

The influence of Mothers' Ethno-Cultural Background and Health Beliefs on Vaccinating their Infants¹

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Preventive health services for infants and toddlers are provided for Israel's entire population and include vaccinations for infants. One of the challenges facing the preventive medical services therefore, is to tailor service- provision to meet the needs of diverse ethno-cultural groups. However, the influence of ethno-cultural factors on the vaccination behaviors of Israeli mothers has not been studied extensively. The goals of this study were to examine the beliefs and behaviors concerning infant vaccinations among four groups of mothers from different cultural backgrounds: Israeli-born (Jewish and Bedouin) and immigrants from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia. In addition, we also studied the effect of health beliefs on vaccination behavior and estimated the connection between earlier vaccinations and later vaccination behavior.

Methods: A comparative cross-sectional study conducted in selected community neighborhoods in the Negev. A quota sample included 100 mothers who had infants aged 18 to 24 months from each of the four ethno-cultural groups. (N = 400). Data were collected through questionnaires and examination of the vaccination history cards from Well Baby Clinics (*Tipat Halav*).

Results: Mothers from different cultural backgrounds hold different beliefs regarding their babies' vaccinations. Bedouin mothers are more conscientious compared to those from other groups about vaccinating according to the Ministry of Health guidelines. Our findings indicate that maternal behavior is shaped in the first months of their babies' lives and earlier vaccination behavior is the main

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predictor for continuing vaccination at age six months, one year and after one year of age.

Conclusions and suggestions for policy makers: In order to expand the response to vaccinating, pregnant mothers or those who have just given birth should be offered culturally-appropriate intervention programmes.