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## Factors affecting emigration intentions in the diaspora population: The case of Russian Jews

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## ABSTRACT

The present study formulated a new theoretical model predicting emigration intentions in diaspora populations and tested it among Jews living in Russia. The study sample consisted of Jews and their relatives living in the vicinity of five large cities in Russia ( $n = 824$ ). The results obtained demonstrated that a more negative attitude toward the country of residence and a more positive attitude toward the historical homeland were associated with stronger emigration intentions. A higher preference for the self-enhancement values and a lower preference for the conservation values were associated with stronger emigration intentions. The effect of the self-enhancement values on emigration intentions was complex: while their direct effect was positive, their indirect effect (through attitude toward Russia) was negative. The effect of the conservation values on emigration intentions was indirect (through attitudes toward Russia and Israel). Perceived socioeconomic conditions in the country of residence affected emigration intentions indirectly, through attitude toward Russia, whereby a higher level of perceived discrimination and a lower level of perceived economic conditions were associated with a less positive attitude toward Russia and stronger emigration intentions. Jewish identification also affected emigration intentions indirectly, through its positive connection with attitude toward Israel. Age negatively affected emigration intentions, both directly and indirectly (through its effect on values and perceived economic conditions). Religiosity and family ethnic composition affected emigration intentions indirectly, whereby a lower level of religiosity and a higher proportion of Jewish relatives in the family were associated with stronger emigration intentions.

Presently, about 250 million people worldwide are living in a country other than their country of birth (UNDESAPD, 2015). Moreover, surveys conducted in different countries indicate that a substantial proportion of the population in both low- and high-income countries consider emigration (Frieze & Li, 2010; Gudkov, 2016; Van Dalen & Henkens, 2007). However, only a small number of studies have investigated potential emigrants; therefore, much remains unknown concerning the factors affecting emigration intentions (Hagen-Zanker, 2008).

The present study focuses on emigration intentions among Jews living in Russia.<sup>1</sup> This population has a long emigration history,

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<sup>1</sup> “Jews living in Russia” or “Russian Jews” in this article designate all Jews and their relatives who are eligible for immigration to Israel under the Law of Return (i.e., those who have at least one Jewish grandparent as well as their spouses), and who are presently living in Russia.

with the last wave of mass emigration beginning at the start of *perestroika* in 1986. Since then, about 1.5 million Jews (of the approximately 2 million living in the Soviet Union before its downfall) have emigrated. About 990,000 Jews from the Former Soviet Union (FSU) arrived to Israel, 320,000 – to the USA, and 230,000 – to Germany (Tolts, 2011). Today, Jewish emigration from the FSU continues; in 2015, about 6600 Jews emigrated from Russia (Tolts, 2016). During the last decade, more than 90% of the Jews who emigrated from the FSU arrived to Israel, and this proportion has been increasing in recent years (Tolts, 2016, Tables 8, 9).<sup>2</sup>

Jews living in Russia constitute a diaspora group and have emotional, cultural, and religious ties with their historical homeland (Alfonso, Kokot, & Tölölyan, 2004; Avineri, Rubinstein, Orgad, & Gavison, 2009; Khanin, 2005; Shual, 2000). Moreover, according to the Israeli Law of Return, diaspora Jews (as well as their descendants and spouses) are entitled to immigrate to Israel and receive Israeli citizenship immediately upon arrival (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013). Thus, unlike other people wishing to leave their country, Jews in Russia (as well as in other countries) may easily realize their emigration intentions.<sup>3</sup> In addition to Israel, many other countries in the world have their own laws of return (e.g., Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Japan, Poland, and Russia); however, there are currently no studies on the emigration intentions of diaspora populations.

The present study suggests a new theoretical model explaining emigration intentions in diaspora populations (Fig. 1). It is assumed that attitudes toward both the country of residence and the historical homeland directly affect emigration intentions. Furthermore, it is assumed that other variables, such as the basic motivational goals expressed in personal value preferences, ethnic identification, and perceived socioeconomic conditions in the country of residence affect emigration intentions both directly and indirectly, through their impact on the attitudes toward the two countries. Finally, it is assumed that sociodemographic characteristics of potential emigrants affect their emigration intentions indirectly, through their effect on personal value preferences and ethnic identification.

#### *Attitudes toward the country of residence and the historical homeland*

Attitude toward the country reflects an individuals' evaluation of the country as satisfying or frustrating their needs as well as the individuals' emotions related to the country on a negative-positive continuum (Barrett & Davis, 2008; Schatz & Lavine, 2007; Tartakovsky, 2012). A positive attitude toward a country reflects its subjective evaluation as beneficial, and is accompanied by feelings of pride, love, and comfort, while a negative attitude toward a country reflects its evaluation as unsatisfactory, and is accompanied by feelings of shame and discomfort (Blank & Schmidt, 2003; Schatz & Lavine, 2007; Smith & Kim, 2006; Tartakovsky, 2009, 2012).

The classic push-pull theory of immigration assumes that individuals contemplating emigration compare the country of prospective immigration with their country of residence, whereby those who perceive the conditions in the country of prospective immigration as more benign than the conditions in the country of residence decide to emigrate (Lee, 1966; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). However, Berry's (2013) acculturation theory and the theory of multifaceted group identity (Phinney & Ong, 2007; Phinney, Madden, & Santos, 1998; Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001) assume that ethnic minorities and immigrants have a two-dimensional system of group identities reflecting their relationships with the majority population and the minority group. The theories further assume that the two dimensions are independent rather than contradictory, and they may simultaneously (albeit to a different degree) affect other variables (e.g., psychological well-being, acculturation intentions, and risk behavior). These assumptions have been corroborated empirically in different immigrant and ethnic minority populations (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Phinney et al., 2001). Moreover, studies conducted among Jews from the FSU, both before and after their emigration, have demonstrated that their attitude toward the country of origin is independent from their attitude toward Israel, and a stronger Jewish identification has been associated with a more positive attitude toward Israel, but has not been related to attitude toward the country of origin (Tartakovsky, 2009, 2011).

Following the theory of multifaceted ethnic identity and the two-dimensional acculturation theory, as well as the results of previous studies, it was assumed that members of a diaspora group have two independent attitudes – toward their country of residence and toward their historical homeland—and both affect emigration intentions. Specifically, it was assumed that individuals who sense that their needs are not satisfied by their country of residence form a less positive attitude toward the country and are more motivated to leave. Furthermore, it was assumed that members of a diaspora group have a well-formed attitude toward their historical homeland, as it constitutes a part of their ethnic identity (Tartakovsky, 2009, 2011), and because it is a country to which immigration is possible and relatively easy.<sup>4</sup> Those who see their historical homeland in a more positive light, i.e., as potentially satisfying its citizens' needs, may be more motivated to leave their country of residence. Therefore, the first hypothesis of the present study was formulated as follows: A negative attitude toward the country of residence and a positive attitude toward the historical homeland will be associated with stronger emigration intentions (H1).

The present study focused on the emigration intentions of Russian Jews; i.e., the participants' plans to leave Russia were investigated. Previous qualitative studies that investigated migration decision-making have demonstrated that factors related to both

<sup>2</sup> In 1989, the USA stopped granting refugee status to Jews from the FSU; and in 2005, Germany imposed restrictions on Jewish immigration from the FSU. This has significantly reduced the number of eligible immigrants from Russia to the USA and Germany, and this number is rapidly decreasing, as nearly all those eligible have already exercised their immigration rights.

<sup>3</sup> In a recent poll, 19% of Russian citizens expressed a desire to emigrate (Gudkov, 2016); however, in 2015, only about 50,000 from 141,000,000 Russians emigrated to countries outside the former Soviet Union (Goskomstat, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> In all countries that have a law of return, diaspora immigrants are entitled not only to citizenship, but also receive governmental support and various privileges, including free language and professional courses, housing subsidies, tax reductions, and more (Avineri et al., 2009).

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