

Israeli Arabs in Health and Welfare Professions: An Ethnic and Gender Oriented View of Representation and Employment

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Employment of ethnic minority members in the health and welfare professions (hereafter: HWP), especially medicine, embodies two major benefits: First, these professions offer feasible and prestigious career paths to members of ethnic minorities. Second, minority employment in HWP helps increase variety in professional staffing, enabling provision of culturally-competent treatment to minority members in a multicultural society. The study focuses on intersecting ethnic and gender aspects of representation in the medical professions, seeking to assess the percentage of Arabs in Israel employed in HWP – especially medicine – and the meaning of such employment for them. A combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies was used, analysing data derived from two surveys conducted by the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics in 2011 (*Labor Force Survey* and *Social Survey*), as well as in-depth interviews with ten Arab physicians employed at public hospitals in Israeli cities with mixed Jewish-Arab populations. HWP was found to be a preferred employment path for Arabs in Israel. Most employees in these professions are women, but fields requiring rigorous academic training, such as medicine, primarily attract Arab men. It was found that academically educated Arab women are less inclined to opt for HWP and more likely to seek employment in education than their Jewish counterparts. The Arab population's overall underrepresentation in medicine with regard to physicians in Israel is thus largely the result of severe underrepresentation of Arab women in this field compared with both Jewish women and Arab men. Arab women in Israel experience dual marginality – as women and as Arabs. They are barred from reaching senior positions in HWP and are especially underrepresented in medicine.

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This finding demonstrates how processes of selective modernisation engender a combination of ethnic and gender disparities in the medical profession and how this affects treatment of Arab women in Israel. The study concludes with practical recommendations aimed at increasing the number of Arab women physicians.