

REDUCTION OF THE GAP IN THE INFANT MORTALITY RATE BETWEEN JEWS AND ARABS IN ISRAEL

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Background: The infant mortality rate (IMR) is a health status indicator. The gap in the IMR between Jews and Arabs has been markedly narrowed, particularly in the period 1975-2000.

Methods: Data were taken from publications of the Central Bureau of Statistics and by the Department of Mother, Child and Adolescent Health in the Ministry of Health.

Results: In 2000, the IMR was 8.6 per 1,000 live births in the Arab population compared to 4.0 in the Jewish population. Between the period 1970-2000, the IMR decreased by 78% among Moslems, by 82% among Druze and by 88% among Christians, compared to 79% among the Jewish population. In 2000, congenital malformations (CM) were the leading cause of infant mortality among the Arab population, 40% of all infant deaths were caused by CM and 29% were caused by immaturity compared to 23% and 53%, respectively, among the Jewish population. Between 1970-74 and 2000, a decline in the CM rate was observed in both the Arab and Jewish populations. The decline in this rate was far greater among the Jewish population than among Arabs. By 2000, this rate was 3.7-fold higher among Arabs compared with Jews.

Conclusion: The differences in IMR caused by CM between Arabs and Jews can be explained by the high prevalence of consanguineous marriages among the Arab population in Israel.

