

BS"D

Hebrew University

The Federmann School of Public Policy and Government

Communities Growing Gardens, Gardens Growing Communities:

**Can Community Gardening Enhance Social Capital in
Low Socio-Economic Neighborhoods in Jerusalem?**

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Abstract

An imperative of health promotion is to foster “health-enabling communities,” where healthy choices are easy choices for community residents. Social capital, or the presence of social networks that breed individual and collective benefits, is one component of a health-enabling community. Social capital facilitates better use of health services and information, support through crisis, demand for underprovided services and may increase the body’s ability to resist disease. One challenge for health promotion policy, therefore, is to generate social capital.

The following study presents initial insight into three new community gardens in Jerusalem’s low socio-economic neighborhoods, where residents are working and managing shared plots of land. The research goal is to assess whether community gardening is contributing to individual and community social capital, in order to examine community gardening’s ability to help foster health-enabling communities in Jerusalem. Results gathered through surveys, interviews and observations indicate that residents believe the gardens to be increasing community cohesiveness, providing meaningful activity for children and improving residents’ health, suggesting that the gardens have, indeed, begun to enhance social capital of community gardeners and their neighbors.