



Scientific Progress

In 2022, the number of people living in poverty in Israel rose to over 2.5 million, more than 20% of the country's population. In Jerusalem, poverty is twice as high, with over 40% of the city's inhabitants remaining below the poverty line. Addressing this national epidemic requires policy change, an updated economic system, and cooperative efforts for confronting poverty.

The research of Prof. Mona Khoury-Kassabri, Vice President for Strategy and Diversity (Paul Baerwald School of Social Work and Social Welfare) focuses on issues related to child and youth welfare. In a study on the prevalence of emotional and physical maltreatment of students in primary schools by school staff in Israel, Prof. Khoury-Kassabri, in collaboration with researchers from the University of Michigan, demonstrates that students from poor and minority families in Israel are victimized by school staff more often than those from a higher socioeconomic background. The most vulnerable groups suffering maltreatment were males, students in Arab schools, and those in schools with a high percentage of students from low-income families. The researchers have formulated recommendations for educational campaigns among teachers, and for allocating more resources to support staff in low socio-economic neighborhoods.

Community Impact

Prof. John Gal (The Paul Baerwald School of Social Work and Social Welfare) leads a number of research projects on social and economic rights in Israel and is heavily involved in multiple efforts to eliminate poverty. Prof. Gal is a Principal Researcher and Chair of the Social Welfare Policy program at the Taub Center for Social Policy Studies. Prof. Gal led a team of senior welfare researchers in Israel in devising a comprehensive plan for the Right to Good Welfare, a multi-year reform plan for the welfare system in Israel, launched and commissioned by the Menomadin Foundation, and adopted by the Minister of Welfare. One of the main challenges addressed by the plan is how to deal with struggles of families living in poverty in the present and how to prevent future deterioration into poverty. As a member of the organizing committee of the Beatzmi Foundation, Prof. Gal has been central to the implementation of occupational programs for people from diverse sectors living in poverty.

Prof. Momi Dahan (Federmann School of Public Policy and Governance) has been studying the interrelationship between inequality and economic growth, the role of family in shaping overall income inequality and the optimal income tax schedule. Prof. Dahan's research efforts yield theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions that have led him to chair and serve as a member of numerous public committees and policy advice forums related to welfare policy and poverty reduction. Among these, Prof. Dahan chairs two steering committees in the Central Bureau of Statistics which measure poverty in Israel: the socio-economic and the peripheral measurement committees. Prof. Dahan has also given ad hoc advice on poverty to international bodies, such as OECD and IMF, delivers outreach lectures to numerous decision-making bodies, and is the author of a range of white papers on poverty.

Studies and Learning Initiatives

At the Baerwald School of Social Work and Social Welfare, students are learning methods for tackling poverty through formal channels, professional training and social involvement. A significant percentage of the students are tasked with addressing challenges of people living in poverty, at the individual, family, and community levels.

Dr. Eve Sihra (Bogen Family Department of Economics at the Faculty of Social Sciences) offers a B.A. course in "Development and Poverty in Economics," which tries to answer questions such as why some nations are rich while others are poor, or how to lift people out of poverty. Prof. Avner De-Shalit (Department of Political Science) offers a Master's Degree course in "Poverty Inequality and Disadvantage," focusing on the political and moral aspects of poverty and the policies aimed at reducing poverty.

Actions on Campus

At HUJI's Faculty of Law, the Clinical Legal Education Center combines legal theory and practice. The center comprises 8 clinics that provide free legal services to underprivileged and marginalized populations, and is operated by law students during the course of their education. This significantly enhances the professional perception of law students to include commitment to the community and social sensitivity, and promotes an understanding of the gap between law by the book and law in reality. The clinic operates two legal aid centers for members of the Ethiopian community living in poverty, and assists dozens of individuals every year in exhausting their rights to National Insurance, public housing, enforcement, and labor laws.