

## Continuity and Discontinuity in Attitudes toward Marital Power Relations: Pre-retired vs Retired Husbands

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### **ABSTRACT**

Taking a life-cycle approach to marital power relations, the paper compares the attitudes of married men close to retirement with those who are retired. An integrative model based on Resource Theory was designed to analyse the effect of several variables on the husband's perceptions of power relations: perceived resources, attitudes toward gender roles, emotional commitment to his wife and anticipated dependence on her. The model was tested on a sample of 348 Israeli men – 137 pre-retired and 211 retirees. Contrary to expectations of a decline in the retired husband's perceived power, no differences were found between the two groups except for a reported increase in social power among the older group. Major differences were found, however, regarding the overall impact of variables: perceived economic resources had the strongest explanatory power for pre-retired respondents, whereas it was psycho-social factors (anticipated dependence on the wife for satisfaction of emotional needs, psychological resources, and emotional commitment to the wife) that best explained variance among retirees. The increased dependence of retired husbands on their wives' expressive resources seems to contradict their reports of greater social power, suggesting that their perceptions of marital power relations may be coloured by feelings of status anxiety.

**KEY WORDS** – Marital power relations; Resource Theory; attitudes toward gender roles; emotional commitment; anticipated dependence; pre-retirement stage; retirement stage.

### **Introduction**

Theoretical literature on the maturing individual tends to take one of two directions. One approach conceives of old age as a stage that continues the individual's previous life pattern (Atchley 1982; Costa and McCrae 1988). According to this school of thought, maintenance of functional stability provides the older person with strong anchors that afford a sense of order, control and confidence. A second theoretical

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approach is more dynamic, portraying ageing as a process of transition and development over a series of stages (Erikson 1969; Jung 1971). The last stage of life ('late adulthood') is perceived as a time of inwardness, reflection on the past, and closure.

In keeping with the dynamic theoretical approach to old age, retirement is considered one of the critical transition points in the family life cycle (Lowenthal *et al.* 1975; Mattessich and Hill 1987; Szinovacz *et al.* (1992). With retirement, workers, particularly men, lose some of their resources. In the economic sphere, income levels are likely to drop, possibly affecting the family's lifestyle (Dowd 1975; Gratton and Rotondo 1992). On a social level, relationships and contacts that originated in the workplace often dissolve, such as ties with fellow employees and customers, union membership, and participation in leisure groups based on work connections (Bosse *et al.* 1990; Griffel 1985). From a psychological perspective, research points to changes in the life goals of the pensioner. Whereas the working individual tends to have achievement-oriented and material-oriented goals, the retiree tends to focus on family life through which he or she hopes to obtain support, love and friendship (Kulik 1992; Stinnett *et al.* 1972). Moreover, studies have shown that patterns of interaction between couples change after retirement (Hagestad 1988; Keating and Cole 1980; Kulik 1992). As a result of these numerous changes, there are grounds for expecting some shifts in the power relations between spouses.

Notwithstanding the changes in employment trends among women in recent decades, it seems that men and women are still differentially affected by retirement (Atchley 1982; Fox 1977; Szinovacz 1982). Specifically, whereas retired men move from the primary status of main provider to the status of pensioner (Atchley 1975, 1982), retired women maintain their central role as wife and mother. For this reason, the present study examines the effect of the husband's retirement on family life, and focuses on his perspective of marital power relations before and after retirement.

Blood and Wolfe's (1960) classic study of changing power relations at different stages of married life was one of the first major attempts to examine this issue. Their findings indicate that, in the initial stages of marriage, the husband maintains an average level of power in comparison with other stages in the family life-cycle. After the birth of the first child, the husband's power increases until the oldest child enters school, and then steadily declines once the oldest child reaches pre-adolescence. A particularly sharp decline occurs when the oldest child leaves home, and once again after the husband's retirement.

These changes in the marital power relationship are explained by Blood and Wolfe as a function of fluctuations in resources possessed by the spouses during marital life. Heer (1963) explains these fluctuations as a function of the alternatives available to the wife outside the marital context at a given stage of marriage. Thus, for example, a decline in the power of the wife after the birth of the first child is attributed to the decline in rewards that she can receive in alternative contexts if she were to divorce while still caring for young children. Notwithstanding considerable research based on Resource Theory (Blumberg and Coleman 1989; Hertz 1986; Kranichfeld 1987; O'Connor 1991) and a few studies on ageing families (Barusch 1987; Friedman 1987), there is a lack of comprehensive research focusing specifically on the effects of retirement on marital power relations. The present study attempts to re-examine differences between pre-retired and retired husbands in the area of marital power relations, in light of some social and normative changes that have taken place in industrial societies over the past four decades, including the transfer of women into the labour market.

Despite these changes, it seems that differences between the sexes still exist in most countries, even if different cultures exhibit various degrees of ideological commitment to the notion of gender equality. Some recent studies on the division of gender roles indicate that the common stand which permeates cultural diversity is still that of gender inequality (for a comprehensive review, see Lewis 1992). These studies have shown that in most dual-earner families, the women still retain the major responsibility for domestic work in addition to their paid work. Similarly, family roles are more salient for mothers than for fathers, and it is more legitimate for the wife to accommodate her work schedule to family life than for the husband to do so.

However, several researchers have noted gradual changes, which are reflected in the area of family roles (see the review of Pleck 1983). For example, even if the wife maintains the major domestic responsibility, men in dual-earner families participate more actively in domestic tasks, especially in child care, in some countries (Pleck *et al.* 1986; Sandquist 1992; Yuen and Lim 1992). This reallocation of roles may be indicative of a new generation that is less closely attached to stereotypical gender roles (Gilbert and Dancer 1992). An extreme example of this trend is Sweden, which endorses equal roles in parenting and equal opportunities for both sexes in the public sphere (Sandquist 1992). Similarly, gender equality was a basic tenet of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe, particularly with regard to women's participation in the labour force (Clason 1992; Lapidus 1988). In Israel, the tension between commitment to equality and traditional ideology is resolved

by a modified version of family and equality, where men are encouraged to 'help' with family work but the ideal of role sharing is not articulated (Israeli 1992; Lewis 1992).

In the light of these developments, there is a need to re-examine the impact of shifts in ideologies regarding equality between spouses and perceptions of marital power relations. This issue is of particular interest in the case of Israel for several reasons. First, Israeli society is highly family-oriented (Bar-Yosef and Bachar 1972; Peres and Katz 1981, 1990). This trend has been ascribed to the combined influence of the Jewish religion, the traditional culture of immigrants from Moslem countries, and collective goals related to population expansion such as the need to maintain a large army and to offset the growing Arab population. Moreover, family ties provide security and support in a society that is constantly subject to the anxieties that accompany military unrest (Bar-Yosef and Bachar 1972; Peres and Katz 1990).

Secondly, the gender gap in Israel is considerable, even though it is often perceived otherwise owing, among other reasons, to the drafting of women into the military. In fact, daily interactions between male and female soldiers frequently reproduce the gender division of labour, status and power in civilian Israeli society, so that military service can actually help to perpetuate gender inequalities. Military jobs are highly segregated by gender, mainly because women are excluded from combat duty, tend to receive secondary military roles, serve a shorter period of time, and are automatically released from duty upon marriage. Consequently, the army is characterised by a macho culture that fosters and disseminates the myth of male superiority and female dependence (Azmon and Israeli 1993).

The present study investigates attitudinal differences between pre-retired and retired Israeli husbands regarding marital power relations in order to enhance knowledge of marital dynamics during the later stages of family life. Specifically, the study utilises a multivariate model to investigate two questions in the Israeli context. Are there differences between the attitudes of pre-retired and retired husbands toward marital power relations? Can different sets of explanatory variables related to marital power be distinguished for each group of respondents?

### **An integrative model of marital power relations**

The current study makes use of an integrative model aimed at explaining attitudinal differences between pre-retired and retired men

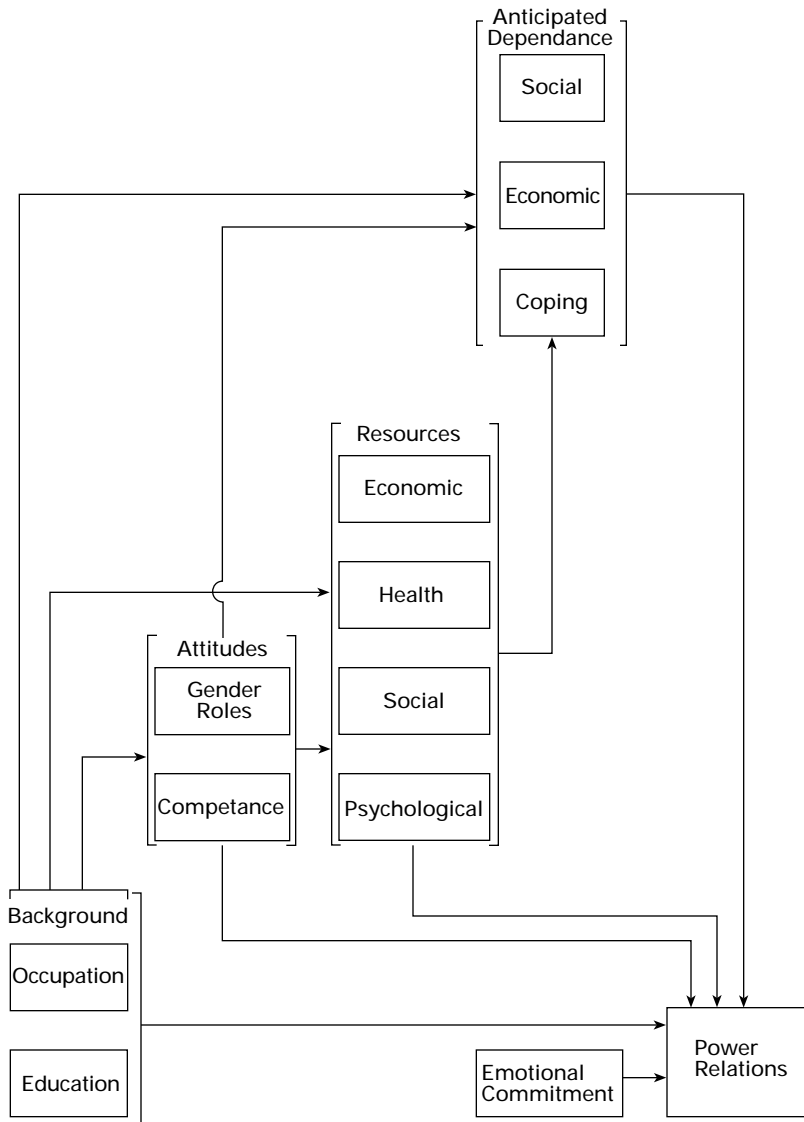


Figure 1. Integrative model of marital power relations.

regarding marital power relations. The model relates these attitudes to a number of variable clusters: perceived resources of various types, their attitudes toward gender roles, their emotional commitment to and anticipated dependence on their wives, and a variety of background factors (Figure 1).

The relation between marital power relations and existing resources was first explicated in Blood and Wolfe's Resource Theory (1960). Derived from Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) Social Exchange Theory (later developed by Blau 1964), Resource Theory claims that marital relations are based on an exchange in which each spouse contributes resources to satisfy the other's needs. Most research on marital power considers a very limited set of resources. These studies, for example, focus specifically on income, schooling, and occupational prestige. These aspects far from exhaust the great variety of resources that may affect marital power. The present research considers a broader set of resources, which includes: health and energy; material resources; social resources; and psychological resources.

*Health and energy:* These resources are highly relevant to coping with many stressful encounters, including life transitions (Lazarus and Folkman 1984). A person who is frail, sick, tired, or otherwise debilitated, has less energy to expend on coping than a healthy, robust person. Thus, for example, it can be assumed that, when there is a natural decline in these resources with age, the healthier spouse will have a power advantage in the marital relationship.

*Material resources:* This refers to money, particularly the goods and services that money can buy (Antonovsky 1985). Obviously, monetary resources greatly increase coping options in almost any situation or life transition. They provide easier and often more effective access to legal, medical, financial, and other professional assistance. Moreover, the availability of these resources may provide individuals with a sense of security and reduce their vulnerability to potential threat.

*Social resources:* According to Kessler *et al.* (1985), this resource refers to the various sources of social support rooted in social relations. This may protect the individual from the threats of stressful situations encountered during the life course (House 1981). The individual's social network may supply affection, empathy, acceptance and esteem, as well as instrumental help such as information and financial assistance that facilitate coping (Caplan 1974; Cobb 1982). High social status may be related to the quantity of support, but not necessarily to its quality in providing emotional support and affection.

*Psychological resources:* These resources include problem-solving skills, social skills, and emotional strength. Problem-solving skills refer, for example, to the ability to search for information, to analyse situations, and to select and implement an appropriate plan of action. Social skills reflect one's ability to behave and communicate with others. In general, these skills give the individual greater control over social interactions (Lazarus and Folkman 1984).

It is generally believed that marriage involves the mutual satisfaction of needs using resources such as those described above. Although the extent of this obligation varies across cultures, it can be assumed that dependency may ensue when one partner provides vital resources which cannot be contributed by anyone else. This, in turn, puts this partner in a position of power. It is thus assumed that the greater the husband's perceived resource advantage over his wife, the greater will be his perceived power advantage in marital relations. Furthermore, the loss in resources which generally accompanies the husband's retirement is expected to be to his disadvantage in their power relations.

In addition to the impact of resources, marital power relations are also said to be influenced by cultural context, *i.e.* the attitudes toward gender roles prevailing in the couple's social environment (Rodman 1967, 1972). This approach has received partial empirical support in a number of countries: Puerto Rico (Cooney *et al.* 1982), Mexico and the U.S. (Cromwell *et al.* 1973), Hindu Indians in Canada (Dhruvarajan 1992), Israel (Katz 1980) and Germany (Lupri 1969). This suggests that the wife's resources have limited impact on marital power relations when conservative attitudes toward gender roles prevail; even if she possesses substantial resources, she usually accepts the traditional norms regarding marital relations. In contrast, when egalitarian attitudes toward gender roles are dominant, there is a freer exchange of resources that offer decision-making power. The current model therefore hypothesises that evaluations of economic and social resources are influenced by the husband's normative perceptions of gender roles.

Gender attitudes affect not only perceptions of resources but also marital dynamics in general. Thus, it is expected that the more traditional the husband's attitudes toward gender roles, the more likely he is to report an advantage in marital power relations. According to Lewis and Cooper (1988), beliefs about gender relationship are interwoven in the ideology of the family and are culturally defined. Israeli society, which has a relatively constant flow of immigrants in the process of absorption, contains a mixture of normative trends. It is commonly believed that Easterners (Israelis of Afro-Asian origin) hold more conservative attitudes regarding gender roles than Westerners (of European or American origin). It is therefore also hypothesised that background variables will affect gender role attitudes, not only with regard to ethnicity but also religiosity: religious people are expected to have more conservative attitudes regarding gender roles than their secular counterparts (Rodman 1967, 1972). It is further assumed that individuals with higher levels of education and in higher occupational

strata, will have more liberal attitudes (Scanzoni and Scanzoni 1981; Murillo 1971; Coverman 1983). In addition, background variables are expected to affect the other variables in the model, including a direct effect on power relations.

Recent comprehensive studies of marital power relations suggest that expressive variables, such as emotional commitment to the other, also play a role (Blumberg and Coleman 1989; Kranichfeld 1987; McDonald 1980). Since the family is a primary social unit founded on emotions, intimacy and expressiveness, emotional commitment is considered a key variable shaping marital ties (Mudd and Toulin 1982; Strube and Barbour 1983). In the current research model, it is hypothesised that the stronger the husband's emotional commitment to his wife (which provides her with more expressive resources), the less likely he is to perceive himself as having a power advantage.

Finally, this study adds a future dimension to the explanation of marital dynamics. This dimension is expressed in the concept of 'anticipated dependence,' defined as the extent to which the husband expects to become dependent on his wife in the future. The variable combines two basic concepts: the dependence which may be perceived to characterise the later stage of life (including retirement) and expectations which reflect future perceptions of the marital relationship. Many researchers have emphasised the impact that expectations have on current behaviour: present interaction between individuals may be affected by expected future outcomes (Gamson 1966; Nye 1982; Samuel and Zelditch 1989). Thus, the husband's anticipation of future dependence on his wife to supply his vital needs can provide her with personal credit and afford her an advantage over him in the present. Furthermore, the husband's evaluation of his relative advantage/disadvantage in current resources is expected to affect his anticipated dependence on his wife. In short, the more dependent the husband expects to be on his wife in the future (which provides her with a kind of resource in the present), the more likely he is to perceive himself as having a disadvantage in the power relationship. The inclusion of this dimension in the current model expands classic resource theory (which is limited to the exchange of accessible resources) by adding a potential resource that can affect current perceptions of power relations.



## **Method**

### *Sample*

A total of 348 men participated in the cross-sectional study, of whom 137 were 'pre-retired' (up to 18 months prior to retirement) and 211 had been retired for two to ten years. The mean ages were 65.5 years (S.D. = 4.7) for the pre-retired respondents, and 70.4 years (S.D. = 5.4) for the retired.

The 'pre-retired' study population was drawn from special workshops for people approaching retirement and sponsored by a variety of organisations (*e.g.* service organisations and factories) in Israel. With regard to the retired population, some were reached via retirement clubs and adult education programmes specifically designed for retirees and organised by the Histadrut Workers' Union throughout the country. Others were obtained from lists distributed by various types of organisations and were approached at their home addresses. In order to eliminate the psycho-social effects of work, only fully retired men were included.

The distribution of respondents by occupation, education and ethnic origin corresponded with that of the general population of pre-retired and retired Israelis in the relevant age ranges (Kulik 1992). Moreover, no significant differences in background were found between the two sample groups (Table 1). About 60.2 per cent of the wives of pre-retired respondents were also employed outside of the home, compared with 20.1 per cent of the wives of the retirees.

### *Instrument*

The research instrument consisted of several sub-questionnaires, which were identical for both groups of respondents. The time allotted for completion of the entire questionnaire was forty minutes.

### *Dependent variable*

*Marital power relations.* Based on the research of Blood and Wolfe (1960) and others (Cooney *et al.* 1982; Gray-Little 1982; Katz 1980), a questionnaire was adapted to the Israeli context and to the later period of marital life. This questionnaire initially included all items in the above measures that were relevant to this age period, together with a few original questions added by the author. It was administered in a pilot study to approximately 100 older men and women (accessed from the same clubs as the sample groups), who were asked to indicate the

TABLE 1. *Background variables*

	Pre-retired %	Retired %
Education		
Elementary (0–8 years)	42.3	49.0
High school (9–12 years)	32.2	27.2
Higher education (13+ years)	25.5	23.8
Ethnic origin		
European-American	67.8	73.5
Asian	16.7	11.8
African	9.0	11.8
Israeli-born	6.5	2.9
Religiosity (self-reported)		
Orthodox	11.5	13.1
Traditional	34.9	35.9
Secular	53.6	51.0
n (= 100%)	137	211

degree to which each item refers to a decision relevant to their married life. Of these, the 13 items with the greatest frequencies of high scores and which appeared to reflect a wide range of aspects of marital life were included in the final version of the questionnaire (*e.g.* who decides upon the breakdown of the family budget, who decides where to go on vacation). Factor analysis of the responses distinguished between three factors reflecting power relations: instrumental (family budget and major purchases), social (entertaining friends, vacations and recreation) and occupational (part-time work and volunteer activity).<sup>1</sup> For each item, respondents were asked to indicate who decides, on a five-point scale ranging from 1 ('the husband always decides') to 5 ('the wife always decides'). Researchers have claimed that different aspects of decision-making power carry different weight, so that the evaluation of decision-making power should take into account the subjective importance and frequency of specific decisions (Heer 1963; Katz 1980; La Liberte-Richmond 1976; Safilios-Rothschild 1976). Despite this, 'weighted' methods have yielded findings that are substantially equivalent to those of the non-weighted approach (Katz 1980; Price-Bonham 1976). Thus, for the sake of simplicity, items were not weighted in this study.

#### *Independent variables*

*Resources.* The 14-item questionnaire on resources was constructed on the basis of Blood and Wolfe's (1960) Resource Theory and asked the husband to evaluate the relative advantage/disadvantage to himself

and his spouse regarding a wide range of resources. For each item, respondents were asked to indicate 'who has the resource advantage' based on a five-point scale. The higher the score, the greater the wife's perceived advantage over her husband in that resource area. Factor analysis of these items distinguished between four factors: health and energy (physical and mental), economic resources (financial contribution to the family), social resources (*e.g.* status in the community, relationships) and psychological resources (*e.g.* emotional strength, ability to withstand crises that accompany the ageing process, good relations with offspring).

*Attitudes toward gender roles.* Based on the measures employed by Katz (1980) and Scanzoni (1975), a five-item questionnaire evaluated the husband's attitudes toward gender roles in the family and society along a five-point scale. The higher the scores on an item, the more conservative the attitudes of the respondent. Factor analysis of these items distinguished between two areas: one factor reflected attitudes regarding role division by gender (henceforth the 'gender role' factor), *e.g.* 'the woman's main role is to be a wife and mother'; the other factor reflected attitudes toward the ability of women to perform various roles in society (henceforth the 'competence' factor), *e.g.* 'women can fulfil social tasks as well as men'.

*Emotional commitment.* Based on the questionnaires of Sabatelli and Cecil-Pigo (1985) and Swensen and Trahaug (1985), this ten-item measure assessed the husband's emotional commitment to his wife along a five-point scale, *e.g.* 'my wife's well-being is important to me'; 'I am willing to make an effort to make my wife happy'. The higher the score on these items, the greater the husband's commitment. The reliability of the questionnaire (Cronbach's alpha) was .91.

*Anticipated dependence.* The questionnaire consisted of nine items evaluating the extent to which the husband expects to be dependent on his wife in the future in various spheres of married life. Three factors were distinguished by factor analysis: anticipated dependence regarding basic physical and mental functions (henceforth 'coping dependence'), *e.g.* 'I expect to become dependent on my wife to help me maintain personal hygiene and cooking'; anticipated dependence regarding satisfaction of emotional needs and companionship (henceforth 'social dependence'), *e.g.* 'I expect to depend on my wife to satisfy my social needs'; and anticipated financial need and help with affairs outside the home (henceforth 'economic dependence'), *e.g.* 'I expect to be dependent on my wife for financial support'. The scale for each item ranged from 1 to 5. The higher the score on an item, the more dependent the husband expects to be on his wife.

*Background variables.* Several variables were examined for both the husband and wife: educational level, occupation, religiosity, ethnic origin, age, length of residence in Israel and variables pertaining to children (*e.g.* number of offspring, whether they live at home). Moreover, respondents were asked whether their wives participated in activities outside the home (*e.g.* paid employment or volunteer activity). The pensioners were also asked to indicate how many years they had been retired.

### *Procedure*

Data were collected over the years 1989–1991. All participants in the clubs, programmes and workshops in the study were approached. The structured questionnaires were administered either in these settings or in the respondent's home by two research assistants. These assistants were familiar with the questionnaire items and answered any questions raised by respondents. All the respondents were interviewed individually, and not in the presence of other family members.

### **Results**

MANOVA analysis revealed significant differences in the perception of marital power relations between the two groups of respondents ( $p < 0.05$ ). Separate analyses of variance for each of the power relation variables revealed that the social aspect of these relations was the main factor distinguishing between pre-retired and retired husbands (see Table 2); after retirement, the men made more decisions about the social aspect of their lives than those who had not yet retired. No significant differences were found regarding the other aspects of power relations.

With regard to the resources (social, economic, health, and psychological), MANOVA analysis revealed differences between pre-retired and retired men across all types of resources ( $p < 0.05$ ). However, separate analysis of variance for each of the resources revealed differences only in perceived health resources (Table 3). The retirees were more likely than the pre-retired husbands to perceive their wives as healthier than themselves. The retirees also expressed more conservative attitudes toward gender roles than the pre-retirees, particularly concerning the 'gender role' factor (Table 3). They also expected to become more dependent on their wives than the pre-retired

TABLE 2. *Perceived power relations*

Factor:	Instrumental		Social		Occupational	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Pre-retired	2.98	0.58	3.21	0.56	2.15	1.05
Retired	2.96	0.57	3.05	0.59	2.23	0.79
F	0.02		6.91*		1.62	

\*  $p < 0.01$ .*Note:* the higher the score, the greater the perceived power of the wife.TABLE 3. *Other significant differences*

	Health resources		Gender roles factor		Coping dependency		Emotional commitment	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Pre-retired	2.91	0.60	2.36	0.77	1.86	0.35	4.23	0.59
Retired	3.05	0.75	3.10	0.95	1.99	0.42	4.37	0.58
F	4.13*		5.81*		4.15*		4.15**	

\*  $p < 0.05$ .\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .*Note:* higher scores indicate the perceptions (i) that their wife is healthier than themselves, (ii) more conservative attitudes towards gender roles, and (iii) greater anticipated dependence on wives.

men with respect to 'coping dependence'. With regard to the expressive aspect of marital life, the retirees reported greater emotional commitment toward their wives than their pre-retired counterparts ( $p < 0.01$ ).

LISREL analysis (Joreson and Sorbon 1981) was employed to examine the combined effect of the research variables on marital power relations among pre-retired and retired husbands. To simplify the path model, a single measure of power relations was used, including all 13 items (rather than the three factors obtained for this variable). Initially, this theoretical model included background variables which did not contribute significantly to the explanation of marital power relations in either group. In order to obtain a parsimonious model, these variables were eliminated; consequently, the model includes only the background variables of education and occupation.

Goodness of fit measures indicated that the multivariate model reproduced the original correlations among the variables quite well. The independent research variables explained 26 per cent of the variance for the pre-retired respondents, and 36 per cent for the retirees.

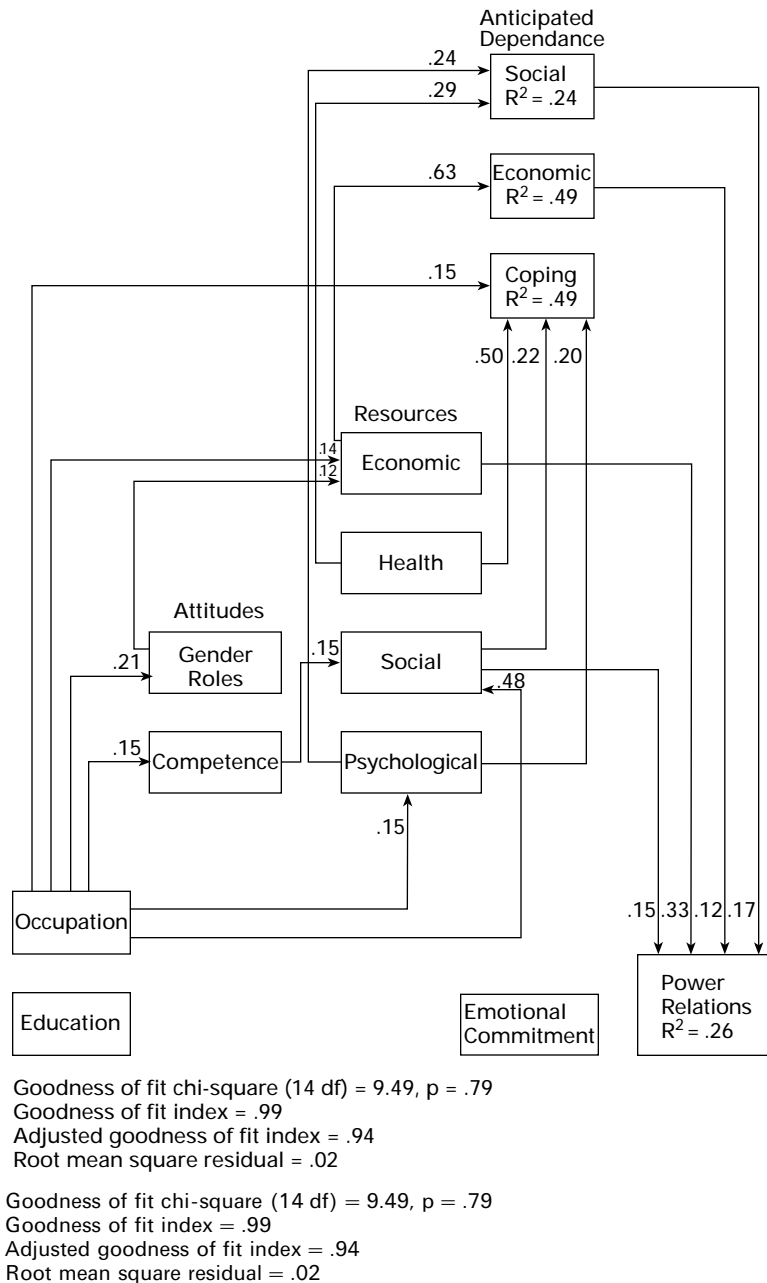


Figure 2. Path analysis (lisrel), pre-retired husbands.

Comparison of the paths obtained for pre-retired and retired husbands from out of the variable clusters appearing in the theoretical model (see Figures 2 and 3), reveals different patterns of variables explain power relations in each group. For the pre-retired respondents,

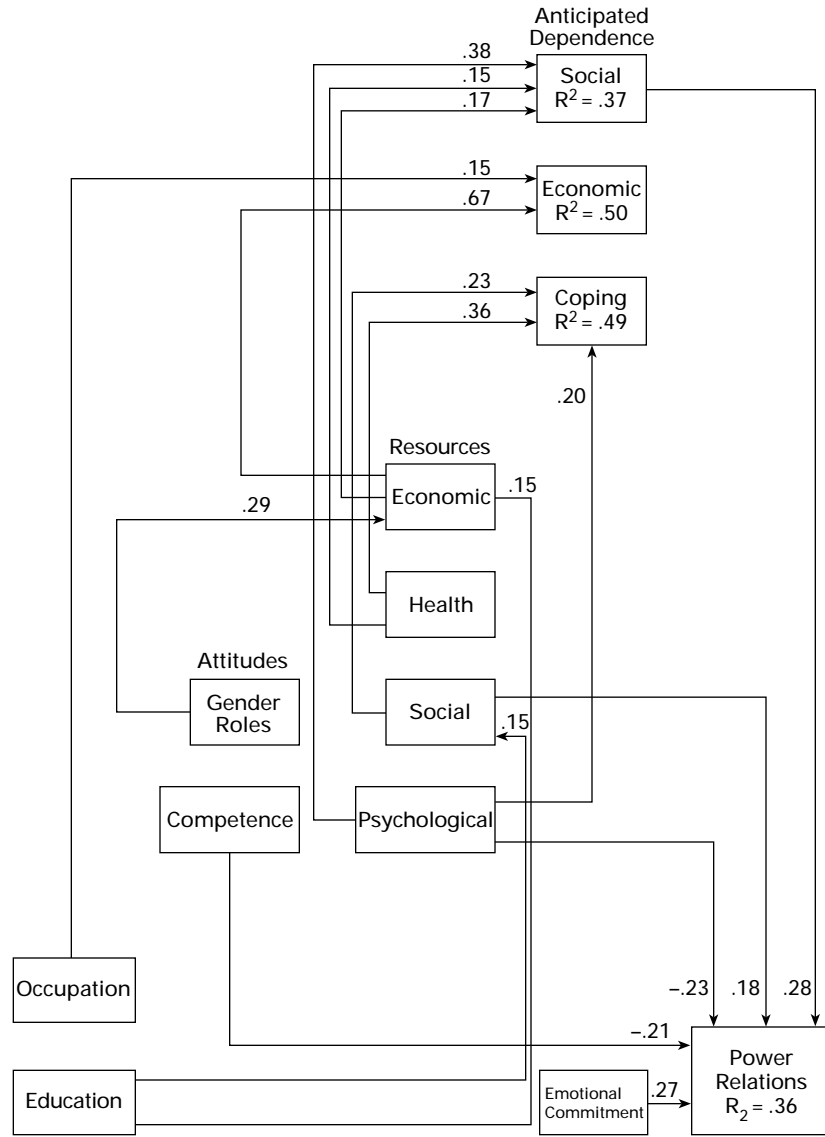
perceived economic resources had the most explanatory power (Beta = 0.33) and a significant though somewhat weaker effect was found for social resources (Beta = 0.15). In both cases, this effect was direct and positive, *i.e.* the partner with a resource advantage also had a perceived power advantage.

Among the retired respondents, perceived power relations are explained by a broader range of resources. Here, too, social resources had a direct and positive effect (Beta = 0.18). A direct effect was also found for psychological resources, but surprisingly it was negative (Beta = -0.23). Thus, the greater the wife's perceived advantage in the area of psychological resources, the more likely the husband was to report an advantage in marital power relations (this finding will be discussed later in more detail). In addition to the direct negative effect, psychological resources also had an indirect positive effect on power relations (Beta = 0.15). These resources operate through anticipated social dependence (Beta = 0.38). Thus, the greater the advantage of the wife in the area of psychological resources, the greater the husband's anticipated dependence on her to satisfy his social needs in the future. This, in turn, tips the balance of power in her favour in her husband's eyes.

Another resource variable which distinguishes between pre-retired and retired males is perceived health resources. This variable has both a direct and indirect effect on perceived marital power relations among retired couples (Table 4). Although both are small, the total effect of this resource is significant ( $p < 0.01$ ). Thus, there is a significant overall contribution of health resources toward explaining perceived marital power after retirement.

Anticipated dependence, particularly in the area of social needs, was found to be a key variable for both pre-retired and retired respondents. This factor is affected by a large number of variables, and constitutes a dominant explanatory factor for marital power relations. Its effect is direct and positive in both groups, *i.e.* the more the husband expects to become dependent on his wife to satisfy emotional and social needs, the more he perceives the balance of power as being in his wife's favour.

Attitudes toward gender roles affect marital power relations among the retired respondents via the 'competence' factor (Beta = -0.21). The effect of this variable was direct and negative, as expected. That is, the less the retired husband believes that his wife is capable of performing certain tasks, the more he perceives the balance of power in his favour. In sharp contrast, this factor makes no contribution to the explanation of perceived marital power relations among pre-retired respondents.



Goodness of fit chi-square (14 df) = 14.97,  $p = .38$   
 Goodness of fit index = .94  
 Adjusted goodness of fit index = .91  
 Root mean square residual = .02

Figure 3. Path analysis (lisrel), retired husbands.



TABLE 4. Direct and indirect effects of main variables on marital power relations (Beta values)

	Pre-retired			Retired		
	Direct	Indirect	Total	Direct	Indirect	Total
Resources						
Health	0.04	–	0.04	0.11	0.97	0.18*
Economic	0.33*	0.04	0.37*	0.06	0.08	0.14
Social	0.15*	0.02	0.17*	0.17*	0.05	0.22*
Psychological	0.09	–	0.09*	–0.23*	0.15	–0.07
Anticipated dependence						
Coping	0.18	–	0.08	–0.09	–	0.09
Social	0.18*	–	0.18*	0.28*	–	0.28*
Economic	0.12	–	0.12	0.03	–	0.03
Attitudes						
Gender role	–	–	–	0.08	–	–0.08
Competence	–	–	–	–0.21*	–	–0.21*
Commitment	0.12	–	0.12	0.27	–	0.27*
Background						
Occupation	0.11	–0.09	0.03	0.05	–	0.05
Age	0.13	–0.14	0.09	–	–	–
Residence	0.14	–	0.14	–	–	–
Education	0.07	0.04	0.11	–	–	–
Religiosity	–	–	–	–	–	–
Ethnicity	–	–	–	–	–	–

\*  $p < 0.01$ .

– Negligible effects.

The husband's reported commitment to his wife has a positive and direct effect among the retirees on power relations (Beta = 0.27): the greater his commitment, the greater her perceived marital power. No effect was found for this variable among the pre-retired respondents.

Finally, the background variables of occupation and education do not affect the perceived balance of power in either of the respondent groups. However, this pair of variables does have a direct effect on perceived resource advantages for both respondent groups.

## Discussion

The present study reveals both differences and similarities in the attitudes of pre-retired and retired husbands toward marital power relations, leading to the conclusion that such relations should not be looked upon as a homogeneous phenomenon that is explained throughout all stages of life by the same set of variables. On the contrary, power relations are explained by a wide and varied range of

variables that are dependent on the individual's life stage. Thus, in order fully to understand and analyse this topic, it is necessary to take a life-cycle approach to marital power.

The findings that point to continuity in the attitudes of pre-retired and retired respondents may be attributed to the fact that the 'pre-retired' group was examined about 18 months before retirement, and thus may already have begun a process of anticipatory socialisation, and have adopted a perspective similar to that of retirees.

Evidence of continuity in domestic life was also found in the qualitative study of Mason (1987), which indicated that the division of responsibilities between spouses is repatterned but not basically renegotiated after retirement. While the husband does not want to give up the responsibilities he had in the social sphere prior to retirement, which he considers his right, the wife does not want to lose control of responsibilities in the home. Thus, even if she seeks more help in the home and expects to involve her husband in domestic affairs, the actual changes that occur are superficial and do not involve renegotiation of these responsibilities (Mason 1987). In this connection, our finding that husbands increase their involvement in the social sphere of marital life should not necessarily be interpreted as a fundamental change in marital power relations. Indeed, one of the main findings of the study is that retirement is not accompanied by a decline in the husband's perceived power in the primary aspects of life (*e.g.* instrumental and occupational), but rather is characterised by the above-mentioned continuity, in contradistinction to the earlier research of Blood and Wolfe (1960). The difference between the present findings and those of Resource Theory may be rooted in changes that have taken place in industrial societies over the past 45 years, such as the massive transfer, of women into the workforce. This has enabled women to accumulate resources comparable to those of men, so that the husband is no longer the sole provider in the family unit. Rather, he is either the 'senior partner' (and his working wife the 'junior partner') or he is an equal partner when his wife has an independent career (Scanzoni and Scanzoni 1981). Therefore the traditional family model, which assumes that the husband has exclusive control over family resources, and that his power declines after retirement when he loses some of these resources, is no longer applicable in the 1990s. On the whole, the wives of the retired men in the current sample were reported as not employed outside the home (see the description of the research sample above). It therefore seems that the relative resource advantage (or disadvantage) held by the husband is not affected by his retirement, even though his resources may have declined, because his wife has also stopped

working. The only exception is in the area of health resources, where the retired husbands reported a decline.

The present findings may also have been affected by the macho culture prevailing in Israeli society, which emphasises male superiority and female dependence (Azmon and Izraeli 1993). In this cultural context, men may feel a particularly strong need to preserve their former status after retirement. Thus, the failure to acknowledge post-retirement losses, such as a decline in resources, may be part of the husband's attempt to avoid an ego-threatening situation and to overcome a fear of losing his status in the family and society. Note that the present study examined the perceptions of husbands, whereas Blood and Wolfe (1960) focused on wives. It is possible that the wives would have been more likely to report a decline in their spouses' resources, while their husbands were less willing to admit this.

This assumption is supported by the finding that, even though the retirees report an advantage in social power, their perceptions of marital power relations are explained mainly by their emotional commitment toward their wives and anticipated dependence on them for the satisfaction of social needs (whereas their pre-retired counterparts focus on economic resources). This finding corroborates studies which indicate that older couples emphasise the expressive aspects of marital relations (Lipman 1961). Thus, when the husband loses social contacts and other social rewards deriving from the work place, the wife becomes a primary agent for the satisfaction of affective needs, and the marital relationship may compensate for various deficiencies accompanying retirement that are not acknowledged by the husband. Again, the reported rise in social power may be coloured by status anxiety.

The increased expressive orientation of the retired husband toward his wife may account for the differences in the set of variables that explain marital power relations among pre-retirees and pensioners. Thus, when the husband evaluates his wife as having more expressive resources (in the future or the present), he also reports that she has a power advantage over him. This finding is in keeping with the conclusions of Safilios-Rothschild (1976) that the partner who was more 'in love' tended to have less power in the marital relationship. Emotional commitment to, and anticipated social dependence on, the marital partner should therefore be defined as expressive resources, and future research should measure them like other perceived resources – in terms of the relative advantage held by either spouse.

The retired husband's greater emphasis on expressive elements is also reflected in his changing perceptions regarding psychological resources

(*e.g.* the ability to cope with crises). These resources explain a significant percentage of the variance in the marital balance of power after retirement, whereas they play a minor role beforehand. Moreover, it seems that male retirees perceive the exchange of psychological resources in the family differently from husbands who have not yet retired. Path analysis revealed that when the retiree perceives himself as having fewer psychological resources than his wife, he also perceives himself as having more power in the family. He therefore seems to conceive of his relative weakness (*i.e.* lack of coping resources) as a strength. This conclusion is reinforced by earlier findings (Elison 1969) that weakness is sometimes used as a strategy to manipulate the environment (*e.g.* capitalising on illness, when wishing to be served by others). In a similar vein, the husband may use helplessness and psychological incompetence to manipulate his spouse in the later period of family life.

This perception of weakness as a power resource may be related to the status anxiety that the husband experiences during the transition from employment to retirement. This explanation is supported by the finding that retired husbands hold more conservative attitudes toward gender roles than pre-retired respondents. In particular, they develop more conservative attitudes about women's roles in society. Moreover, path analysis revealed that the more conservative the attitudes of the retired husband, the more likely he is to perceive himself as having a power advantage in the family. Hence, retired men apparently feel a need to adopt attitudes that diminish their wife's ability to perform social tasks in order to justify their perceived power in the family and society. This argument is corroborated by the lack of explanatory power of this attitudinal variable among pre-retired respondents. Apparently, men who are still working do not need to rely on traditional attitudes toward gender roles as a tactic for enhancing their power in the family.

It would be interesting to examine this issue, and others related to marital power relations, from the perspective of the wife. Does she also consider the family as a primary unit in which psychological weakness is a source of power after retirement? Does she, too, change her perceptions of power relations during the later stages of family life? Or are these changes only characteristic of the husband in an effort to cope with losses after retirement?

From a theoretical perspective, the current study proposes an expansion of Social Exchange Theory to include future as well as current resources. That is, power relations in the present are explained not only by a current resource advantage (which creates dependence of

the weaker on the stronger), but also by potential resources in the future, as reflected in the concept of anticipated dependence. Blau's (1964) approach, which frames the study of resource exchange within the key concept of dependence, can therefore be seen in a new light: the conceptions of dependence in the present and in the future are integrated in the explanation of marital power relations.

### **Recommendations for further research**

The study was based on the husband's reports of perceived marital power relations. Undoubtedly, it is important to understand the husband's perspective since changes in his attitudes after retirement will have an impact on marital dynamics. However, the wife's attitudes toward marital power relations should also be considered. In this connection, studies in which both partners were interviewed have not revealed consistent findings relating to power relations. A few found agreement between husbands and wives (Blood and Hamblin 1958; Buric and Zecevic 1967). More studies, however, have reported inconsistencies and significant differences between husbands and wives (Brinkerhoff and Lupri 1978; Cromwell and Cromwell 1978; Douglas and Wind 1978; Katz and Peres 1985; Dhruvarajan 1992). This suggests that under appropriate conditions both partners should be interviewed.

Moreover, since the pre-retired respondents were close to retirement, their attitudes may have reflected their anticipated future status as retirees. Consequently, in order to arrive at more clear-cut conclusions regarding the impact of retirement on marital power relations, a relatively younger sample that is not so close to retirement (*i.e.* between the ages of 50 and 55) should be examined.

Similarly, the massive transfer of women into the workforce in recent decades has changed the significance of work and retirement for them (Anson *et al.* 1993), and so additional studies focusing on the significance of the wife's retirement in the marital power relationship would be worthwhile. Implementation of these recommendations in future research on marital power relations can enhance knowledge about the effects of retirement on the marital relationship.

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## NOTE

- <sup>1</sup> All of the factor analyses were conducted according to the varimax rotation method. A loading of 0.50 was set as a cut-off point for including items in any category.

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