

The Social Status of War Widows

Lea Shamgar-Handelman

ABSTRACT

The paper deals with changes in the place of families in society due to the long term effect of disaster on the family. It draws on interviews with Israeli war widows, faced with erosion in the status formerly accorded them through their late husband.

Three alternative methods used by the widows to create a substitute status to halt this decline are described. None of them succeeded in preventing erosion in the status of the widow and her family. Over time, the place of the family within the various social groups and categories to which it had belonged was lost, due to the weakened position of the widow in her social network.

The centrifugal process which pushes families affected by disaster to the margin of society, creates vacancies in different social groups and categories throughout society. Quantitatively large changes of this sort might result in significant qualitative changes in the composition of those groups and categories.

The focus of most research into families in disaster situations has been on the short-term effects upon the family (Barton, 1970). The purpose of the present paper is to draw attention to the long-term effects of disaster on the family, an aspect which has been comparatively neglected in the relevant literature. I argue that, after the crisis stage is over, and the family unit overtaken by disaster has reached a satisfactory level of reorganization and functioning (Hill, 1958c), it finds itself in a social place, or within a social context, different from, and very often less favorable than, that which it occupied before it was affected by the disaster. In support of this argument, I have drawn on the findings of a study concerning changes that occurred in the status of family units after the death in war of the family head.

Despite its limited reference to a highly specific group, functioning under very special social and administrative circumstances, the example does have a more general applicability, dealing, as it does, with a change in their place in society of a group of families struck by disaster. Seen in this way, social status is treated as the social place a person has in the society in which he lives (Parsons, 1951; Linton, 1945). This place determines the kind, level and combination of social rewards he gets (Davis and Moore, 1945). Thus, any change in the composition of social rewards is an expression of a change in social status.

In the discussion following the presentation of the findings, I put forward arguments to show that the trend of change in the family's social place is not unique to Israeli war widows, but should form the basis for an assumption to be tested on families injured by disaster in general.

Background

During the 1967 Six-Day War, 315 fathers-husbands, heads of families still raising minor children, lost their lives. Open ended interviews on pre-set subjects were conducted with a random sample of 72 of their widows three years after the war. Widows in kibbutzim were excluded from this study, since their conditions for coping with widowhood were unique and called for a study designed specially for their situation. The discussions were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Each widow was asked for detailed information on her life before and after being widowed, including information concerning various aspects of status.

The findings presented in this paper are based on the relevant parts of these interviews. Policy makers, social workers, friends and families of the widows supplied additional material through the same method, and documentary sources provided background material.

The families were from various sections of Israeli society and differed from one another in many ways: at the time the soldiers were killed, their widows ranged in age from 19 to 47 years; the oldest among their children were in their late teens, and 46 children were as yet unborn. The husbands' occupations ran practically the

whole gamut of the occupational spectrum--unskilled workers, self-employed artisans, businessmen, professionals, academics and, in numbers disproportionate to the general population, members of the Permanent Army. In the majority of these family units, the occupation of the husband was the dominant status component and the main source of economic rewards, social prestige and social connections as well as of access to sources of information.

Most of the women were full-time housewives and their participation in creating family status was, accordingly, minimal. In some cases, the woman did play an active role in the occupational advancement of her husband by participating in public appearances, by entertaining, and so forth (Kanter, 1977: 104-126). Before they were widowed, less than half of the women worked and contributed to the economic resources of the family. Only a small minority in the sample studied were dual career families (Rapaport and Rapaport, 1969) where the family status was based, more or less equally, on the accumulation of rewards achieved by both husband and wife.

The Problem

Clearly, a husband's death results in the breakdown of the status structure in the family unit as a whole. In addition, it constitutes a threat of further loss of status both for the widow herself and for the family unit she now heads. First, by definition, the widow loses the status of a married woman and enters the marginal category of a "non-married" woman and mother, in an age group where most Israeli women are married. This is a basic status which affects all the roles and relationships of the widow (Adams, 1974; Perry, 1975; Stein, 1976). A second threat of status loss lies in the loss of social rewards which were accorded to the husband for the roles he had performed in society and which, through him, were enjoyed by his whole family.

When a woman becomes a war widow, she also becomes the sole head of her family unit. Thus, among her other roles, she takes on that of ensuring a new status for the unit. The widows in the sample were deeply aware of this obligation and their aim was usually to prevent, as far as possible, the loss of status for their families. The criteria

as to what constituted such loss of status were not the same for all the widows. The aim of some was to maintain their pre-widowhood rewards, while others tried to keep a status comparable to that of family units within their old social circle, that served as reference groups.

A loss of family status, to the extent that it derived from the personal status of the widow, could be avoided only in one way - by remarriage (Shamgar-Handelman, n.d.). Although remarriage was considered a desirable solution to many problems in a widow's life, including that of status loss, there was, in every case, a period during which this was either impossible objectively or so considered. The awareness that this was not, and could not be, an immediate solution impelled the widow to try to construct an alternative status to that which was lost with the death of the husband. Attitudes of widows to this substitute status were of two basic types: Some saw in the substitute status an interim solution until they remarried and accordingly made little effort to ensure its stability. Others saw the substitute status as a permanent possibility, in the event that they would not remarry, in which case they attempted to construct as stable a status as possible.

The widow's choice of a course of action in creating a substitute status depended on her objective capacities and skills, on her level of aspiration and also upon the readiness of her social milieu to cooperate. Her choice was influenced too by what she felt was most lacking in her reward composition. Every widow, in her specific situation, tried to manoeuvre in order to achieve the optimal combination of status rewards for herself and for her family unit.

This study revealed three patterns of attempts to construct a substitute status. However, it is possible that there are additional patterns which, for various reasons, did not appear in the sample.

Patterns of Substitute Status

A. Adopting the New Status of War Widow. A conscious attempt on the part of Israeli society to enable war widows to construct a substitute status can be seen in the special law regarding them, by which the government undertakes to provide for the basic economic support of the war widow and her children.

The Rehabilitation Department of the Ministry of Defense is responsible for the implementation of this law, thus avoiding the stigma attached to recipients of Public Welfare. This is not to say that the economic situation of all the widows was similar. Many of them had various sources of income, including income from their own employment. Since completion of the study, the war widows' allowances have increased considerably. Besides the monthly payment, other types of help are available to the widow to alleviate her economic situation through negotiation with welfare workers of the Ministry of Defense.

Official inclusion in the category of war widows automatically entitles a woman to the basic financial support, but not to all the other potential social rewards of this status. A very direct and active effort on the widow's part is required in order to realize this potential. Self-identification of a woman as a war widow penetrates into all areas of her life. War widows who choose to adopt this status maintain close association among themselves, actually creating a group which serves as a core of communication in matters of mutual interest, so that their information about new rights, new regulations and precedents is always up-to-date.

Such information is important in their contacts with the rehabilitation centers of the Ministry of Defense, the main source of social rewards for its clients. Those widows whose social rewards derived mainly from this status often got employment on the recommendation of their social worker; or they may have benefited from special housing arrangements upon the recommendation of the Widow's Association; sometimes they went abroad as representatives of war widows at the expense of philanthropic hostesses who, in turn, gained prestige from having Israeli war widows as their guests.

Besides the fact that the full status of a war widow is not automatically accorded, there are considerable fluctuations in its level and in its relative position in the status hierarchy of Israeli society. These changes are closely related to situations of defense and war prevailing in the country at any given time.

In periods when consciousness of security and war situations is intensified and, as a result, the subject of war widows is brought before Parliament, before the

public, and into the forefront in the mass media, the status of the whole category of war widows rises. This reflects, in turn, on the social interaction of every widow individually. During such a period, the activists in the War Widows' Association begin to use the tools at their disposal to gain ground, to increase the benefits, and to obtain benefits previously unavailable to the whole category of war widows. At such times, many widows are courted by the mass media, and then the individual widow stands to gain more attention and prestige in her personal contacts.

When, for a protracted period, the status of war widows fails to receive either ideological or situational encouragement, erosion takes place in the status of the whole category and the individual widow experiences the decline of the status through her face-to-face interaction (Goffman, 1967).

The frequency of the outbreak of war is an additional factor influencing the status of war widows. The prestige of widows of an earlier war declines greatly with the appearance of widows of a later war, and this limits the ability of veteran war widows to realize the potentials of this status. At a certain stage in the time continuum, but unrelated to the advent of new wars, the status of a "war widow" begins to be seen as a failure similar to that of an "old spinster".

About half of the widows in the sample, for the most part those whose families did not enjoy very high status before widowhood, chose to construct their substitute status around that of a war widow. For a limited time, this satisfied their status expectations, but those who continued in this for a longer period found erosion setting in. The longer they maintained this substitute status, the less they were able to realize its potential rewards. This erosion in their status impelled some of them to seek "status-strengthening" devices of various kinds. For example, they increased their consumption of status symbols - moved into larger and better apartments, changed their furniture, bought especially big cars.

An increased consumption of status symbols was made possible by the continual rise in the economic rewards they received from the Ministry of Defense, which exceeded cost-of-living increases. In this way, while their children were still young, the widows could compensate in

some measure for the erosion of their own status as war widows. The major drop in status occurred, however, when their children reached the age (21 years) at which government support for them ceased, and the economic resources available to the widows were thereby greatly decreased.

The widows expected this high standard of living to bring them closer to the higher status for which they strove. But only rarely did such conspicuous status symbols give them and/or their children the prestige, the social contacts, or the expected entry into the status category to which they aspired.

B. Preseveration of Former Family Status. Some of the widows found the status of a war widow unsatisfactory even at its peak, and they did not adopt it. These were, in most cases, widows whose husbands' occupational achievements had brought them not only financial rewards, but also prestigious social contacts, recognition, or invitations to public affairs, and had made them privy to confidential information (or information thought to be so). Their occupational achievements were accompanied also by a set of social benefits which accrued to membership in an elite social group.

Some widows tried to preserve intact the family status they thus inherited, and this demanded concentrated and focused efforts on the widow's part. In order to achieve her aim, she adhered consciously and meticulously to certain symbols, social contacts and life style; she made sure to keep the memory of her previous family status alive in her circle of contacts.

Widows who chose this course clung very carefully to the set of mutual services which had existed before widowhood between their families and other families. With this in mind, they repeatedly emphasized their expectations to friends and organizations with which the family had previously been involved, hoping thereby to retain them, as before, as principal sources of power and prestige. Partners in previous social contacts usually did not volunteer to continue them.

Therefore, to maintain these links, it was the widow who had to keep reminding her former contacts that she expected to continue as before. For instance, in the Permanent Army where "warriors' friendship in life and in death" is part and parcel of the ideology, demands

presented by the widows in the name of past friendship received, at least for a time, a better response than such demands presented to other social groups.

It was typical, also, for widows of men who had held University posts, to stress the retention of that position within the group which was the source of their previous prestige. This they tried to maintain through social contacts, through regular visits to the deceased husband's department, through contributions of money and work for social events connected with his former colleagues (for example, promotion parties and other celebrations).

In all these cases, the widow was unable to continue as a member of the group for any length of time. Social contacts were broken, seemingly temporarily, because of a colleague's sabbatical leave or other such occurrence, but they were never renewed. Moreover, personnel changes within the department altered the group's structure and this made it very difficult for the widow to keep in touch. After a comparatively short time, at best, contacts continued only with the wives of her husband's colleagues; with his colleagues themselves, contacts became limited to very specific matters, which could be perceived as "asking for favours".

Attempts to preserve pre-widowhood family status also took other forms, such as attempts by a widow to assume the economic-occupational roles of her late husband. In so doing, she hoped to assure the continuation of social rewards which these roles had brought in the past. Attempts of this kind were made by some widows whose husbands had been self-employed, either in independent businesses or in partnerships.

Only one of the widows in the sample tried to take over her husband's small business. In this she was unsuccessful. In those cases where partnerships were involved, the late husband's partners, sooner or later, made it plain that they wished to terminate the partnership. In all cases, the partnership thus ended with the widow being obliged to withdraw, sometimes on a more, and sometimes on a less, equitable basis.

The emphasis in the attempts of the widows to preserve that family status which they had enjoyed before widowhood differed from one case to another, and accordingly, different techniques of status preservation were applied. The possibility of preserving the former family status

depended on the readiness of "meaningful others" to cooperate and/or to enter into a process of exchange with the widow, through which she could hope to get those status components she considered necessary.

The *quid pro quo*s which the widows were willing to offer in these exchanges were usually significant; yet, despite this, they rarely succeeded in preserving the pre-widowhood status for more than a short period. With time, they realized that they were losing their place within the primary group to which they used to belong, and with it, the link to the social category (professional or economic elite) that had been their source of social rewards and prestige.

C. Construction of a Self-Achieved Status. Another alternative open for a war widow to create and to construct status was to use her own resources in establishing a self-achieved status, consonant with the general criteria of success acceptable in Israeli society. Professional occupational status is the main source of social rewards in every modern society, including that of Israel (Eisenstadt, 1967, 1971).

The level of success in attaining self-achieved status depended, as is generally the case, on the talents, efforts and capabilities of the widow, but also, and no less, on the level of readiness -the accumulation of skills and knowledge -which had already been at her disposal at the point when she became a widow.

In the sample there were a few widows who had, before widowhood, already reached various stages in their occupational training or careers. They had become involved in studies or jobs, and had tried, despite the restrictions of marriage and child-raising, to pursue independent careers.

Widowhood brought about a new situation and new pressures to make major investments of time and energy in professional training and in career advancement. Certain widows had not planned to embark upon a full-time career, and therefore had not exploited their occupational training to any significant degree. Some of them felt that their new status as head of the family obliged them also to adopt the occupational role as a major part of their lives, whereas it had previously been only a minor or secondary role. This change in emphasis involved much effort, and often brought about meaningful changes in their everyday life-style and in that of their families.

A considerable number of widows, whose occupation or training before widowhood was in a typically feminine sphere (nursing, teaching, kindergarten teaching, and so on) which did not command very high prestige, found these occupations unsatisfactory once they were to become the main source of status. Some of these widows abandoned their former occupations and began training for new ones, usually in spheres which commanded higher prestige.

Even among those widows who had neither suitable preparation nor resources, some tried to construct a self-achieved status. Most of them lacked any professional or occupational training and, in fact, had little formal education. Their previous work experience, such as it was, was very slight and at the lowest level, and had usually been undertaken in their pre-marital days in order to solve economic problems. Their recognition of the consequences of their lack of educational and occupational experience induced most of them to try and acquire at least minimal skills in office services, such as typing, IBM card punching, and the like.

Not all of the widows who tried, succeeded in acquiring such skills; but those who did also acquired, at the same time, routines such as getting to work on time, being properly dressed, and learning to integrate into a socially mixed group, which was very different from that to which they were accustomed. They considered it as an achievement and a source of status.

Their low place in the group did not disturb them; it appeared to them as "natural", as a woman's place, and especially the place of a woman without a husband. In most cases, these widows did not see their new position as a real compensation for the married status they had lost. But they also did not conceive of it as a failure, since they accepted, as a fact, that there was no way whereby a woman could compensate for that status which was lost when she lost her husband.

Among those whose occupations before widowhood seemed to them to command insufficient prestige (especially teachers and kindergarten teachers), or among those whose occupations before widowhood had negative prestige (mainly housemaids, charwomen, etc.), there were a few widows who preferred to abandon such occupations altogether and content themselves with the

rewards they received by virtue of their status as war widows.

Most of the widows who tried to activate their own resources and to compete for positions in the open job market attained levels of occupational achievement consonant with their education and professional training. These levels were often much higher than those they had reached before widowhood. The formal rewards they received in terms of salary and authority were in most cases in keeping with the particular job they did.

But the social rewards for a woman performing a job are different from those accorded to a man in the same job. In most cases, this difference does not lie in the formal rewards that accompany the role, but in the symbolic "padding" of benefits and prestige which are accorded to the man but not to the woman.

Many widows in the sample, with high occupational attainment, and holding senior positions, nevertheless did not have entree to the social circles of colleagues in similar or identical jobs. They were not able to participate in either the formal or the informal social life of such groups, nor did they enjoy benefits that went with membership in these groups, like access to information, and invitations to various prestigious occasions. These activities and privileges were, on the other hand, available to the wives of their colleagues, so that, as it turns out, the wife of a man doing a certain job enjoys, through the benefits and prestige symbols of her husband, a greater status than does a woman who herself performs this job.

That status which is self-achieved is the only type, among those described above, which is not eroded directly by time. In fact, in most cases, such status tends, in absolute terms, to gain ground with time.

But given that a desirable status for a widow is usually set against that of her pre-widowhood days, even such independently achieved status does not, in most cases, satisfy the aspirations of the widow, nor does it prevent a decline in status for herself and for her family. If this does not apply in all cases, according to absolute criteria, it does apply in almost all cases, according to relative criteria. In Israeli society in general, it is usual for a husband to have higher occupational skills than his wife, and the widows in this sample were no exception (Padan-Eisenstark, 1973).

It is therefore very difficult for a widow to reach that occupational level which her late husband had attained and she finds herself, for various reasons, constantly lagging behind. The widows who were best prepared for achieving an occupational level comparable to or identical with that of their late husband were those who began to develop their own careers before they were widowed, but even those who had reached such a level found that their personal and family status did not measure up to the status of their pre-widowhood circle of friends.

This status lag resulted from the fact that, while the widow was trying to catch up with her late husband's occupational status, the occupational achievements of their friends continued to advance and so remained ahead of hers. Thus, she could not attain that place which she and her husband would have had within the group at this later point. In some cases, her occupational sphere was completely different from that of her husband and, as a result, she had created for herself a separate friendship group and/or a different reference group. Only in such cases was her status lag no longer, or only partially, relevant.

This status lag resulted from the fact that, while the widow had an area of freedom within which to manoeuvre. The extent to which she used the different alternatives to gain status, and the degree and efficiency with which she manipulated them, depended on her personal attributes, on her talents, skills and resources, as well as on her ability to understand her situation and her willingness to pay the price for those benefits which she got from the various types of status.

But it should be stressed that different types of status are, to some degree, mutually excluding. The simultaneous use of more than one status is possible, but only where the settings and contexts in which they are activated are separated one from another; nor are all combinations of status simultaneously possible.

The dominant status adopted by the widow was not permanent, and shifts from one type of status to another was one technique she used to manipulate status potential. A widow could shift status in order to test out, or to familiarize herself with, new situations. Such shifts enabled her to gauge the benefits and the drawbacks in various alternatives in the presentation of status, and to determine her preferences.

Changes in the widow's situation were another reason for shifting status. For example, a widow who, at the beginning of her widowhood, tried to preserve her former family status, would abandon this status at some later point when she realized that, despite all her efforts, she was losing her place in this status group.

As an alternative, she might adopt the status of "war widow" and retain it while preparing herself for an independent career. When ready to enter the job market, she would give up the status of "war widow" in favour of her self-achieved status in most of her social interactions.

The most common shifts found among the widows in the sample were from one of those types of status that tended to erode (status of war widow or previous family status) to a self-achieved status. Such shifts were clear attempts on the widows' part to escape, at least to some extent, the process of erosion which lay ahead.

Discussion

The study findings presented above point to the conclusion that the Israeli war widow can only rarely hold on to the family status she had before her husband was killed, and the family she now heads can almost never advance on the status track in the way and in the rhythm she could have expected when the husband was alive.

The halting of the process of status advancement results in the loss of the family unit's place within the various social groups and categories to which it had belonged. In many cases, only the special financial arrangements and the high prestige attached in Israeli society to any form of contribution made to the defense of the country, prevent these families from dropping to the bottom of the status ladder. But, even under these special ideological and bureaucratic conditions, most widows find themselves ousted from their previous social place and driven to the social margins.

The process of centrifugal movement to social marginality, as it can be seen in the case of Israeli war widows, resembles a widening spiral which, no matter in what sphere of life it begins, encompasses wider and wider areas, finally reaching into almost all areas of life. This process is described below, starting at a point arbitrarily chosen.

The widows and the families they head are socially defined as deviant. At first, the effect of this definition is offset by the prestige attached to the event which caused the deviance. But, with time, as described above, the prestige fades and the deviance remains the principal label by which the widow and her family is known. Once the label of deviance becomes the dominant one, it has an influence upon every kind of social interaction in which the widow participates. This is most clearly seen in the different levels of interaction within her social network.

The loss of the husband had, almost automatically, cut some of her links in the network, thus reducing its size; and even within this reduced network, his absence leaves the family unit with less power of exchange than it had formerly enjoyed.

The label of deviance attached to the widow and her family makes others reluctant to enter into an exchange relationship with them. Her weaker position lessens her capacity to use the network to gain social rewards, the less social rewards she gets the further is her position weakened and so, in a process of decline, she drifts to the margin of her previous network, or drops out of it altogether (Laumann, 1966).

Two additional elements contribute to speed this process. The vacancy in the network left by the death of the husband tends to be filled by others, thus moving the widow still further from the center. The term vacancy is used here loosely, in the general way it is used by White (1970) to describe "chains of opportunity". Although White's usage of "vacancy" is related specifically to the analysis of formal organizations, both this concept and that of "chains of opportunity" should be adapted as well to the study of mobility within informal organizations.

The upward status mobility of other members of the network, when not matched by parallel progress in her own position, will accentuate the status lag and speed her entry into a marginal position (Boissevain, 1974). When she embarks upon the track of self-achieved status, her weak position within her network impedes her ability to use it to further her own interests. From this position of relative weakness, she enters into a system in which women are in any event generally at a disadvantage compared with men. On top of this, she experiences all the disadvantages similar to a married working woman,

(restrictions and constraints related to home and child rearing obligations), but enjoys none of the advantages, (ranging from cooperation in practical, everyday matters to assurance of a secure place in a social network).

From a different angle, the widow is in a deviant position within the occupational framework, especially on the more advanced and/or professional levels. Most women, especially married women, expect their occupation to be a source of social rewards, but generally secondary (to that of her husband) or temporary (until she marries) (Felson and Knoke, 1974).

Widows, as heads of families, have to gain status in the present even if they hope to transfer this obligation to a possible future husband. Those who enter the occupational sphere expect this to be the main source of social rewards and status for themselves and their families. Their aspirations and their way of functioning in this sphere, therefore, resemble those of men who, a priori, regard their occupational achievements as the main source of status. In addition, because of their high level of aspiration, such widows compete with men for jobs that command high rewards.

Behaving "like a man" within the occupational framework results in the widow being labeled, if not with the totally derogatory labels of "pushy" or "unfeminine", then the dubious label of "career woman". Like a boomerang, these labels have an impact on the informal relationships of the widow with her colleagues and friends, and add obstacles to her occupational advancement and social acceptance.

The place and importance of informal relationships either for occupational advancement and/or for full realization of status potential was discussed at the beginning of the description of the process of centrifugal movement towards social marginality.

It is important to note, however, that the above description relates only to the widow in her role as head of a family unit and as such the main source of its status. On the personal level, and seen from the point of view of her complex of roles, the situation can be perceived as completely different. The widow, in becoming the sole head of a family, gains much more power within the unit and an almost total control of its financial resources, and becomes its main representative to the outside. If she

starts, or continues, an independent career outside the home, her personal position in the career may be, and usually is, higher than before she became a widow. But, despite such possible personal gains, she cannot ensure for the family she now heads the actual and/or the potential status it had before the death of the husband/father.

The findings of this study lead to some general assumptions on the nature of social status and disaster. The process of centrifugal movement towards marginality created by the reaction of society to people overtaken by disaster has a reciprocal effect on the structure of that society.

The tenor of my argument is that the centrifugal process discussed is not unique to Israeli war widows and is applicable in many other situations of crisis or disaster affecting a family unit. Any event that weakens the unit's power of negotiation within the various social frameworks in which it interacts might start a similar process.

Evidence, although not systematically collected from categories in Israeli society of families afflicted by war, other than widows (such as bereaved parents, families of war invalids), reveals a similar process leading to similar results, whose severity may vary in degree. Families going through a personal crisis unconnected with a social disaster are subject to the same process with similar results (Caine, 1966), but are not discussed here, since the influence of a change in the position of an individual family on the social structure is insignificant.

The literature on disaster points out that a large-scale social disaster, by itself, may well bring about change in the social structure and/or stratification system. The disappearance of traditional classes, a greater openness to professional occupations through education, a comparative elevation in the status of youth, and change in the relative place of practically all occupations on the occupational ladder, are among changes considered to be a direct result of that large-scale disaster in Europe --the Second World War (Sorokin, 1945). A famine and a smallpox epidemic in Kwakiutl society resulted in a change from an ascribed system of transfer of leadership positions to a competitive one (Codere, 1950; Drucker, 1939).

Other studies in this area conclude that a localized disaster will change the inner structure of the community

in which it occurs (Barton, 1970). Between these two ends of the scale, there is what may be called the medium-scale social disaster, of which the case of the Israeli war widows is an example. Such a disaster affects certain individual family units throughout the society, while other family units remain more or less unaffected.

Unlike the large-scale social disaster, the medium-scale disaster is unlikely to bring about a total change in the stratification system; unlike the localized disaster, the effect of the medium-scale disaster will not immediately be recognized.

The long-term cumulative impact of a disaster affecting families throughout the society will be seen in the composition of social groups, social categories and social strata. The centrifugal process towards marginality of large numbers of families will create vacancies in different social categories throughout the society (Whyte, 1970). These vacancies will be filled by members of the society who otherwise might not have been candidates for such positions (Ben Yehuda, 1981).

In sociological studies, little attention has been given to the change in the composition of social groups and classes as a result of vacancies created by the social decline of families injured by disaster. I believe that, in the study of social mobility, the immediate as well as the intra-generational effect of disaster has not received its due consideration.

