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Scientific biography – Dr. Vered Shenaar-Golan

My main areas of research involve the examination of factors that contribute to subjective wellbeing. In this work, I focus on examining the specific contributions made by the mechanisms of emotional regulation, attachment, and self-compassion to increasing the sense of subjective wellbeing of parents of children with emotional and behavioral problems. In addition, I trace the effects of parental variables on children’s adjustment metrics.

Fieldwork with disadvantaged populations formed the basis of my thesis, which focused on comparing the social networks of women living in poverty with the social networks of women who belonged to different socioeconomic groups. Subsequently, my doctoral dissertation dealt with the subjective wellbeing of two population groups who had been referred to occupational rehabilitation programs as an opportunity to escape from situations of poverty and exclusion. One group comprised women with disabilities and the other women who experienced occupational barriers. My work presented a conceptual framework for examining how the subjective wellbeing of women with disabilities, their living environment, and their degree of hope work together and determine their level of functioning and integration into society.

My doctoral work led to me forming a collaboration with the International Wellbeing Group, led by Professor Robert Cummins; I later translated the Adult Personal Wellbeing Index into Hebrew. I began to research this concept more deeply, including an exploration of the homeostasis theory of personal wellbeing and, more recently, researching the integration of this theory with self-compassion.

My initial postdoctoral research studies focused on an examination of the factors that are likely to increase the sense of subjective wellbeing of parents in life situations that involve ongoing stress. I explored this area in the context of the human–environment approach, i.e., by examining the personal and environmental factors that contribute to individuals’ subjective wellbeing. The study of personal factors considers variables from the world of positive psychology, such as self-efficacy and a sense of hope. The study of environmental factors examines metrics related to peripherality and conditions of exclusion. I integrated my findings from this stage and wrote several articles about diverse populations, including adolescents with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and intellectual–developmental disabilities and their parents.

The research I conducted that involved women in poverty and with disabilities led me to examine these women’s access to higher education. I published two articles about the findings from this research. One presented a critical examination of the life experience of marginalization, focusing on the barriers that single mothers face when seeking to acquire higher education. The second article examined the same phenomenon from the perspective of these women’s children.

Seeking to expand my research into the personal factors that contribute to subjective wellbeing, I formed partnerships with colleagues from the Education and Psychology Departments. These collaborations resulted in fruitful research and led to a series of coauthored articles that focused on parent–child relationships, parenting practices, body image, and physical activity, and the influence of these factors on the subjective wellbeing of parents and adolescents. I also coauthored a book, written in partnership with a colleague from the Education Department, that includes a review of the theory and research in the field of body image, parent–adolescent relationships, and their effects on adolescents’ and their mothers’ subjective wellbeing. The concluding chapter presents an intervention plan designed to help contribute to adolescents and their parents improving their body image and personal wellbeing. I presented some of the findings described in the book at the European Congress of Psychology academic conference.

The next stage of my research was born of my desire to expand research in the field outlined above to clinical populations, due to my increased awareness of the paucity of research into parents of children with emotional and developmental problems. Realizing that there is a great deal of clinical knowledge to be found among colleagues who work in community-based psychiatric services, I began to conduct collaborative research with clinicians who work in the psychiatric clinic for children and adolescents at Ziv Hospital in Safed, Israel. We published the findings of this research in several articles that focused on the connection between children’s and parents’ emotional regulation strategies and the effects of these strategies on children’s anxiety.

My organization, Tel-Hai College, and my collaborating organization, Ziv Hospital, operate in a common geographic space, and we share a commitment to our regional population. Therefore, following the research I and my colleagues had been working on, I wished to establish a permanent research partnership, dedicated to creating interdisciplinary knowledge that integrated social work, psychology, and psychiatry, which would generate not only advancement in the field but also promote wellbeing and improved care for the Galilee population.

The initiative to establish a research partnership was realized, and for the past three years I have directed the Joint Research Center of Tel-Hai College and the Psychiatric Clinic for Children and Adolescents, which integrates faculty members and students from the Faculty of Social Sciences and the Faculty of Science and Technology. At the Joint Research Center, I study emotional regulation mechanisms, attachment mechanisms, and self-compassion among parents and children and their effects on children’s metrics of adjustment, anxiety, and depression and on parents’ subjective wellbeing.

Other studies at the Joint Research Center are intended to contribute to the development of scientific, clinical, and applicable knowledge. Examples include a study into the effects on parents’ emotional regulation of a personal accompaniment program to promote a healthy lifestyle in families with children (aged 6 to 12 years) with mental health issues, conducted in collaboration with the Nutrition Science Department. Another study, conducted in partnership with a psychiatrist, the director of the Hospitalization Unit, and the College’s Department of Psychology, is investigating the effects of running therapy in a population of hospitalized children and adolescents.

One of the first tasks we carried out at the Joint Research Center was to create a comprehensive database of all patients who access the Psychiatric Center; this has enabled us to conduct online follow-up of these patients and their conditions. Results from the first tranche of data have been written up, and we have published several articles in peer-reviewed journals. These included an article reporting on a study that validated the Hebrew translation of the Parental Feelings Inventory (PFI) and was published in (*Name of Journal*), a leading monthly journal in the field of social work.

My current research focus is on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of children, adolescents, and parents. An additional component of my research is dedicated to improving the teaching of the group method in social work. I examine different teaching practices and their effects on the development of skills required of students in facilitating group therapy. I also teach a course in group work for undergraduate social work students. Together, my research and teaching experience has broadened my expertise in the field of group social work. This led to me developing a model for teaching the group work method, which I published in (*Name of Journal*). I also initiated and established a training program for group facilitation, within the framework of the College’s External Studies Unit. A track for group work, which I chair, has been established in the MSW program at the College. I have written eight articles on group work: two discuss models for teaching the method, while the others focus on the unique contribution the method makes in increasing students’ sense of curiosity and improving their listening, reflection, and empathy skills.

I have been awarded a number of external research budgets from the Shalem Foundation (which is involved in the development of services in local authorities for people with developmental disabilities), for evaluative research into partnerships for developing services for people with special needs. On the basis of my research track record, I was invited to serve as a judge of research proposals submitted to the Shalem Foundation. I also received funding from the Adult Probation Service of the Welfare Ministry for research into tracking the effectiveness of group therapy, with the goal of measuring the recidivism rate. The report of my findings was published on the Welfare Ministry website.

Another recently completed study, funded and conducted in partnership with the Child and Youth Service, led to the creation of guidelines for decision-making regarding the joint or separate placement of siblings in out-of-home placements. The results were published in three research reports, in guidelines that can be found on the Welfare Ministry website, and in an article in the journal *Society and Welfare* (*Hevra veRevacha*). Another study, funded by the Chief Scientist of the Ministry of Education, explored the use of the “learning from successes” model for identifying operating principles that contribute to educational achievements among MABAR (regular matriculation track) students and the effect of this process on developing a sense of self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation among these students. This research led to the creation of an intervention model. The findings of this research were published in a report that can be found on the website of the Chief Scientist’s office at the Ministry of Education. Another research grant was received from the National Insurance Institute, to support a collaborative project with colleagues from the Education and Human Services Departments. This project investigated the influence of higher education on female employees in their work, professions, and salaries, among different groups of women. The findings were presented in a report submitted to the National Insurance Institute.

I have been awarded several internal research budgets from my College, including a budget for the Research Center of 100,000 ILS, research grants from the Unit for Gender Equality, and grants for excellence in teaching and research. Recently, I received a grant for publishing the largest number of research articles in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities (five articles in 2020).

In total, I have published 35 articles, a book (without peer review), and a book chapter. I have three additional articles currently under review. I collaborated in writing a “spotlight” for a chapter in a book published by Cambridge University Press, on the connection between intimate relations and a sense of subjective wellbeing. This was the fruit of a collaboration with Professor Charles Hill of Whittier College and a group of other researchers from around the world. The book was launched at the most recent European Congress of Psychology, where I gave a lecture entitled “Spousal support and wellbeing of parents of children with special needs in Israel.”

I supervise graduate students from the Psychology and Nutrition Departments at Tel-Hai College and from the Social Work Department at Haifa University. I serve as a permanent reviewer for several journals, both in Israel, for *Mikbatz: The Israel Journal of Group Psychotherapy*, and abroad, for the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, *Family Relations*, and *Mindfulness*.

During my years of work at Tel-Hai, I have participated in a variety of committees whose goal has been to strengthen connections with the community. Other committees I have participated in at the College level include six years on the disciplinary committee, initially as a member and later as committee chair. For the past four years, I have served as a representative of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities in the Research Authority. I was recently appointed to the position of College ombudsman. My other activities within the department include a wide range of key departmental roles and membership of various other committees; I am also the chair of a master’s degree studies track.

**Future research vision and objectives**

The pursuit of the integration of scientific knowledge and practice is deeply important for me and has been present at each stage of the development of my professional identity as a lecturer, as an educator of future generations of the profession, and as a researcher. In the coming years, I aspire to develop further international collaborations between the Research Center I chair and mental health centers around the world. I also hope to expand my research into comparisons between clinical and general populations. Furthermore, I plan to continue my studies investigating the connection between emotional regulation mechanisms, attachment, and self-compassion for parenting practices and subjective wellbeing, through the use of quantitative research tools and physiological indicators in combination with neuroscientific knowledge stemming from investigations into the neurophysiological and neurobiological effects of self-compassion protocols.

I plan to conduct a longitudinal study to examine the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically the effects of the pandemic on the emotional and behavioral indices of children and teenagers and to follow the study population over time. I intend to deepen the knowledge base about interventions focused on self-compassion, with clinical populations and health care professionals, by carrying out research with leading researchers from overseas, such as Dr. Kristin Neff, and clinicians from the Psychiatry Department, to expand compassion-based research to populations of preschool-age children and their parents.

In the field of group work, I plan to deepen my research into group social work and the teaching of this method, as previously described, and seek to understand its unique attributes for assisting the target populations of the social work profession.