

Adoption parley focuses on results of new law

By MALA RIDBERG

Results of a change in adoption laws allowing non-profit agencies to assist parents adopting children from abroad are the focus of today's gathering of adoption experts, parents, and government officials at the Hebrew University's Baerwald School of Social Work.

The 1996 amendment filled a gap in adoption laws which did not provide a legal framework or special services to parents seeking to adopt children abroad, explained one of its most vocal proponents, Prof. Eliczer Jaffe.

Many couples turn to adoption abroad because of the lack of babies available for adoption in Israel. In 1996, only 74 babies were available to over 1,500 waiting couples. Without legal assistance from the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, which had monopolized the adoption process, parents often traveled abroad on their own for the purpose and fell victims to various illegal practices.

Since the passage of the amendment, the once illegal non-profit adoption agencies have been granted licenses to work with foreign governments and assist parents to adopt from Eastern European countries, Russia, and South America. According to Jaffe, "this [law] was a breakthrough [that] helps parents more than anyone else. The focus now is how to nourish and develop [the amendment]," which has ended the ministry monopoly.

Rivka Esther Rothstein of Ramat Beit Shemesh is one of the parents who benefited from the amendment. The law's requirement of having Israeli doctors examine the children allayed Rothstein's concerns for the health of her child, whom she adopted three months ago from Ukraine.

The ministry did not initially want to grant non-profit agencies the responsibility of managing adoptions from abroad. Jaffe theorizes that some MKAs were not eager to promote the adoption of non-Jewish babies. After debate on the issue in the Knesset, the final amendment made no mention of conversions, which are managed by parents after adoptions are made.

At today's conference experts will recommend possible improvements to the law as well as a review of results. In a medical panel, Prof. Arthur Adelman is expected to propose follow-up examinations of adopted children once they are in Israel.