

BANK OF ISRAEL

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**Geographic barriers to education among disadvantaged communities:**

**Evidence from high school openings in Israeli Arab localities**

* In recent decades, the geographic distribution of high schools in Arab localities has expanded significantly. At the same time, there has been a marked increase in high school education in the Arab society.
* A study by the Bank of Israel Research Department examined the effect of the availability of a local high school in an Arab locality on various outcomes. The study found that opening a high school in a locality increased the likelihood that youths living in that locality would complete 12 years of schooling by 5–7 percentage points.
* Opening a high school in a locality also had a positive effect on other outcomes in Arab society: matriculation eligibility, post-secondary education, women’s employment and income, and a lower likelihood of receiving a juvenile criminal record
* These findings point to the importance of the geographic barrier to high school education in Arab society. This barrier is currently prevalent mainly among Bedouin society in the Negev. The findings also suggest that improving the geographic availability of high schools may yield numerous benefits for the localities.

Since the establishment of the State of Israel, the supply of high schools in Arab localities has expanded. Among Arabs that are not Negev Bedouin, 28 percent lived in localities with a high school in 1970, compared with about 95 percent today (Figure 1). There was also a significant expansion in school availability in Negev Bedouin localities, even though a high number of Negev Bedouin (about 40 percent) still live in unrecognized localities without a high school.

A study conducted by Elad DeMalach of the Bank of Israel Research Department examines how opening a high school in the student’s residential locality has an impact on his chances of obtaining an education. The study exploited the variation in the timing of the establishment of high schools in various localities and years to examine the impact of high school availability in the locality on the likelihood of youths on educational attainment. The study used a broad data set and advanced statistical methods to identify the causal effect between the two. It examined two different historical periods: (1) opening high schools in Arab localities in the north and center of the country between 1972 and 1995; and (2) opening high schools in Bedouin localities in the Negev between 2007 and 2014.

The study found that opening a local high school increased the proportion of residents in the locality who had 12 years of schooling by 5–7 percentage points (Figure 2).[[1]](#footnote-1) The effect was found in separate estimations among both Arabs in the north and center and Bedouin in the Negev. The effect of opening a high school increases the farther the locality is from other schools prior to the opening of the local school. The study also found positive effects in other aspects. In particular, among Arabs in the north and center of the country, there were increases of about 6 percent in the number of those with post-secondary education, 7 percent in women’s employment, and 11 percent in women’s income. Among Bedouins in the Negev, there was an increase in matriculation eligibility and a decline in the likelihood of opening a juvenile criminal record, particularly for property crimes.

These findings point to the importance of the geographic barrier to high school education in Arab society, which is currently pronounced mainly among the Negev Bedouin. They also indicate that increasing the geographic availability of high schools may yield numerous benefits for these localities.

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| **Figure 1: Arab Localities with a High School, 1948–2020** | |
| 1. **Number of localities with a high school** | 1. **Share of localities with a high school** |
| Number of Arab  localities with a high school increased from 1 in 1948 to more than 80 in 2020 | **While in 1948 about 10% of the Arab population (not including Bedouin of the Negev) resided in a locality with a high school, 28% did so by 1970 and  84% of them did so by 1990** |
| SOURCE: Based on data from the Ministry of Education and the Central Bureau of Statistics. | |

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| **Figure 2: Increase in the Likelihood of Completing 12 Years of Schooling as a Result of Opening a High School in the Locality, by Age at the Time the School Opened** (percentage points) |
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| Notes: The point is the size of the effect. The vertical line is the confidence interval at a 95 percent significance.  SOURCE: Based on data from the Ministry of Education and the Central Bureau of Statistics. |

1. In relative terms, the increase was 10–13 percent. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)