The Geographic Distribution of America's Jewish Elderly

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In the 1980s, studies of elderly Jewish populations, both worldwide (Schmelz, 1984) and within the United States (Kahana and Kahana, 1984; Warach, 1985; Rosenwaike, 1986), began to attract increased attention. These studies have indicated "a trend for pronounced 'aging,' i.e. high and rising proportions of elderly" within the Jewish populations examined (Schmelz, 1984). In the United States it is estimated that the Jewish population aged 65 and over, which numbered 503,000 in 1957 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1958), will reach 975,000 by 1990, according to projections made by Israeli demographers (Schmelz, 1984). Thus in the course of three decades the size of this age group is expected to nearly double. In contrast, the expected growth of the total Jewish population in the same time period is likely to be minimal; from 5,030,000 in 1957 to 5,645,000 in 1990 (Schmelz, 1984), a gain of only about 12%. This projection thus indicates that the proportion of those aged 65 and over in the total Jewish population will have risen from about 10% in 1957 to 17% in 1990.

Until very recently there was no recognition of need for separate study of the geographic distribution of America's elderly Jewish population. Although there may have been some minor exceptions, by and large, geographic patterns of residence generally were not differentiated by age. Thus the geographic distribution of Jews aged 65 and over would have been similar, if not identical to, that of the overall Jewish population. However, in the post-1950 period a new pattern gradually emerged: increasing numbers of elderly began to migrate to retirement areas in other sections of the country, notably the South.

Several factors contributed: social security payments and private pensions, greater savings based on higher lifetime earnings, and the development of retirement communities principally in the Sunbelt. A loosening of family ties may also have contributed to the emergence of this new lifestyle for the elderly.

As a result, by 1980 the geographic distribution of elderly American Jews no longer closely resembled that of the aggregate Jewish population. Much larger proportions of elderly Jews were found in those metropolitan areas that were attractive to retirees. By one estimate, one-fifth of all older Jews now live in Florida, particularly in the three Southeastern counties of the "Gold Coast" (Rosenwaike, 1989a). This shift in the geographic distribution of the elderly Jewish population over the past decades has been far more radical than that for the Jewish population as a whole. The unprecedented demographic pattern that has emerged, clearly warrants separate study.

Estimating Geographic Distribution by Using Census Data

The lack of United States Census data by religion has made it difficult to ascertain the characteristics of the national Jewish population and its subgroups, such as the elderly. However, census data have long provided some indirect measures of Jewish population distribution. For example, mother tongue data have been analyzed, with persons of Yiddish mother tongue considered as somewhat representative of the Jewish population (Kobrin, 1983; Rosenwaike, 1971). Similarly, data on the population of foreign provenance (foreign birth or parentage) have been analyzed with those of Russian stock considered representative of the Jewish population (Rosenthal, 1975).

The 1970 census was the last to query mother tongue and parents' country of birth. Thus, attempts to use 1980 census data to determine patterns of Jewish population distribution must rely on indirect measures. Two useful indicators are responses to the new queries on ancestry and on language spoken at home. Two ancestry groups are considered here: "Russian" (single ancestry) and "Religious Group", a category in which the Census Bureau included those persons who responded "Jewish." As has been pointed out, the Census Bureau's instructions specifically forbade self-reporting of a religious group as an ancestry. Since the Census Bureau considered Jews solely as a religious group and refused to accept "Jewish" as an ancestry designation, such responses were not given a separate code but placed in an unspecified category that included persons indicating religious groups (Magocsi, 1987). Many Jews, for example, perhaps as many as 17% of those in New York City, disregarded the Census Bureau's instructions and reported themselves as such (Rosenwaike, 1989b). However, many others reported their ethnic origin as "Russian," "Polish" "German" or other. By far the largest share reported Russian. It is likely that in most urban areas Jews accounted for the overwhelming share of all persons classified as Russian. Accordingly, both the distribution of persons of Russian ancestry and the distribution of persons in the religious group category are likely to be indicative of the settlement patterns of the total Jewish population.

A third indirect measure of the Jewish population can be derived from responses to the question on language spoken in the home. A total of 316,000 persons, five years of age and older, were reported as speaking Yiddish according to published 1980 census data (United States Bureau of the Census, 1984). This represents only about 6% of the estimated Jewish population. Those who spoke Yiddish were primarily East European immigrants and their children; this population was concentrated among those at older ages. A majority, nearly 174,000, were recorded as being 65 years of age or older. Among the total elderly Jewish population in the United States perhaps close to 18% were counted as speaking Yiddish.

The "Russian" ancestry group and the "religious group" category also appear to include a higher proportion of elderly than non-elderly Jews, but the relative excesses are not nearly so marked as in the case of the language indicator. Data for New York City and three suburban counties can illustrate the patterns. According to a 1981

survey 14.3% of the estimated Jewish population in this area consisted of persons aged 65 or older (Ritterband and Cohen, 1984).

Public-use microdata tabulations for purposes of this study using the 5% samples (PUMS) from the 1980 census indicate that, of the Russian ancestry population, 27.4% were 65 or older and of the total "religious group" figure, 29% were elderly. 50% of all persons speaking Yiddish at home were 65 years or older.

Even among the elderly, the proportion speaking Yiddish appears to increase with age. Public-use data for the United States as a whole indicate that in 1980 there were 83,400 Yiddish-speaking persons aged 65-74 and 88,520 Yiddish-speaking persons aged 75 and over. According to age distribution of the total Jewish elderly population prepared by Schmelz (1984), the former figure represents 14.8% of all persons aged 65-74 years; the latter figure, 28.1% of all persons aged 75 years and over. This excess of Yiddish speakers among the old-old as compared with the young-old suggests cautious use of this measure in estimating Jewish population distribution. A Jewish community with a high proportion of old-old among its elderly is likely to have a higher proportion of Yiddish speakers than one with relatively more young-old. As will be demonstrated, some communities have high and others low proportions of old-old within their aggregate elderly group.

Table 1 provides summary figures for the total elderly population in the United States according to the three 1980 census categories previously discussed, by two age subgroups: 65-74 years of age and 75 years and over. As noted above, a majority of the elderly Yiddish speakers were 75 and over. However, the percentage of old-old among the religious group category was identical to that for the United States population as a whole and the percentage among the Russian ancestry group was only slightly higher.

TABLE 1. AGE DISTRIBUTION OF PERSONS 65 YEARS AND OVER IN SELECTED CATEGORIES 1980 CENSUS, AND ESTIMATED JEWISH POPULATION OF THE UNITED STATES, 1980

Population group	Total		65-74 years		75 years and over	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1980 Census Russian ancestry	338,540	100.0	200,940	59.4	137,600	40.6
Religious group ancestry	194,460	100.0	118,560	61.0	75,900	39.0
Yiddish speaker	171,920	100.0	83,400	48.5	88,520	51.5
1980 Schmelz projections: Estimated Jewish Population	879,600	100.0	564,200	64.1	315,400	35.9
1980 Census Total U.S. population		100.0		61.0		39.0

Table 2 shows the numbers of elderly persons in 1980 in the total United States and in six major metropolitan areas in each of the three ancestry/language groups. Comparison of the Russian ancestry and religious group ancestry distributions indicates striking similarities. In both groups about one-fourth resided in New York City and three suburban counties and one sixth in the three counties of South Florida. The distribution of the elderly Yiddish-speaking population differed from the other two groups in two major ways. A much larger percentage–almost 40%– were concentrated in New York City and its environs and a much smaller percentage–about 24%–were residents of the balance of the nation (excluding the six metropolitan areas specified in Table 2).

TABLE 2. PERSONS 65 YEARS AND OVER IN SELECTED CATEGORIES - UNITED STATES AND
SELECTED GEOGRAPHIC AREAS, 1980

Area	Russian ancestry		Religious group ancestry		Yiddish speaking	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
United States	338,540	100.0	194,460	100.0	171,920	100.0
New York City*	83,820	24.8	48,240	24.8	68,180	39.7
South Florida*	54,160	16.0	29,480	15.2	27,900	16.2
Los Angeles (county)	25,540	7.5	13,020	6.7	11,380	6.6
Philadelphia*	19,780	5.8	10,740	5.5	10,680	6.2
Chicago*	14,540	4.3	9,420	4.8	7,020	4.1
Boston*	11,940	3.5	8,100	4.2	5,780	3.4
Balance of U.S.	128,760	38.0	75,460	38.8	40,980	23.8

a. New York City, Nassau, Suffolk and Westchester counties.
b. Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties.
c. Philadelphia, Bucks, Chester, Delaware and Montgomery counties.
d. Cook, DuPage and Lake counties.
e. Boston and suburban region.

A few possible explanations for these different distributions can be suggested. It may be that the historically densely settled Jewish neighborhoods in New York were instrumental in maintaining the Yiddish language in that city to a greater extent than elsewhere. Conversely, those areas with relatively small Jewish proportions in their population were least likely to have a considerable Yiddish-speaking share. In terms of Jewish population estimation, another explanation as to why there are higher percentages of the two ancestry group populations outside of the six major metropolitan areas may be that the Yiddish language group is presumably entirely Jewish. On the other hand, the Russian ancestry and religious group ancestry populations include unknown, but not insubstantial, percentages of non-Jews. Since more than four-fifths of the general United States population live outside the six metropolitan regions specified in Table 2, presumably a majority of the non-Jewish Russian ancestry and religious group ancestry elderly also live in the "balance" of the United States. These persons inflate the share of the Jewish population residing in the United States "balance" when "Russian" or "religious group" ancestry is used as a proxy measure.

In summary then, it is likely that the proportion of the elderly Jewish population estimated to reside in the six metropolitan areas is somewhat overstated when the Yiddish language group is designated as a surrogate measure but may be understated when either ancestry group is chosen as proxy. No ideal solution is at hand. However, a feasible approach would be to use all three measures to the extent possible; this lessens dependence on any one measure with its particular biases.

TABLE 3. PERCENT DISTRIBUTION OF PERSONS 65 YEARS AND OLDER SPEAKING YIDDISH AT HOME, BY ANCESTRY - UNITED STATES AND SELECTED GEOGRAPHIC AREAS, 1980

Area	Ancestry								
	Total		Russian		Religious group		Polish		All other including other multiple ancestry
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
United States	171,920	100	52,480	30.5	47,480	27.6	32,820	19.1	39,140	22.8
New York City	68,180	100	17,480	25.6	17,520	25.7	15,740	23.1	17,440	25.6
South Florida	27,900	100	9,460	33.9	6,180	22.2	5,180	18.6	7,080	25.4
Los Angeles	11,380	100	3,320	29.2	2,980	26.2	2,540	22.3	2,540	22.3
Philadelphia	10,680	100	4,580	42.9	3,340	31.3	940	8.8	1,820	17.0
Chicago	7,020	100	1,900	27.1	2,360	33.6	1,240	17.7	1,520	21.7
Boston	5,780	100	2,060	35.6	2,180	37.7	640	11.1	900	15.6
Balance of US	40,980	100	13,680	33.4	12,920	31.5	6,540	16.0	7,840	19.1

To estimate the geographic distribution of the elderly American Jewish population we used composite statistics for all three groups: Russian ancestry, religious group ancestry and Yiddish language persons. The Yiddish speakers, however, cannot simply be added to those of Russian or religious ancestry, since a majority of them also reported that they are of Russian or religious group ancestry (Table 3). Accordingly, only those Yiddish speakers who report ancestries other than these two can be added to the Russian/religious group counts to avoid duplication. These tallies of mutually exclusive groups are shown for the United States and for the

TABLE 4. SUM OF PERSONS 65 YEARS AND OVER IN THREE MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE GROUPS - UNITED STATES AND SELECTED GEOGRAPHIC AREAS, 1980

Area	Total	Russian ancestry	Religious group ancestry	Yiddish speaking: not Russian or religious group
United States	604,960	338,540	194,460	71,960
New York City	165,240	83,820	48,240	33,180
South Florida	95,900	54,160	29,480	12,260
Los Angeles	43,640	25,540	13,020	5,080
Philadelphia	33,280	19,780	10,740	2,760
Chicago	26,720	14,540	9,420	2,760
Boston	21,580	11,940	8,100	1,540
Balance of U.S.	218,600	128,760	75,460	14,380

six major metropolitan areas in Table 4.

In Table 5 we have used (for illustrative purposes) the Schmelz (1984) estimate of 879,000 Jews aged 65 years and over in 1980 as representative of the total elderly Jewish population. Accordingly, we have distributed the Jewish population by geographic area proportionate to the distribution tallies in Table 4. New York City and suburbs is estimated to have an elderly Jewish population of 240,300 or 27.3% of the national total. This percentage exceeds those for the representation of Russian or religious ancestry group persons in metropolitan New York (Table 2) but is less than that for all Yiddish speakers. The second largest concentration of Jewish elderly– 15.9% of the national total–is found in South Florida with 139,400 elderly. This percentage closely corresponds to the average of the percentages for the three proxy measures shown in Table 2.

Discussion

Population surveys within a year of the decennial census were conducted in a number of major Jewish communities in the United States. It is therefore possible to compare the estimates derived in this study with those from local community sources. The Greater New York Jewish Population Study collected data from a sample of 4,505 Jewish households in New York City and the suburban counties of Nassau, Suffolk and Westchester in early 1981 and estimated the total Jewish population to be 1,670,700. Among those who reported age, 14.3% were 65 years and over (Ritterband and Cohen, 1984). When this percentage is applied to the total population it yields an estimate of 238,900 elderly, a figure within 1% of the estimate given in Table 5.

TABLE 5. ESTIMATED GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF JEWISH PERSONS
65 YEARS AND OVER, 1980

Area	Number	Percent
United States	879,600*	100.0
New York City	240,300	27.3
South Florida	139,400	15.9
Los Angeles	63,500	7.2
Philadelphia	48,400	5.5
Chicago	38,900	4.4
Boston	31,400	3.6
Balance of U.S.	317,800	36.1

a. Estimated total according to Schmelz (1984). Estimated Jewish population in each area distributed pro rata according to the total in Table 4.

A study of the population 65 years and over based on the 1979 Los Angeles Jewish Population Study (which included 823 households in its sample) reported approximately 58,200 non-institutionalized elderly (Huberman, 1984). If it is assumed that, as in the United States population as a whole, 5% of all persons 65 and older are residents of long-term care facilities (United States Bureau of the

Census, 1984), then the total elderly Jewish population in Los Angeles may have been at least 61,000. This figure differs by 4% from the estimate of 63,500 in Table 5. Given the limitations of calculations from proxy census data as well as the fact that Jewish community surveys often sample relatively small numbers and thus yield estimates that may be subject to considerable sampling variation, it cannot be expected that other comparisons would correspond as closely as do these two examples.

Perhaps the most striking finding in Table 5 is that an estimated 16% of the elderly Jewish population resided in South Florida in 1980. This figure dramatically reflects the degree of geographic concentration of retirement migration among American Jews. According to estimates available at the time of the 1980 census, South Florida had only 7% of the total Jewish population of all ages (Chenkin and Miran, 1982). The much higher percentage of the elderly Jewish population found in this area is largely due to migration of those approaching or in the retirement ages.

The 1980 census query on residence five years before the census (i.e. on April 1, 1975) is of some interest in showing the pattern of migration among selected states. Residence in 1975 was coded for a half-sample of those queried, therefore only half the records in the Public Use Microdata Sample show residence in 1975 by residence in 1980. Since weighted figures are based on a 2.5% (1 in 40) sample, and therefore are subject to considerable sampling variability, only weighted data for the three states with the largest Jewish populations 65 years of age and over are shown in Table 6. This table indicates that the preponderant share of respective interstate migrants were residents of Florida in 1980 and that most of these had resided in New York in 1975. The result of this pattern, a disproportionate share of elderly persons among Jewish residents of Florida, is well known (Rosenwaike, 1989a).

TABLE 6. INTERSTATE MIGRANTS OF RUSSIAN OR RELIGIOUS GROUP ANCESTRY, 1975-80, THREE SELECTED STATES[a]

State	Out-migrants from state	In-migrants to state
New York	21,280	1,440
Florida	1,880	24,280
California	1,040	4,400

a. Excludes immigrants from abroad.

It has been observed in a number of countries that retirement migration is frequently concentrated in a few geographic locations. In the United States the states of Florida, California and Arizona have long been favored as retirement destinations. The movement of American Jews is even more focused: the three South Florida counties absorb a large share of all elderly interstate migrants. As movement to South Florida has increased, the pattern of settlement gradually shifted. In the 1950s, and early 1960s Miami Beach and its immediate environs were a prime destination. By the late 1960s other areas in Dade County were attracting newcomers. By the 1970s, the movement of retirees was increasingly shifting

northward to Broward and Palm Beach Counties. The age distribution of elderly Jewish residents in South Florida reflects the shifts in flow over time. Thus in the Miami Beach area a majority of elderly residents (55%) are over 75 years of age, reflecting the earlier arrival of migrants to this area. In the remainder of Dade County about 45% of the elderly group are over 75 years old. In the more recently settled counties an overwhelming share of the elderly were "young-old", persons 65-74 years of age. Table 7 indicates that only 23% of Jewish elderly in Broward and 21% in Palm Beach were 75 and over. These estimates for ten-year age groups were constructed using similar techniques to those shown in Tables 4 and 5 for the aggregate elderly.

TABLE 7. ESTIMATED GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF JEWISH PERSONS 65-74 YEARS AND 75 AND OVER IN SOUTH FLORIDA SUBDIVISIONS*

Area	65-74	75 and over	Percent of elderly aged 75 and over
Dade County			
Miami Beach area[b]	15,300	18,500	55
Balance of county	17,500	14,300	45
Broward County	44,100	12,900	23
Palm Beach County	17,600	4,800	21

a. For sources and methods, see text.
b. Miami Beach, Bay Harbour Islands, Surfside, Bal Harbour, North Bay Village.

Conclusions

The results of this research indicate that a number of different techniques can be used drawing on 1980 census data to measure the geographic distribution of the elderly Jewish population in the United States. The estimates developed here from census data on ancestry and language spoken for major metropolitan areas were compared with estimates of persons 65 years and over based on surveys conducted by Jewish community groups and close agreement was found. The results also indicate that within a metropolitan area the age composition of the elderly population may vary strikingly as a result of migration patterns. The broad features of migration can be derived from the census question relating to place of residence five years ago which permits a simple origin/destination cross-tabulation. Census data indicate that Florida was the main destination of elderly migrants in the 1975-80 period, and this pattern of recent migration is borne out by age data for 1980 which show an unusually high number of "young-old" compared with very old persons in selected Florida counties.

The technique used here involves a composite of both ancestry (Russian, religious group background) and language (Yiddish-speaking) data tabulated in the census. By the time of the 1990 census, however, Yiddish probably will be spoken only by substantial numbers of the very old and the "young-old." Estimates will either have to give greater reliance to the ancestry proxies or use alternative sources of data. Perhaps one alternative will come from the use of surname data derived from the Medicare enrollment files.

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