

History, Current Status, and FAQ about the SHIDDUCH-CRISIS סיון תשע"ה

Shidduch Crisis Definition. The crisis is not about the difficulty of individuals finding a zivug. That would be an individual problem. The crisis is defined as the near certainty that approximately 10% of **all** Bais Yaakov graduates will stay single forever, chas v'shalom.

Cause of the Crisis. The crisis can be summarized into one phrase: **Age-Gap**. In Yeshivish/Litvish circles, it is customary for boys to start shidduchim at age 23, while the girls generally start at age 19. This results in a four year age-gap.

Why is Age-Gap important? In our Orthodox Communities, the newborn population has B"H been growing by over 5% a year (source: Avi Chai Foundation, 2014 study). Thus, if you have a school in which 100 children are currently starting fifth grade, you will find that in that same year there are also 105 children starting fourth grade, 110 starting third grade, 115 starting second grade, and 120 children starting first grade. This percentage can be seen in almost all growing Orthodox Communities, and is true for boys' schools as well as girls' schools. If you wanted to pair up fifth grade students with first grade students for a certain project, you would find that 20 of the 120 first graders cannot possibly find a partner in the 100-child fifth grade class. Now let's move on to shidduchim. We will also move the clock forward by 13 years. You now have 100 boys (corresponding to the fifth graders in our example), who are now 23 years old, and starting shidduchim. At the same time you also have 120 girls who are now 19 years old (corresponding the first graders in our example), who are starting shidduchim. The community is now left with the impossible task of matching up 120 girls with 100 boys. It is obvious that no matter how many shadchanim are involved, no matter how rich all the girls' parents are, and no matter how not picky the girls are, it is impossible to get 20 of those girls married. Of course you look forward to next year, and hope that the next year's group of boys will be the answer to the remaining girls. However, next year (with 5% baby population increase), you have 105 new boys entering shidduchim, with a corresponding 125 new girls entering shidduchim, again leaving you with the impossible situation of matching up 125 girls with 105 boys, thus again leaving 20 new girls with no match. Now, let us also assume that 3 new boys get engaged to last year's girls (they get engaged to 20-year-old girls). You now have 17 girls left over from the first class, and 23 girls left over from the second class. The net result is still that 40 girls remain single.

How Big is the Problem? It is hard to get accurate figures, but it is conservatively estimated that there are over 2,500 single Bais Yaakov graduates over age 25, with approximately 500 over age 40. Studies have been conducted in which the 20 largest Bais Yaakovs in the US and Canada were asked how many girls graduated and, of that number, how many were still single. One study was done in 2009, in which the schools were asked about the number of graduates and the number of those still single who had graduated in 1998-2003. The young women were already dating 5-10 years, and were then 24-29 years old. Of the 5312 that had graduated, 735 (a tragic 14%) were still single. Here is a summary of the numbers supplied by the 20 largest Bais Yaakov schools in 2009:

Year graduated	Age at time of survey	Percentage still single
2004	24	18%
2003	25	16%
2002	26	13%
2001	27	12%
2000	28	12%
1999	29	11%

The above numbers are very uncomfortable to look at. We can hope they will go away. However, unless age-gap is addressed in a meaningful way, the tragedy will unfortunately continue, r"l. As the number of graduates continues to grow from year to year, the percentage of women that will stay single forever, c"v, stays the same at about 10%, but the actual numbers

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keep rising, since 10% of 2000 is much more than 10% of 1500. It is also worth noting, that the survey showed that 11% of the original graduating class were still single at age 29. Regarding Bais Yaakov graduates who are still single at 29 years old, the percentage of them who may continue to stay single forever may be as high as 85% or even higher r"l. This is a problem that needs to be seriously addressed.

Are There Some Actual Numbers to Support the Claims? Here are numbers from two communities: Lakewood Yeshivish girls' schools show a current enrollment of 1135 girls in 4th grade. Lakewood Yeshivish boys' schools currently show an enrollment of 890 boys in 8th grade. In nine short years, the 1135 girls will be entering the shidduch scene on the girls' side, while 890 boys will be entering the shidduch scene on the boys' side. In the best of circumstances, more than 200 of these girls will have no one in the community to marry. In Monsey we see a similar pattern. There are currently 352 girls enrolled in 4th grade at Yeshivish girls' schools, while there are 297 boys enrolled in 8th grade Yeshivish boys' schools. Here again, in just nine short years, more than 50 girls will have no one to match up with.

Lakewood current enrollment				Monsey current enrollment			
4 th grade girls	Try to matchup	8 th grade boys	Shortage	4 th grade girls	Try to matchup	8 th grade boys	Shortage
1135	→→→→	890	245	352	→→→→	297	55

It does not help to wait for next year, as the numbers just keep getting larger for the boys and for the girls at each grade. The 4 year age-gap continually causes large number of girls that *al pi derech hateva* end up with no chance of finding a zivug r"l.

How big is the problem going to be over the next decade? In 2014, the Avi Chai Foundation took a census of all Jewish day schools in North America consisting of approximately 250,000 Jewish students from kindergarten through 12th grade. The census was then broken down by 10 different categories including Chasidish, Yeshivish, Chabad, Modern Orthodox, etc. Since the shidduch crisis is mainly a problem in Yeshivish circles, we worked with the numbers that pertain to Yeshivish schools only. Below is a list of the number of girls currently enrolled in all the Bais Yaakovs, the year in which they will be graduating, as well as the unfortunate number that will remain single if age-gap is not meaningfully addressed.

Year graduating	# graduates	# remaining single r"l
2014	2,038	204
2015	2,160	216
2016	2,231	223
2017	2,391	239
2018	2,387	239
2019	2,517	252
2020	2,655	266
2021	2,787	279
2022	2,973	297
2023	3,035	304
Cumulative for next decade	25,174	2,517

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Therefore, as bad as the current crisis already is, if no steps are taken to rectify the gap, we will, c"v, be adding an additional 2,500 girls to the forever single status over the next decade. You can also see that last year's graduates will add 200 girls to the forever single category, while the girls graduating a decade later will add more than 300 girls to that unfortunate status in one year alone. Drastic and immediate steps must be taken to avoid this potential catastrophe.

Who Will be Affected? A Yeshivish family today consists of six (or more) children be"h. That translates to 3 sons and 3 daughters on average. If every 10th girl stays single, as we are currently witnessing, then every third or fourth family will have one unmarried daughter. Extend this calculation only one more generation, where on average, every parent will have 36 grandchildren (6 children who in turn also have 6 children of their own), there will likely be 18 grandsons and 18 granddaughters for the average grandparent. Therefore, the average grandparent will likely see two of his granddaughters stay single forever r"l. It is that bad. Of course every parent and grandparent will hope and daven that the problem does not affect his or her descendants. However, if one parent or grandparent is spared this agony, it is only because another family is seeing twice as many single daughters in their home. It cannot be acceptable that we take solace in the notion that "it may not happen to me, but instead will happen to my neighbor." Fundamental changes have to take place in the shidduch scene to stop this scourge from causing so much more pain in our community.

When Was the Age-Gap Problem Discovered? Until about 10 years ago, very few individuals were aware of the age-gap problem. Everyone knew that it was much more difficult to find a shidduch for a girl than for a boy, without understanding why. An actuary then started publicizing the facts in Orthodox magazines, and ever so slowly people started to understand the nature of the problem.

How Are Other Orthodox Communities Faring? In Chasidish circles, where boys and girls start shidduchim at about the same age, there is no shidduch crisis for the girls. (There is a small shidduch crisis for the Chasidish boys, but that is beyond the scope of this discussion). In Europe, where Litvish boys start shidduchim at age 20, there is no shidduch crisis. It is interesting to note that for Lubavitch Chasidim, whose boys generally start shidduchim at age 24, and the girls start shidduchim at age 19, there is the same crisis as in the Yeshivish/Litvish communities. In pre-war Europe, where men did not get married until they had their army obligations behind them, resulting in men starting shidduchim at age 25, and girls starting at age 17, there was a huge shidduch crisis. In pre-war Europe, the crisis manifested itself in Chasidish and in Litvish communities. In the final analysis, if boys start shidduchim four years later than the girls, it really does not matter if the four year age-gap is because of learning, or going to Eretz Yisroel, or going to college, or going to the army, or for any other reason. The results are exactly the same: a tragic shidduch crisis, in which too many girls stay single forever. This is a problem that cannot fix itself. A change in the shidduch scene must take place to alleviate the crisis.

What Solutions Are There? The only thing that can stop the shidduch crisis is a narrowing of the age-gap. This can be accomplished in one of two ways: either the boys start shidduchim earlier, or the girls start shidduchim later, or a combination of both. It is very convenient to say, "Let the girls start later." In theory, it would work. But unless a ban is issued by many Gedolim that it is forbidden for any girl to start a shidduch before age 22 (a situation we cannot imagine happening), this solution cannot work. Any girl who decides on her own to stay out of the shidduch parsha until age 22, would be doing a great harm to her chances of ever getting married. The only solution that can possibly address the age-gap problem is for boys to start shidduchim earlier.

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Have Other Solutions Been Tried? About seven years ago, askanim went to 70 Gedolim, Roshei Yeshiva, and Rabbonim in Eretz Yisroel and the US to explain the problem and ask for a signature on a kol koreh. The 70 Rabbonim signed a letter requesting all bochurim to first consider a girl either their own age or a girl slightly older when starting shidduchim. An organization (NASI) was started that paid (and continues to pay) shadchanim for each date that a shadchan sets up for "older" Litvish girls in different communities, regardless if the date results in a shidduch or not. These efforts helped somewhat, inasmuch as at least the bochurim are now willing to listen to a shidduch of an older girl because of the kol koreh. However, this is not the long term solution, because if a boy faces a choice of getting engaged to a 23 year old, a 22 year old, a 21 year old, a 20 year old, and a 19 year old, he will naturally gravitate to the shidduch he thinks is the best, and will not consider shidduchim by giving older girls a priority. The result is that the shidduch crisis just goes on and on.

Has a Second Solution Been Tried? These same askanim that got the 70 Rabbonim to sign the kol koreh seven years ago, looked back at how much progress was made. They discovered that even though older girls were at least given a chance to be redt, in actuality, the big picture had not changed very much. There were many individual stories of how an older girl got engaged, but the big picture remained bleak. For all the headline stories of success with the older girls, there were, unfortunately, many, many more that were being added to the "single forever" status during these seven years. The askanim then tried a new track in 2012. They went back to the same and new Rabbonim to explain that allowing the bochurim to start shidduchim at 23, and trying to solve the crisis by encouraging bochurim to consider older girls first, was, in fact, not making a material difference. A second kol koreh was drafted asking parents and bochurim not to delay shidduchim unnecessarily. The letter encouraged bochurim to start shidduchim one year earlier than the current norm of starting at 23. The kol koreh stated that if bochurim would start only one year earlier, then 1,000 girls would be saved from igun olam during the next 10 years. Will that goal be realized? It is too early to know, but the trend is still for bochurim to learn in a US Bais Medrash until age 21, go to EY for 1½ to 2 years, and start shidduchim at 23. Until this automatic sequence of events is changed, no meaningful progress can take place.

What Can You Do to Actually Stop The Crisis? Implementing a trend in which it becomes common practice for bochurim to start shidduchim by age 21 is what is desperately needed. Here is what you can do:

- 1) Speak to your son about the benefits of starting shidduchim earlier.
- 2) Ask your son's rosh yeshiva if he will allow your son to date. Do not assume that since it was not previously encouraged, the rosh yeshiva will not allow it.
- 3) Consider the many benefits to keeping your son in American Yeshivos. If he is here, the shadchanim, neighbors and relatives will notice and will redd him a shidduch.
- 4) If your son is currently in Eretz Yisroel, you can actively look into shidduch prospects you find interesting while he is in Eretz Yisroel, so your son can pursue the shidduch when he is back during bein hazemanim.
- 5) Be proactive. Make the following statement to your neighbors, friends, relatives and shadchan: "If you have something good to redd for my son, please do so." That one statement made by you can make a world of difference to the thousands of girls graduating in the future. If you start your son's shidduchim earlier, then your neighbor's daughter will have a better chance of getting engaged. If your neighbor's son starts shidduchim earlier, your daughter will have a better chance of getting engaged.

What About The New Kol Koreh Signed By 14 Roshei Yeshiva? Eight months ago, many Roshei Yeshiva signed a letter allowing bochurim to date during the 4th year of Yeshiva. Since the bochurim are, on average, a little over age 21 in 4th year, this kol koreh, if implemented at many Yeshivos, has the potential to make a significant contribution to closing

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the age-gap, thereby be"l alleviating the shidduch crisis. We do not yet know the effectiveness of this program for multiple reasons: 1) It is very new and is only now getting off the ground, 2) Fourteen R"Y is a great start, but more are needed, and 3) the vast majority of bochorim go to Eretz Yisroel for 4th year, leaving only a minor number here in the US. Nevertheless, this kol koreh is a very important development, and hopefully will start to solve the problem.

Should Not All Boys Go To Eretz Yisroel Before Getting Married? For some bochorim, going to Eretz Yisroel is a very big nisoyon. Many parents, aware of the problems, or for other reasons, would like to keep their sons here, but because so few boys stay, they reluctantly send their sons as well. It might be better for most bochorim to get engaged first and go to EY after their engagement or after their chasunahs. A very prominent R"Y told me that he would much prefer that the bochorim not go to Eretz Yisroel until after their chasunahs.

Aren't The Boys Too Immature At Age 21? For many bochorim, it is marriage (or more correctly – starting to date) that makes them mature, not the other way around. In Chasidish circles, the boys and girls get engaged at 18½, and they lead respectable married lives. Litvish bochorim in EY, and Litvish bochorim in Europe get engaged by age 20-21, and lead respectable married lives. It cannot be that American Litvish bochorim are the only ones who are incapable of leading normal married lives if they are to get married younger. Give them the responsibility, and they, like their counterparts in every other frum community, will more than likely rise to the occasion.

Won't Divorce Rates Rise Even More If The Boys Get Married Earlier? We will again use the example of bochorim in Eretz Yisroel and Europe that get married by age 21, and have lower divorce rates than their American Yeshivish counterparts. The lowest divorce rates of all are by the Chasidim, yes - the group that gets married the youngest. So, marrying older is not the answer to lower divorces. A possible reason for the divorce rate currently being so high, is that for some American bochorim, going to Eretz Yisroel, and living in unsupervised diras, may have done more harm than good. Another possible explanation is that the girls are under enormous pressure to settle for bochorim who are less than their peer, which can cause a significant blow to shalom bayis. By lowering the age of bochorim starting shidduchim, there will be no such pressure, and girls' shidduchim may well be decided based on compatibility, instead of making decisions based on fear of staying single forever.

IN SUMMARY. The shidduch crisis is defined as the current statistic of approximately 10% of Bais Yaakov girls staying single forever, r"l. The cause is the current four year age gap between when the boys start shidduchim vs. the girls. Other solutions have been tried with limited success. Leaving the age-gap the way it is, will unfortunately result in almost every single family having a daughter or granddaughter remaining single forever r"l. What is urgently needed is a lowering of the age-gap by having the bochorim start shidduchim earlier. Gedolim and roshei yeshiva are calling for this change, and the sooner that we, as a community, heed the call, the sooner we will see the day when each and every Bais Yaakov graduate can realize her dream of building a bayis ne'eman b'Yisroel. **You can help by openly discussing the issues with your son, and actively listening to shidduchim for him at a younger age.**

May we be zocheh to speak about the shidduch crisis as something that was and no longer is.

I am ready to further discuss the problem, the suggested solutions, and eagerly look forward to any comments, questions or other suggestions.

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