. Slightly less than a quarter of this group (22%) are already retired, but an equal percentage stated they have no plans for retirement. Of those who are currently participating in the labor market, 83 percent work full time, 12 percent work part time, and 5 percent are either looking for work or are too ill to work.

Almost half (49%) have household incomes in excess of \$50,000 a year, while only 11 percent have household incomes under \$20,000 a year.

D. Origins

The birthplaces of the population aged 50 to 64 are more diverse than those of younger cohorts. A total of 6 percent were born outside of the United States, and 5 percent are Holocaust victims. Substantial percentages of the parents of persons aged 50 to 64 were foreign born. Over half (54%) of the mothers and over two thirds (67%) of the fathers of this age group were born outside of the United States. One third of this group's mothers are still alive, but only 9 percent of fathers are still living. Of parents who are still alive, around half reside in the Houston area. 7 percent have parents in nursing homes in the Houston area. Of these, 4 reside in Seven Acres Home for the Aged, 2 reside in Goldberg Towers, and 1 is in another Houston area nursing home.

E. Religious Background and Education

A smaller percent of respondents aged 50 to 64 have a non-Jewish parent than percentages found in younger cohorts. Both parents of 90 percent of this population were Jewish. 3 percent of this age group are converts with neither parent born Jewish. 12 percent in this population who are married at this time have a current or former spouse who is not Jewish. Only 17 percent of former and current non-Jewish spouses of persons in this age group have converted to Judaism. Of the 83 percent of non-Jewish spouses who have not converted, half are currently Catholic, one quarter are Protestant, and one quarter have no religious preference. 95 percent of the intermarried in this age group who have had children have raised their children in the Jewish religion.

The population aged 50 to 64 is highly similar to the general adult population with respect to religious education. Although a slightly smaller percentage in this age group have had a Bar or Bat mitzvah, and afternoon or weekend Hebrew school activities than the overall population, this may be a reflection of the increase in weekend and afternoon schools and the popularization of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah in the past thirty or so years.

With respect to current religious practices, synagogue affiliation is very high among this age group. 71 percent of the population aged 50 to 64 are currently affiliated with an area synagogue or temple. Identification with the Conservative movement is also highest in this age group. 42 percent of this age group consider themselves Conservative as compared to 35 percent of those over the age of 65 and 29 percent of the total adult sample. Five percent fewer in this age group identify with the Reform movement than the percentage found in the general adult population. Survey data indicate that this group is also more observant than the general population. While 20 percent of the total affiliated adult population goes to synagogue only for High Holy Holidays, only 11 percent of the affiliated in this age group attend services this infrequently. Of those in this age group who are not currently affiliated, two thirds have had synagogue or temple affiliation in the past.

Religious observances provide another indication of the high level of Jewish identification in this age group relative to the total adult population. The percentages of respondents aged 50 to 64 who participate in a number of observances are presented below along with percentages of the total adult population who participate.

#### Religious Observances

|                          | <u>50-64 Year Olds</u> | <u>Total Sample</u> |
|--------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| Attend Passover Services | 90%                    | 82%                 |
| Light Candles on Friday  | 57%                    | 40%                 |
| Don't Work on Yom Kippur | 86%                    | 72%                 |
| Have Mezzuzah on Door    | 76%                    | 59%                 |
| Buy Kosher Food          | 4%                     | 7%                  |
| Light Chanuka Candles    | 84%                    | 79%                 |

With the exception of buying primarily kosher food for the household, a higher percentage of respondents aged 50 to 64 reported participation in each of the observances examined.

#### F. Communal Engagement

Households of this age population indicate high levels of participation in Jewish activities and membership in Jewish organizations. Two thirds of this age group reported either congregational affiliation or membership in one or more Jewish organizations. Almost three quarters of adults in this age group hear about Jewish activities through the Jewish Herald Voice, 45 percent through the synagogue bulletins, 21 percent through the Jewish Community Center newsletters, and 16 percent through friends and relatives. 59 percent read the Jewish Herald Voice regularly, and only ten percent have not heard of the Jewish Herald Voice.

Substantially higher percentages of respondents aged 50 to 64 reported membership for themselves or their spouses in a number of Jewish organizations.

Organizational Memberships

|                                     | <u>50-64 Year Olds</u> | <u>Total Sample</u> |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| American Jewish Committee           | 13%                    | 7%                  |
| Anti-Defamation League              | 20%                    | 10%                 |
| B'nai B'rith Lodge                  | 19%                    | 7%                  |
| B'nai B'rith Women                  | 20%                    | 13%                 |
| Haddassah                           | 29%                    | 16%                 |
| Houston Action for Soviet<br>Jewry  | 6%                     | 4%                  |
| Jewish Community Center             | 28%                    | 26%                 |
| Jewish War Veterans                 | 4%                     | 1%                  |
| National Council of Jewish<br>Women | 4%                     | 5%                  |
| ORT                                 | 16%                    | 10%                 |
| Westwood Country Club               | 5%                     | 3%                  |
| ZOA                                 | 13%                    | 5%                  |

The high participation levels in Jewish organizations could be a function of the reduction in child rearing responsibilities and increased leisure time associated with older adulthood.

Philanthropic giving is also high among this age group. Only 7 percent of respondents aged 50 to 64 either do not make contributions or refused to indicate whether they make any religious, cultural, or social contributions. This is about half the percentage found among all households in the sample. 73 percent of the group which indicated that they do make contributions reported contributions to the United Way, as compared to 57 percent of the overall sample. 76 percent give to the United Jewish Campaign as compared to 43 percent of the total population.

#### 4. Planning Implications\*

It is recognized that other characteristics of the older Jewish population beyond absolute numbers, proportion of total population, and geographical distribution and location have to be borne in mind when providing services or programs. The elderly are a fast changing group in terms of their characteristics on a number of key social indicators. For instance, greater longevity has changed the sex ratios at various ages. The heavy preponderance of widows now occurs only after age 75. This fact has very important implications for housing for the elderly with greater calls to accommodate couples rather than single individuals. Another trend of significance is that whereas in the 1970s, over 70% of those aged of 75 years were foreign born, with all the other social characteristics associated with this background, more recent surveys have shown that among the new "young-old", aged in their early 60s, only 15% are foreign born.

The religious profiles and language characteristics have also changed among the various generations of elderly. Given the fact that the elderly now range over a 35 year age spread this is not surprising. The economic situation of those whose working lives were spent in different decades also affect the changing economic climate with regard to various age cohorts' access to home ownership, private pensions and other forms of wealth. Again surveys show that elderly Jews are the most polarized section of the Jewish community in terms of income, with above average numbers in both poverty and affluence.

Another demographic feature with important social planning effects is the different homelife experiences of the "old-old" and the "young-old". At the beginning of this century most persons were born into extended families with large numbers of siblings in heavily congested urban areas. The "young-old" have only one or two siblings and themselves produced small families. Thus they were brought up and continued to live in a more privatized environment. We can expect them to have much different attitudes to personal privacy, and so to group and collective experiences even on a mundane level such as cooking and working facilities, eating meals and leisure activities.

Quantitative data on such social psychological issues is at yet rather limited. The census and community surveys are limited by methodological constraints from in-depth inquiries into questions of changing attitudes and values. Research in this sphere is more appropriate to the techniques of qualitative research such as focus groups or participant observation. However, the growing need to market services for the Jewish elderly to an increasingly sophisticated group of consumers, suggests that further research in the direction of marketing is required.

It is also important that increased efforts are made to include the institutional population in surveys or at least to include them in local population counts and estimates. This issue should be a crucial agenda item for those who provide services to the Jewish elderly.

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