

The Shidduch Crisis: How marrying off *your* son can help marrying off *YOUR* daughter

Please ask yourself the following questions:

Do I know *one* girl who is 24 years-old or older in shidduchim?

Do I know *five* girls 24 years-old or older in shidduchim?

Do I know five *boys* who are 27 years old and still in shidduchim?

To most people in the Orthodox community, the answers to these questions reveal an unbelievable phenomenon. We all seem to know so many girls who have been dating a long time and still aren't married, and yet the boys by and large seem to get married relatively quickly. Take the Lakewood Yeshiva, for example: There are 500 new boys involved in shidduchim each year. Within 3 years almost every single boy is married. Oddly, however, there are still many girls in who are still unmarried despite having dated 3 years.

Of course, no one has ever been to a wedding were there was a chosson without a kallah. However, somehow, for some reason, the boys seem to get married relatively quickly to girls and there still seem to be many, *many* girls hanging around, dating not for 2 or 3 years, but for more than 5, 6, even 10 years. Understanding the dynamics underlying this phenomenon is the key to solving the problem.

Let's imagine an island call "Shidduch Island." If 100 boys and 100 girls are brought to the island and every boy marries after one year, regardless of what factors are at play it is not possible for there to be more unmarried girls than boys left at the end of the year. Similarly, after 2 or 3 years, as long as the ratio of boys to girls on the island remains equal it is impossible for there to be more unmarried girls than boys.

After a few years, however, we find that there remain unmarried girls on the island, or more unmarried girls than boys. How can that be?

Perhaps the reason why some girls are not getting married is the presence of factors such as wealth, family lineage, attractiveness, intelligence, and so on. The girls that have money, *yichus*, and are exceptionally beautiful are the ones being chosen as wives, while the others are not.

This explanation is not plausible to explain why some girls on the island remain unmarried, while all of the boys are married. Clearly, the only possible explanation is that there are *more* girls than boys. Wealth, *yichus*, and beauty determine only *which* girls have a better chance of getting married and leaving the island. If there are 100 boys and 150 girls, obviously 50 girls have no possible chance to get married. It is impossible to know which girls will be among the unlucky 50. Perhaps girls from wealthy families, with *yichus*, beauty, etc., have an advantage over the other girls. But at the end of the day there still will be 50 girls without a husband. Even if every single girl is wealthy, from a great family, and beautiful, there still will be just as many leftover girls.

The only possible reason is that there are more girls than boys on the island. Even if every boy got married and left the island with his wife, there would still be girls stranded on the

island with no hope. How, though, can it be that there are more girls on the island, if the birth ratio of boys and girls is 1:1?

Baruch Hashem, the population of Orthodox Jewry is growing rapidly. A quick demographic look at Jewish schools shows that the first-grade class is much larger than the eighth-grade class. Many schools have only one or two eighth-grade classes, but have three or four first-grade classes. Similarly, the ninth-grade classes are larger than the twelfth-grade classes.

In the non-Chassidic community, the girls start shidduchim at around 19 and boys at 22. The annual population growth of the Orthodox Jewish community results in a simple fact: there are many more 19 year-olds than 22 year-olds. It is the equivalent of matching twelfth-graders with ninth-graders. There are not enough 22 year-old boys for the 19 year-old girls.

Some respond, "What's the big deal? This year's surplus of girls will wait until next year." Again, however, next year the incoming group of 19 year-olds is much larger than the incoming group of 22 year-olds. The result is that *close to 200 girls each year* have no chance of getting married in the current dating structure -- not at age 19 and not at age 35.

The inequity of numbers (more 19 year-old girls than 22 year-old boys) exists across the spectrum of Orthodox Jewry, from Modern Orthodox to ultra-Orthodox, with the exception of the Chassidim, who face no Shidduch crisis. In fact, in the Chassidic community, the girls are at a high demand. The reason why the Chassidim have no problem is simple: even though their population grows very rapidly, the boys start shidduchim at age 19, the same age as the girls.

This inequity of the numbers is so significant and critical that *anything* done to address this specific dynamic achieves progress towards easing the crisis.

It is true that, as a result of the imbalance in the numbers, the boys have the upper hand and are in a position to take advantage of the situation and make unfair and ridiculous demands. Those demands, however, are a **result** of the imbalance in the numbers, not the *cause*.

Once the cause of the problem has been identified, *what is the solution?*

The solution is obvious, and it is the *only* solution. We -- parents of young men and women, friends, shadchanim, mentors, rabbanim -- need to take the initiative to close the age gap between boys and girls who are dating. Either boys must get married earlier, or girls must get married later, or a combination of both.

Now for the good news: **The solution is definitely within our grasp.** All we need do to is slowly but surely close the age gap so that the numbers of boys and girls dating are equal. We are not talking about not having any 19 year olds getting married. We're not talking about every boy marrying a girl older than him. What the community needs is **significantly** more close in age shidduchim than we've had in the past.. If the average age gap between chosson and kallah in the past has been 3.5 years we need to get it to under two years. And over time to get the average age gap to within one year. We need many more 23 year olds marrying 22 year olds instead of 19 and 20 year olds. This is clearly doable but we need to pay attention.

Now for some practical and effective ideas: Let me preface them by saying that change is not easy and it doesn't happen overnight. However every little bit counts and we as a community MUST be ready to make the difficult decisions necessary to implement the minor changes that will alleviate the situation. The status quo is NOT an option. I don't think it necessary for me to describe the pain and agony of those suffering from the situation and with that in mind let's discuss some plans of action.

1. Raising Awareness

To date the most effective course of action has been to educate the community about this issue. It's unbelievable how publicity of the issue has caused a tremendous change in boys and their mother's attitudes towards slightly older girls. This has been the primary goal to date of the NASI Project. Every public speech on the topic has a positive effect. Which is why I started by saying that this evening's event will definitely cause girls to get married who otherwise would've been stuck. Every bit of marketing makes a difference.

You have no idea how many phone calls I have received from mothers of boys telling me their son just got engaged to a girl his own age that previously they would never have considered the Shidduch. But either in light of the new awareness they are trying to do their part, or they have come to realize the tremendous benefits of a girl who is 23 and finished college with some experience under her belt.]

I would like to read to you Two letters from shaddcanim and two letters from girls/parents regarding the progress that has already been made.

From A letter recently written by Sara Richards and printed in the Yated Neeman

“ We have been noticing lately that even the boys who are first beginning to date want only girls who are 21 or older or even girls who are close to their age. Just this week I received four phone calls asking for girls that fit this bill.”

From Shlomo Lewenstein

In the year and a half I have seen a tremendous change in the shidduch scene. Boys (and their parents) are much more willing to do shidduchim with girls their own age or even slightly older. Such readiness to date close in age has the potential to greatly alleviate what has become known as the shidduch crisis.

Shloime Lewenstein

The following are two letters recently received by the NASI Project

Dear Nasi,

As a 23 year old single girl, I just wanted to let you know that I think you've done the yeshiva world a tremendous service with NASI. I think that it raised significant awareness about the problem of the age gap, and has drastically lowered the stigma for a boy marrying a

girl his own age or even older. I know that I've dated several guys barely my own age in the past year, and a sizable number of my friends have married younger guys as well -- and no one thinks twice.

Thank you for doing your best to alleviate the "shidduch crisis"!

- A grateful single

(And now-From a mother of a 23 year old married to slightly younger boy)

We owe NASI a huge debt of gratitude for changing the "velt's" attitude toward older girls. You know, that NASI has single handedly changed the world with regard to acceptable dating ages, producing marriages that would have otherwise never happened! Think about how many homes were established and children born/to be born.

However, awareness can only go so far. So long as boys begin dating at 23 and girls are rushing to date straight out of seminary we will continue to have a massive problem. Not only that, - but Out of Town communities that are hit especially hard cannot really hope to solve their local problem without realizing it is a derivative of the national one. So long as the schools in Brooklyn have large amounts of older unmarried singles, out of town will have that many more. So long as a boy has a choice of many local girls to date because of the inequity of numbers, the prospective girls from out of town will not likely be his first choice. Various attempts to alleviate their local problem help slightly very slightly. In my opinion they would be much better served pooling their influence and resources and implementing some of the following suggestions that will help the national problem and automatically their local one as well.

In conclusion: The crisis is very real. B"H much much progress has been made, but there remains a long way to go. I beg everyone reading this letter. Each and everyone of you CAN and MUST make a difference. You all know boys: your sons, brothers, nephews, cousins neighbors etc. Encourage them to date girls their own age.

Please Please be part of the solution - not part of the problem.