

Adoptive parents fear their child may be next

• By HILARY LEILA KRIEGER

Ever since news broke that a biological mother is demanding that she get back the child she gave up for adoption, Ruti Eldar's phone has been ringing off the hook.

Eldar, the chairwoman of Humanikat, a non-profit organization which arranges for Israeli parents to adopt children from abroad, has been inundated with calls from parents who have adopted through her agency and are concerned that they too might face a custody battle.

"People are in great fear and uncertainty," she explained. "Adoptive parents are constantly afraid of this situation, that the mother will come take the child or that the child will [reunite with] the biological mother."

So she has told the panicked parents to calm down and reassured them that they could never face the same situation. In foreign adoptions – which are far more common than domestic ones – the consent of the mother is "irrevocable," she said.

Rachel Levy-Shiff, a psychology professor at Bar-Ilan University and contributor to the international journal *Adoption Quarterly*, said that while it's natural that the current controversy provokes anxiety, "it won't be disastrous" for the adoptive parents and children watching this case from the sidelines; they have enough other anxiety from their circumstances to deal with.

And according to Eliezer Jaffe, a professor of social work at Hebrew University who studies adoption issues,

prospective parents won't be deterred from adopting by this additional problem. "[These] couples want to have a child by hook or by crook," he said.

Adopting an Israeli child is becoming harder than ever, as the number of children put up for adoption plummets. Only 70 Israeli newborns were offered for adoption this past year, according to the Social Affairs Ministry. (In comparison, Eldar estimated that 200-250 parents forked over \$20,000 to adopt from abroad.)

Ministry spokesman Nahum Ido attributed the decreasing adoption rate to a healthy society, but Jaffe offered other reasons, like hefty welfare support for single parents and the diminishing stigma of being a single mom. Last year, he said, the number of single mothers choosing to keep their babies

doubled from 17 to 34 percent.

Jaffe argued that the current Israeli policy of keeping absolute secrecy between the adoptive and biological families – breached only if the child, upon reaching 18, requests to contact the birth mother and she agrees – keeps women from offering children from adoption.

He recommended an American-based model of adoption, in which adoptions aren't a "secret service" and the mother would have the opportunity of finding out what happens to her child.

Despite the fact that different American states each have different laws governing adoption, Jaffe said it's typically much more difficult there for women to reclaim a child offered for adoption.

He blasted the Social Affairs Ministry, which oversees the process by which a mother decides to give up her child, for having allowed the current situation to take place. He called for a thorough oversight body to review the ministry's work. "It's been the most guarded and protected of all the social services," he said.

Ido defended the ministry, saying its social workers make decisions only in accordance with their supervisors and make every effort "to try to convince the girls to take care of their children and not give them up for adoption," as was done in this case.

Social Affairs Minister Zevulun Orlev said Monday that the ministry needs to conduct an internal review of the adoption issue once the current case has been decided.