**Proposal for Paper: The contribution of unique risk factors for adolescents living in Ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities in Israel**

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The exposure of adolescents living in Ultra-Orthodox Jewishcommunities in Israel to modern Western lifestyles presents a number of risks and challenges to them, given the disparity between their own educational and social frameworks and outside world norms and values. Problems in adjusting to and even dropping out of the school environment are often key moments in a process of disengagement from the community frameworks and behavioural norms, precipitating involvement in risky behaviours, such as drug and alcohol use, criminal activity, and sexual encounters vulnerable to abuse.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the risks to teenagers who live in Ultra-Orthodox communities. These communities are among the poorest in Israel, with about half of their members living below the poverty line and often made up of large households (with an average of around seven children in each family) living in cramped accommodation. Ultra-Orthodox informal educational frameworks do not provide for education in core subjects such as Mathematics and English and, while formal educational institutions have been closed during the pandemic, adolescents in these communities have often not be able to access distance learning facilities either, since many do not have Internet access, either via mobile telephone or home computer.

The study examines the contribution of particular factors affecting adolescents from closed religious communities, such as their specific religious beliefs, the experience of novel school environments governed by unfamiliar rules, and considers them alongside the general social risks they may encounter. These general risks may be both individually-focussed, such as ADHD and other pedagogic and socialisation challenges, exposure to criminal peer activity, and familial in nature, such as their parents’ marital relationships, familial ties, inadequate supervision, lack of parental engagement with schools, and having siblings who are school dropouts.

The study incorporates a survey of 14-18-year-old ultra-Orthodox youths living in Jerusalem at various stages of disengagement from and/or dropping out of school, conducted by the Institute for Policy Studies in collaboration with Ministry of Education and the Jerusalem Municipality. Social and demographic data on these individuals, their personalities, families, experience of school integration, and the educational and behavioural risks to which they have been exposed will be collected and analysed in relation to three categories of risk were examined: academic, behavioural, and emotional.

This comparative study of adolescents at different stages of risk exposure facilitates the identification of the unique risks that the life of a closed religious society exposes them to. The findings will provide social work and educational professionals with greater insight into concentrated areas of risk, helping them to focus their work and counter disengagement in its early stages.

**Keywords**: School disengagement/dropout; youth at risk; Ultra-Orthodox Jewish religious communities; faith schools; community, familial, and personal risk factors.

Dr. Gemma Banks, Journal Manager,

Educational Review

Dear Dr. Banks,

**Proposal for Paper**

In response to your call for papers for the forthcoming special issue of *Educational Review* on “A re-view of educational inequalities,” we are pleased to enclose our draft abstract for a proposed paper on the unique risk factors encountered by adolescents living in Ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities in Israel.

The proposal addresses the aims of the special issue in examining the challenges of diversity within the complexities of Israeli society. These are viewed in relation to unique areas of educational inequality that present a challenge both to the Ultra-Orthodox community itself and to the wider polity. The proposed authors have very significant experience in studying this area and will receive significant support from educational and other official institutions to produce data never before mined in this way. The paper would address the specificities of this dynamic in new ways in examining socioeconomic polarities, problematic adolescent behaviour and complex issues of identity, class, religion, and tradition in a unique context. It would provide for a focussed examination also of how the interplay between these categories is evolving and will aid further refinement of both theoretical perspectives and practical policy on such “wicked problems”.

Thank you for considering our proposal. I would be very happy, on behalf of all authors of the proposed paper, to provide any other information you require and look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Yours Sincerely,

Dr. Chen Lifshitz, Faculty of Social Work, Ashkelon Academic College, Ashkelon, Israel.