**Position Paper**

**Teaching Family Perspective in Understanding Aliya and Immigration Processes**

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**The Immigration Process from a Family Perspective**

Immigration in Israel is one of the major processes in the history of the state since its establishment and until today. The State of Israel continues to absorb Olim and immigrants from around the world and cope with the acclimation of new populations to a state with cultural characteristics, institutional structuring, and norms different from their origin country.

The immigration process is characterized by a significant change in extant relationships between family members and between families and their new environment. Every individual in the family is influenced by and influences the other family members in a reciprocal relationship. All of these dictate changes in the family’s boundaries, organization, hierarchy, and sub-systems (Minuchin, Nichols, & Wai; Young, L. 2007).

The changes occurring within an immigrant family, manifested in its being disconnected from its familiar and supportive cultural environment and emerged in one whose values are different and often foreign, may cause the parents to lose confidence in their parental functioning. In such situations, children and adolescents often assume responsibility for the family and their parents (Walsh, S. et al., 2006); Slonim-Nevo, V. et al., 1999, Weisskirch, R. S., 2010).

Thus, while working with immigrants, it is advisable to plan a family intervention according to the systems approach, and not focus solely on individual treatment, because the individuals in the family, especially the children, are dependent on one another and highly impacted by the familial relationships formed during and after the Aliya (Slonim-Nevo, Sheraga, Mirsky, 1999).

In the following sections, I will present in detail changes that take place within and between the family’s different sub-systems: children, parents, grandparents; and will define processes that take place in the encounter between agents of treatment and immigrant families. The last section will be dedicated to important issues in teaching about family’s in immigration.

**Changes in Children and Adolescent in the Immigration Process**

One of thedevelopments that occur in Olim and immigrant families are changes in the family hierarchy when role reversal occurs and children and adolescents assume responsibility for the family and their parents.

Among the reasons for systematic and hierarchal changes in the family is the faster acclimation of children due to a larger number of connections with the absorbing population. In contrast, the parents are less involved in active contact with the absorbing society and therefore have fewer spontaneous opportunities to learn a new language and culture (Cheung, Chudek, & Heine, 2011; Titzmann, 2012; Telzer, 2011).

Another reason is the loss of the family’s resources and support systems combined with acclimation difficulties. In this situation, children often become mediators or translators for their parents when needed (Tricket & Jones, 2016; Yakhnich, 2005; Kuperminc, et al., 2013), as well as being the best source of information for their parents (Orellana, M. F., 2009). The gap between the values of the absorbing society and those of the immigrant family and their origin culture, may create among adolescent dual loyalties and in turn lead to conflict between parents and children.

For many adolescents and children, the immigration process is an event that may cause stress, thereby putting them at risk for developing many manifestations of distress, such as high levels of depression, anxiety, and somatic complaints (Ponizovsky; Tartakovsky & Mirsky, 2007; Kurman & Roer-Strier, 2012; Yakhnick, 2008).

At the same time, among possible positive outcomes of the role reversal phenomenon in immigration is family cohesion (Dorner, Orellana, & Jimenez, 2008; Ponizovsky et al., 2012).

Therefore, it is recommended to relate to difficulties experienced by children within the broader family context and employ appropriate family intervention that will treat the child as part of a familial system in interaction with a new cultural environment.

**Parental Perspective in the Immigration Process**

Situations of cultural transition may constitute a test for the stability and continuity of parental roles and place upon family members an emotional burden that generates burnout and stress. Immigration challenges the immigrant parents’ existing perceptions of parenthood and forces them to conduct ongoing cultural negotiation.

Every culture has its own definition of “ideal childcare,” which stems from the systems of expectations and objectives that the society puts in place (Roer-Strier &Rozental, 2001). In this context, the image of “the adaptive adult” is a metaphor that organizes within it the ideologies and approaches to child rearing with which the parents identify, and influences their parenting style in a way that may or may not be conscious (Roer-Strier, 2001).

In the process of cultural transition, the immigrant parents will employ different strategies of acclimation to the new environment, which move along a continuum between complete isolation and complete self-deprecation (Roer-Strier, 1996). The choice of strategy is contingent upon factors such as: the extent to which the parents value both the origin and absorbing cultures, the reason that led the family to immigrate, cultural gaps, social and economic changes, and the experience of the first engagement with the education system and professional support agents (e.g. social workers, physicians, community workers, etc.) in the new culture (Roer-Strier, 2001).

Another challenge facing immigrant parents is within their couple relationship, when the balance between them may be destabilized as a result of the pressures of the acclimation process (Remennik, 2005; Roer-Strier et al., 2010).

In light of this, it is recommended to study a parenting model from the origin country in order to become familiar with the family’s present social and cultural context.

**Intergenerational Relations Within the Immigrant Family**

As part of the dramatic changes in the family system during the immigration process we also witness changes in intergenerational relationships. Often, Olim families decide to live in a three-generational structure in Israel, even though they did not live together in the origin country.

Grandparenting, which is considered a significant life experience, entails among middle-aged immigrants painful emotions due to the cultural gaps between them and their grandchildren, especially when the relationship style is “involved grand parenting,” which includes frequent engagement between grandparents and grandchildren and significant involvement in the everyday raising of the grandchildren.

The contribution of grandparents in caring for grandchildren is considerable alongside the loneliness they experience as a result of the growing culture gaps (Akhar & Choi, 2004).

Cultural characteristics and difficulties as a result of the immigration have a substantial effect on the way aging parents are treated. Therefore, it is recommended to take into account the understanding of intergenerational relations in the cultural context and in the context of immigration.

**Cultural Competence and Processes of Countertransference in Working with Immigrant Families**

Therapeutic work with immigrants is based on the assumption that there are gaps between therapist and patient, and that the therapist must develop “cultural competence” skills – to be aware of these gaps, to address them, and to know how to bridge between them in a non-judgmental manner (NASW, 2001).

Acquiring knowledge of the “other” is a necessary condition for working with them. This type of knowledge will usually include the history of the group from which their family originates and about the family itself – social and familial perceptions, worldview, norms, values, communication styles, and behavioral characteristics (Nadan, Y, Weinber-Kurnik, G., & Ben-Ari, A. 2015).

Knowledge about typical and common problems in the society from which patients come and their attitudes toward receiving professional help and patterns for seeking help may contribute to creating a therapeutic context (Al-krenawi, A. & Graham, J. R., 2011).

The relationship that develops between a social worker and their clients engender reactions, on part of the professional, which are related to their perceptions as an individual, especially their cultural perceptions. These perceptions may unconsciously constitute blind spots for the therapist, which in turn may influence, and even undermine, the therapeutic process (Holmes, 1999). This is part of the cultural countertransference process in therapy where experience and cognitive and emotional beliefs that exist on different levels of the therapist’s consciousness intersect (Mirsky, 2011; Yedidia, 2005).

The therapist must develop a high level of reflectiveness and self-awareness not only toward their own origin, cultural values, beliefs, and prejudices, but also toward a parallel internal dialogue of the “personal” and the “professional” that touches upon their many loyalties—to the state, the ethnic group, the dominant society, and the professional role (Baum & Nuttman-Shwartz, 2008; 2011).

The ability to recognize these differences provides the therapist with the ability to contain the same cultural gaps and provide help/aid without judgment (Nadan, Y., Weinber-Kurnik, G,. & Ben-Ari, A, 2015).

**Important Issues for Teaching about Families in Immigration**

While all of the following topics can be learned from the professional literature, a more significant learning outcome can be achieved through interviews with Olim and immigrants who come from families with different structures and by viewing documentary and feature films that provide demonstrations of processes of change and arouse discussion in the classroom. Likewise, examples from the students’ practical work can deepen the discussion.

* **Processes of change in the family in the immigration process**: Changes in the overall family system, in role allocation and relationships between the different sub-systems, such as children, couple, parents; changes in intergenerational relationships; changes that occur between family and society on the meso, eco, and micro levels and their impact on the family’s functioning in general, and on the individuals, in particular.
* **Immigration crisis among children and adolescents**: Role reversal and how it impacts acclimation; identity crisis and construction of a composite identity; unique difficulties in the education system; identification of at-risk situations and groups.
* **Factors shaping parental functioning**: Perceived image of adaptive adult, gaps in parental perceptions between the origin country and Israel, parents’ acclimation styles to the new culture, each parent’s personal coping of with the pressures of immigration, such as acquiring a new language, employment integration; changes in the couple relationship; evaluation of support systems.
* **Intergenerational relations in the immigration process**: Intergenerational residential patterns in the origin country and in Israel, reasons for choosing the current residence; the role of grandparents in raising grandchildren in both the cultural and immigration contexts; unique difficulties in caring for senior Olim parents.
* **Cultural competence in working with families in immigration**: Familiarity with the student’s self-perceptions regarding family, and perceptions of parental functioning and family functioning norms; familiarity with the origin culture of immigrant families; increasing awareness to processes of deferment and cultural countertransference.

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