



# Utilizing forgiveness therapy to heal the wounds of Bedouin-Arab families struggling with the aftermath of severe child maltreatment

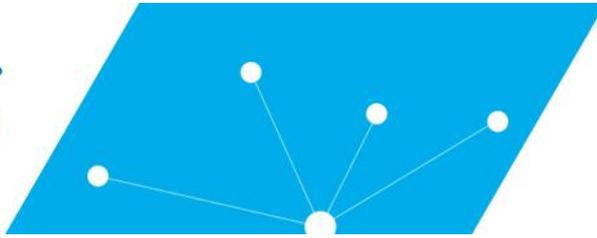
By Alvin Lander

The purpose of this paper is to explore the potential contribution of a forgiveness promoting intervention to the treatment of Israeli Bedouin-Arab families struggling with the aftermath of severe child maltreatment.

The term Bedouin-Arab denotes those desert inhabiting Moslem tribes found in middle eastern countries, including Israel (Al-Krenawi & Slonim Nevo, 2008). Bedouin-Arabs have lived in Israel for two millennia, with the great majority of the estimated 160,000, residing in the southern Negev region (Dinero, 2014). Contemporary Bedouin-Arab society continues to be characterized by an emphasis on the well-being and continuity of the collective (Abu Baker, 2003). All aspects of life are inextricably linked to the nuclear and extended family as well as the tribe, a union of families that traditionally wandered, sheperded and worked the land together under the rule of the sheikh. A rigid and authoritarian hierarchical order is maintained in all levels of society and all aspects of life in which the dominance of male over female and older over younger is strictly observed (Al Krenawi, 1998). Polygamous family structure, associated with significant functional difficulties and negative outcomes for women and children, is common and rates of child abuse and neglect are reported to be high (Al Krenawi, Graham, & Slonim Nevo, 2002)).

Forgiveness has traditionally been considered a central element of both individual and relational healing and recovery. Forgiveness has been related empirically to a spectrum of positive well being outcomes including higher levels of general positive affect, self acceptance and environmental mastery, increased relationship stability and quality, and improved physical health (Enright & Human Development Study Group, 1996). Recently distinct multistage models have been developed to directly promote forgiveness subsequent to interpersonal injury, and a number of these approaches have been come to be known as constituting forgiveness therapy (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2005). Most are predicated upon individual treatment where a victim works with a therapist toward forgiving an offender for a wrongdoing committed. Other models involve conjoint therapy with a victim together with an offender who is a family member, and are intended through the achievement of forgiveness to contribute to the improvement of family relations.

Five case studies are presented that illustrate the utilization of DiBlasio's (1998) conjoint model of forgiveness therapy with families with a history of severe child maltreatment whom local social workers identified as having failed to heal from the abuse and its aftermath. Standardized instruments were used to measure individual and family functioning throughout the course of the 10-15 in-home treatment sessions. Findings underscore the complexities associated with the promotion of forgiveness in families. While parental and family functioning went drastically and consistently down as the therapy progressed and



deepened, child outcome measures showed a robust positive increase.

Factors that may increase the contribution of forgiveness therapy within the context of the Bedouin-Arab family, and with other diverse populations in multi cultural settings, are indicated. Of commanding importance here is the need for the therapist to accept and refrain from challenging the patriarchal organization of the family. Indeed, initial family engagement was enhanced by means of an uncompromising and unbalanced coalition with father and male siblings.

The implications of the research findings for family therapy, and contextual family therapy in particular, are discussed and areas for future research and theoretical development suggested.

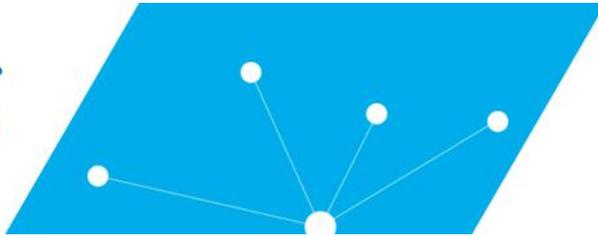
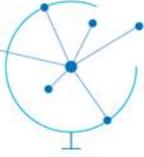
Key words forgiveness; Bedouin-Arab; child maltreatment

#### References:

- Abu Baker, M. (2003). Marital problems and Arab families: Between cultural and family therapy interventions. *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 25, 4, 53-74.
- Al-Krenawi, A.(1998). Family therapy with a multiparental/multispousal family. *Family Process*, 37, 1, 65-82.
- Al-Krenawi, A., Graham, J., & Slonim Nevo, V. (2002). Mental health aspects of Arab-Israeli adolescents from polygamous versus monogamous families. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 142, 4, 446-460.
- Al-Krenawi, A., & Slonim Nevo, V. (2008). Psycho-social and family functioning of children from polygamous and monogamous families. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 148, 745-764.
- DiBlasio, F. (1998). The use of a decision based forgiveness intervention within intergenerational family therapy. *Journal of Family Therapy*, 20, 77-94.
- Dinero, S. (2014). Neo-polygamous activity among the Bedouin of the Negev, Israel: Dysfunction, adaptation or both? *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 43, 4, 495-503.
- Enright, R., & Human Development Study Group, (1996). Counseling within the forgiveness triad: On forgiving, receiving forgiveness and self forgiveness. *Counseling and Values*, 40, 108-126.
- Enright, R., & Fitzgibbons, r. (2005). *Forgiveness therapy: An empirical guide for resolving anger and restoring hope*. New York: The Guilford Press.

Contact information:

ICCT2018  
FOR THE FUTURE!



Institute  
Contextual  
Approach



Alvin Lander Ph.D  
Senior Lecturer School of Social Work  
Sapir College Israel

Alvin Lander (Ph.d University of Toronto) is a senior lecturer in the school of social work, Sapir College, Israel. His scholarship focuses on the utilization of innovative therapeutic modalities in social work practice with children and families. He has a special interest in the role of forgiveness in direct social work practice and particularly in the development and utilization of forgiveness promoting interventions.

Email- [Larrie@zahav.net.il](mailto:Larrie@zahav.net.il)

0544357765