

# The Center for Women's Health Studies and Promotion at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev



המרכז לחקר וקידום  
בריאות האשה

The BGU Center for Women's Health  
Studies and Promotion

ANNUAL REPORT ACADEMIC YEAR 2023-2024

THE CENTER MARKS 25 YEARS (1999-2024)



1. **Name of the Center:** THE BEN-GURION UNIVERSITY OF THE NEGEV (BGU) CENTER FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH STUDIES AND PROMOTION

2. **Center Director:** Prof. Julie Cwikel, PhD, Emerita from the Spitzer Department of Social Work

3. **Center Advisory Board**

Prof. Raz Jelinek, Vice President and Dean for Research and Development

Prof. Nirit Ben-Aryeh Debby, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Prof. Reli HersHKovitz, MD, Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences

Prof. Aya Biderman, MD, Family Medicine, Emerita

Dr. Johanna Czamanski-Cohen, the School of Creative Arts Therapies & Emili Sagol Creative Arts Therapies Research Center at the University of Haifa

Dr. Ofer Emanuel Edelstein, Department of Social Work

Prof. Ephrat Huss, Department of Social Work

Dr. Michal Liebergall-Wischnitzer, the Faculty of Medicine, Hebrew University

Ms. Orly Liberman, Recanati School of Nursing, Emerita

Prof. Eyal Sheiner, Chairman, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology B, Soroka University Medical Center, Faculty of Health Science, BGU

Prof. Ilana Shoham-Vardi, Department of Epidemiology, Emerita

Prof. Shifra Shvarts, Faculty of Health Sciences, Emerita

Dr. Yanna Shraga, Department of Social Work, Emerita

Dr. Nirit Gordon, Adjunct Lecturer in the Department of Social Work

**Center Steering Committee**

Prof. Aya Biderman, MD, Family Medicine

Prof. Julie Cwikel, Department of Social Work

Dr. Ofer Emanuel Edelstein, Department of Social Work

Prof. Ilana Shoham-Vardi, Department of Epidemiology

Dr. Jennifer Ben-Shimol, Barzilai Hospital

Welcome to our 2023-2024 Annual Report –  
celebrating a quarter century of research, activism and women's health  
promotion, in the Negev and in Israel.

We thank our generous donors – we couldn't have done it without you!



We want to thank all our committed and generous donors, some of whom have been with the Center for quite a few years. Some of them responded to our calls for support during the war to meet the needs of the many students, faculty and BGU personnel who needed trauma-focused therapy, delivered over the BGU psychological hot-line (see page 11). Other donors helped us to meet the needs of new mothers as they struggled with the after-math of October 7<sup>th</sup>. Everyone pitched in and some, like **Dr. Ofer Edelstein**, one of the Center's steering committee members, rose to meet the needs of the many soldiers mobilized in field units, and started a meal service for them. He and his wife, **Ruthi**, and his friends turned out 100s of home-cooked meals each week and are still doing this incredible mitzvah.

#### 4. Meet our Center Staff (by alphabetical order)

**Ms. Roza Abu-Agina** is the M2M coordinator for Segev Shalom and the unrecognized settlements. She has started her studies at Sapir College to become a social worker. **We wish her all success!**

**Dr. Samira Alfayumi-Zeadna**, Post-doctoral fellow at the Center, and Director of M2M for Bedouin women in the Negev. Samira supervises **Roza Abu Agina** in the M2M program for Bedouin women.

**Ms. Orit Cohen-Rothman**, the Center Administrator; is also a women's health yoga teacher, a yoga teacher for those with cancer and specializes in yoga for pregnant women. Her connections with women from all different walks of life has been a great asset to the work of the Center.

**Prof. Julie Cwikel**, Center founder and director. Julie formally retired from teaching but is still running the Center, doing cutting-edge research and supervising MSW students doing their PhD.

**Ms. Meirav Hochman** is the M2M coordinator for Beer Sheva and environs and a breast-feeding consultant as well. She brings her diverse skills to the benefit of the women of the Beer Sheva area.

**Ms. Limor Niego**, Director of Special Programs and coordinator of the Conference planned for May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2025 on Menopause - Medical and Psychosocial Aspects.

**Ms. Ilana Schmidt**, Senior Supervisor, Mom to Mom (M2M), doctoral student in combined MA thesis-PhD thesis track evaluating the "Use of Positive Parenting groups on Mothers of Premature Infants". **Supervisors: Dr. Kyla Marks** (head MD Soroka NICU), **Prof. Eyal Sheiner**, Chair of Department of OB-GYN, Soroka, BGU, **Prof. Ephrat Huss**, Social Work. **We wish her all success!**

## ***New Members of the Center's Promotion Advisory Board***

### **Dr. Jennifer Ben Shimol:**

For the last 2 years, she has served as head of the rheumatology department at Barzilai Medical Center. She completed all of her medical training in New York City, and moved to Israel 6 years ago, working at Rabin Medical Center and Wolfson Medical Center before migrating to the South of Israel. In addition to caring for patients in both the inpatient and outpatient settings, she devotes time to teaching medical trainees at different stages in their career. She also engages in numerous clinical research projects. One of her primary interests includes exploring issues uniquely related to different stages of womanhood and how they overlap with the psychomedical aspects of both autoimmune diseases and conditions of chronic pain and fatigue. In particular, she is engaged in understanding the tensions within the female patient-clinician relationship and exploring different ways to bridge these challenges.



## *New staff members*



**Ms. Meirav Hochman** is a IBCLC certified breastfeeding consultant, with more than 12 years of experience working with pregnant women and new mothers. She has established mother's circles in Lehavim and Beer-Sheva.

She has a bachelor's degree in health systems management and a master's degree (track with thesis) in public health (MPH), from Ben Gurion University. The master's degree dealt with epidemiology, health promotion and preventive medicine on conjunctivitis and other infectious diseases.



**Ms. Devorah Fine Sisu**, is a senior interviewer for the data collection project of VOXWELL.ai, being carried out in Kupot Holim family medicine clinics in Beer Sheva and Kiryat Gat (see pages 11-12 for further details). Devorah is also coordinating the translation into English of our recently published book "Advances in Feminist Treatment" See page 29.

She is also a woman and mother who believes in sisterhood and works with women in different circles of life, with drug addicts and young adults in transition. She is a trained family constellation facilitator, a hydrotherapist, dance instructor and crisis center education facilitator.



**Ms. Noah Shviger-Weiss, Isha Be-Shela Clinical Manager**, is a MSW social worker and PhD student in the fourth year at the Faculty of Social Work BGU. In the last decade, the main part of her professional activity is focused on the physical and mental health of women, while combining practical treatment in the field with research and theoretical development.

Her areas of specialization include treatment of complex trauma, dealing with health difficulties, and emotional support in matters of fertility, pregnancy and childbirth. Over the years, she has completed a variety of professional specializations and

accumulated diverse therapeutic tools, which allowing her to adapt the therapeutic approach to the unique needs of each patient. She combines individual therapy with guiding women's groups in various fields, including: personal and occupational empowerment, accompanying mothers whose children have been sexually abused, emotional preparation for childbirth, and coping with the transition to parenthood. Noa's professional concept is based on a deep connection between mind and body, with a special emphasis on psychosomatic aspects of women's health, which are expressed in different and varied ways.



### **Meet Ms. Limor Niego, a veteran at the Center – 10 years!**

She is a psychotherapist, specializing in the treatment of postpartum depression, support for postpartum women and treatment of crisis situations. She has a BSW from TAU, and her MSW from BGU. She is a graduate of psychotherapy studies at the Faculty of Medicine BGU. She has completed continuing education in: SEE FAR CBT training course for dealing with trauma, and the SE (Somatic Experiencing) training course for dealing with trauma and has trained in EMDR Phase 1. She was the coordinator of M2M for 6 years and then became the clinical director of Isha Be-Shela for 4 years. She is now moving to a new position as of December 1, 2024, as the new director of Continuing Education and Conferences at the Center. She has taught in the BSW program of BGU.



**Dr. Samira Alfayumi-Zeadna** is a nurse and researcher, with an emphasis on women's health, especially during pregnancy and after childbirth. In 2020, she founded the mother-to-mother program for the Bedouin population of the Negev at the Center. In addition, she serves as a senior lecturer in the nursing department at Ashkelon college. In previous years, she served as a regional nursing director in community clinics, and as a manager Nursing at the Women's Health Center.



**Ms. Roza Abu-Agina**, is a mother of five lovely children, and worked for many years as a medical secretary. Today she owns a clinic for complementary medicine where she treats women through massage, reflexology and other techniques. She is the coordinator of the Center's "Mom to Mom" program at Segev Shalom. She currently studies Social Work at Sapir College.



**Ms. Orit Cohen-Rothman**, an accomplished **Center Administrator** who came to us with rich administrative experience from the **Zlotowski Center for Neuroscience**. She is also a **senior teacher of yoga for women**, including pregnant women. As a yoga therapist, she teaches yoga to patients coping with cancer. She brings her skills and insights into her work in the best fashion possible and we are very glad that she is coordinating our Center's work. She is also the administrator for the VOXWELL grant collecting data from Kupat Holim clinics in Beer Sheva and Kiryat Gat (see page 12).

## *Center Community Activities*

We invite you to read our report for the years 2023-2024, which describes the research and community activities of the Center, **now marking its 25th year**. **Prof. Cwikel** continues to be Center's Director as part of her activities as an **Active Retiree**.



The Iron Swords War that began on October 7<sup>th</sup> 2023 put the Center and its activities in “trauma-response mode”. Prof. Cwikel worked together with her colleague, **Dr. Alexandra Klein Rafaeli**, a clinical psychologist who made aliya from New York, who headed up the student counselling services at **BGU**. Together with her students, **Yotam Schori** and **Ben Katz**, they set up the

**Psychological First-Aid Line** that went into action already on October 11<sup>th</sup> and gave professional

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to the whole BGU community, students, administrative staff, academic staff, parents of students, partners of students mobilized in the War and visiting academics caught here during the War.

The more than 20 professionals who volunteered on the Kav (as we called it), took 4-hour shifts to respond to requests for emergency psychological first aid. Some only needed one hour of conversation with a therapist before they found their psychological safe place and were able to go on with their lives. Others needed more than one session and some felt they needed face to face personal psychotherapy. **Alexandra** trained and supervised and **Yotam** fielded all the requests such as “ This person XXX who asked to be contacted ASAP, is in the reserves and can only speak with someone in the evening. So, whoever is on evening shift, please make sure to call him.” Or “who on the Kav knows how to access services for a wounded soldier, who is the partner of our student?”.

In my volunteer shifts on the Kav, I spoke to students, family members, people in the army, academic staff, administrative staff, and gradually came to believe in the power of a short-term phone session for those who had been functioning OK before October 7th. Some I later met in person for psychotherapy. There was peak in requests for psychological first-aid around the time that the academic year opened in January of 2024 and over the course of the next few months the need slowly receded and then was absorbed in the regular student psychological services. It was an amazing accomplishment for all involved in volunteering on the Kav, as we counseled over 300 persons in those 5 months when the Kav was working full time.

### **Ongoing research projects**

We continue our work on two grants that we started on last year. One was to expand our work on **biomarkers of anxiety and depression** through the use of *voice* in primary care together with senior BGU and Kupat Holim **Clalit** Family Physicians, **Prof. Aya Biderman** and **Dr. Temira Feinsilver**. We have now accumulated a data set of over 200 patients from family medicine clinics in Beer Sheva and Kiryat Gat. This is an additional round of data that is added to our start-up, now called **VOXWELLAI**. We started working on this project in May 2020, when at the start of the COVID19 pandemic, **BGU President, Prof. Daniel Chamovitz** called on senior researchers to adapt their ongoing projects to address some aspect of coping with the pandemic (see pages 11-12 for more information on this startup). See the next page for a full report.

The second grant, from the **Unit to Improve Teaching at BGU**, was to create podcasts of different lectures to help teach topics relating to trauma to 3<sup>rd</sup> year BSW and 2<sup>nd</sup> year MSW students. Collaborating on this grant were M2M coordinator from 2023, **Ms. Yulia Yehezkel**, **Ms. Limor Niego** and **Dr. Nirit Gordon**, who were both lecturers in the BSW and MSW programs, respectively. Now that the first year has been completed, we are adding additional podcasts that are important in treating trauma, especially in light of the national post-trauma of the Iron Swords war. This endeavor is continuing with the generous support of **Ms. Tammy Rubin** of Colorado who has supported the Center's efforts in teaching, training and treatment around trauma. See page 26 for the list of podcasts that are available from the Center now. See page 27 for a report on her visit to the Center this year.

***Community Activities: Mom to Mom (M2M)*** is now in its 23rd year.

This program provides support for new mothers and their infants in Beer-Sheva and the Negev. The project is designed to help mothers cope with the first year of parenting through home visits of volunteer mothers in the Jewish sector and direct support from the coordinators in the Bedouin sector. The aim is to provide support and guidance to mothers of the Negev who feel that they lack adequate support to make the transition smoothly. We are proud that we are now able to run M2M in both the Jewish and Bedouin communities of the Negev. Once a month, meetings were held at the university with the volunteers participating in the program, and in addition, training for new volunteers was held.



Volunteers doing crafts for emotional regulation for their mothers.

The next picture shows us giving out the Center's revised cookbook for Mom to Mom volunteers. The cookbook was tested and tasted recipes collected from our staff and the Mom to Mom volunteers – it is now in its third revision and still going strong.



During the last year, an initial contact was made with over 100 new mothers. Some of them came to us through referral from the Tipat Halav (Mother and Baby Clinics) and community health clinics, some applied independently, and some were located by our volunteers who visit Soroka maternity wards A & B once a week. Most of the mothers were satisfied with an initial conversation or telephone consultation with the program coordinator and about 35 expressed an interest in participating in the project and receiving individual guidance from a volunteer or participating in a face-to-face workshop with other mothers.

During 2024, two in-person groups for mothers on maternity leave were opened as part of the program. In each workshop 10 new mothers and their newborn babies participated. Each of the workshops included 6 fascinating sessions on various topics surrounding motherhood - for example, about the experiences of childbirth and motherhood, promoting better infant sleep with an attachment approach, coping with pregnancy and birth in the shadow of war, and more... Each session started with a short yoga

practice by the Center's own **Orit Cohen-Rotman**, giving the mothers useful tools for releasing stress, moving the body and connecting to internal anchors.

Both workshops received excellent feedback from the mothers who participated. Our "Mom to Mom" program was presented at a community conference for mothers, which took place on August 2024 in Be'er Sheva, in honor of International Breastfeeding Week, in collaboration with the health insurance funds, the Ministry of Health, the Be'er Sheva Municipality and other NGOS which helped to sponsor this day of activities. During the conference, a lecture was given on the topic: "Breastfeeding - preventive medicine for life" by Merav Hochman, the M2M coordinator, who is also an IBCLC certified lactation consultant.

Currently there are 9 female volunteers in training, which should be completed their training by the end of December 2024. In addition, women crochet-mavens from the Lehavim "Palace" Retirement Home, continued volunteering to knit dolls, toys, hats and blankets for us, which are lovingly given by the "Mom to Mom" volunteers to the new mothers.



## ***Mom to Mom (M2M) for Bedouin Women – Segev Shalom***



### **Partnerships within the healthcare system**

1. Meetings were held with other professionals from the Maternal and Child Health Clinics (MCHC) in the Bedouin community to familiarize them with the project and to encourage referrals into M2M. Recruitment of birthing mothers began in the villages of Lakiya and Segev-Shalom, especially through the MCHC. We included both pregnant and postpartum Bedouin women with young infants (up to one year). Up to this date, more than 150 mothers have been referred to the M2M program from the beginning of the project in the Bedouin communities in southern Israel (2021), and 130 mothers joined the program. In addition, we are now building a partnership with a nurse from an unrecognized village (Beer Hadaj) who will also be referring new mothers to the M2M project.
2. We conducted several meetings with nurses, physicians and social workers from Soroka University Medical Center from the various maternity wards to familiarize them with the project and encourage them to refer women in need of professional support in the perinatal period.

This project, in contrast to the project among Jewish birthing women of the Negev, does not use volunteers, as in our initial organization of M2M we found that having volunteers come into the home is not culturally acceptable among the Bedouin community.

### **M2M support groups**

All groups were conducted in Segev Shalom with the collaboration and support of MCHC.

1. During February-May 2023 we conducted an open M2M positive parenting group. This group included 8 new mothers from Segev Shalom and unrecognized villages and had 5 sessions. The focus was on the issues of Bedouin culture, support for mothers, positive parenting, and different activities for mothers and children. This was led by **Roza Abu Agina**.
2. In November-December 2023 we conducted group meetings with mothers from Segev-Shalom. This group included 8 new mothers in 5 sessions. The focus was on the first and most difficult months of the war, to relieve stress and keep the children busy who were at home with their mothers all day. This meeting was in collaboration also with the MCHC. These meetings were conducted in the mothers' houses. Each session took an hour and a half. The activities included reading a story and various creative activities to do with babies. In addition to the group meetings, Roza conducted home visits for those mothers who could not attend the group meetings.
3. A group program in collaboration with the Hosen Center and MCHC in Segev Shalom. Hosen Center (The Oti Association's Cohen-Harris Resilience Center) is committed to bolstering civilian resilience in the face of traumas, crises, and mass disasters, operating at local, national, and international levels. They opened a new center in Segev-Shalom. This group included 9 new mothers from the area and had 8, hour and a half sessions (Dec. 2023 – Feb 2024). Another group is planned for this coming year.
4. Baby massage workshop: During Feb 2024, Roza conducted a baby massage workshop. This group included 8 mothers from Segev Shalom and had 2 sessions, 4 mothers in each session.

### **M2M personal support from the M2M coordinators**

Since January 2024, 15 new mothers joined M2M. We continue to provide personal support and education to the mothers in the M2M program in a variety of areas: parenting, breastfeeding, coping with the new situation of parenting, proper nutrition for postpartum women and during breastfeeding, use of nutritional supplements, infant emotion regulation and temperament, the role of the parents in emotional regulation, and promoting and maintaining the mental health of postpartum mothers through use of personal and family resources, options for treatment, and information about medications as PPD treatment.

The frequency of personal meetings (face to face or phone) depended on the medical and mental state of the woman. In the case of a mother with a medical problem, hospitalization, or distinct mental health issues, we maintained frequent personal support and sometimes spoke on a daily basis. If the mental and physical condition of the mother was good, meetings were once a week or once every two weeks. Mothers who did not answer the phone, received a message on WhatsApp. Also, pregnant women received support during pregnancy which continued into the postpartum period. Support during pregnancy included: education about pregnancy, the importance of follow-up, nutrition supplements, anemia prevention, avoidance of prenatal depression, social support, and medical issues.

### **Partnerships within the community**

1. A meeting with Bedouin women in December 2023 was organized by the local council in the city of Rahat. **Dr. Samira Alfayumi-Seadna** presented on behalf of M2M. The presentation topic was women's mental health, post-partum depression, and genetic disease in the Bedouin community. 35 women participated in the meeting.
2. Meeting with the early childhood team in the village of Hura to discuss opening an M2M project in the village. This issue was postponed due to the war and the elections to the local authority in Hura. Hopefully soon we will renew contact with the representatives.

### **International conference:**

Samira participated in the WAIHM (World Association of Infant Mental Health) conference in July 2023. The presentation topic: "Cultural Adaptation of Mom-2-Mom to Address Perinatal Mental Health Challenges Among Bedouin Mothers in Southern Israel". The participation in the conference was made possible through the generous support by the Two Lilies fund.



### **Publication of papers:**

1. Cultural Adaptation of Mom to Mom to Address Postpartum Depression and Parenting Stress Among Arab Bedouin Mothers in Southern Israel (submitted)
2. The Relationship between Postpartum Depression and Quality of Life among Mothers in the First Year After Childbirth: Ethnic Differences (revise and resubmit)

**Continuing research: Assessment of vocal markers to triage depression and anxiety using AI. Introducing: VOXWELLAI**

**Prof. Julie Cwikel and Dr. Dan Vilenchik** (Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Engineering), **with the assistance of Mr. Ruslan Sergienko**, data manager and doctoral student at the Faculty of Health Sciences, have established an algorithm that is a **triage tool for the early detection of symptoms of clinical depression and anxiety** and can differentiate between no or low symptoms levels, significant symptom levels but not acute mental health distress and high distress requiring immediate attention by a mental health professional. We call our start-up **VOXWELL.AI**.

**Background on our start-up:** The World Health Organization (2019) estimates that 7.4% of global Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) are lost due to mental and behavioral disorders, with unipolar depression the third leading cause of disability worldwide. Diagnosis of mental disorders generally involves a clinical interview with a psychiatrist and/or filling out a battery of questionnaires, which can be burdensome and intrusive, requiring significant time as well as compliance and communication skills. Thus, there is an urgent need for an innovative, non-intrusive, and effective detection method of mental illness symptoms.

While research using Machine Learning (ML) to evaluate **usinf** voice as a biomarker, the obtained accuracy so far has not met clinical requirements. Our algorithm builds on our research from four different samples since March 2020, and we have developed an automatic pipeline that provides high-quality, correctly labeled voice recordings that differentiate between persons with and without clinical symptoms of depression and anxiety, the two most common mental health challenges seen in primary care in the community. This gives rapid, inexpensive answers to complicated clinical questions such as: who to process further for evaluation, who to send directly to psychological treatment/psychiatric attention and who is at low risk for current mental health impairment. Our work with family physicians has shown that the algorithm is particularly helpful in meetings with new patients. The results are validated against commonly used diagnostic tools designed for community epidemiological studies. We are now in the **“pre-seed funding stage”** when we are looking for investors to help further develop our algorithm, which is unique in the world, due to the comprehensive data sets we have collected. A paper on the method has been resubmitted after revisions to a high-quality mental health journal.

**Please contact me at [jcwikel@bgu.ac.il](mailto:jcwikel@bgu.ac.il) for more information on this investment opportunity.**

## **Graduate Students Creating New Research in Women's Health**

**Two graduates this year: Alex Davidoy:** "Neurofeedback training as a tool that contributes to function and regulation of the emotions under stress among Israeli soldiers in IDF" supervised by **Prof. Julie Cwikel** and **Prof. Talma Hendler**, Tel Aviv University, Sackler Medical School. Alex's received his Phd. at this year's graduation ceremony.

**Nuha Sliman:** "The effect of family structure on children's morbidity in the first year of life in Arab society". Jointly supervised by **Prof. Jonathan Anson** and **Prof. Julie Cwikel**. Nuha is proud to have completed her research together with the birth of two children. A paper from her thesis has just been published <sup>1</sup>

**Saying sad farewells to our recent PhD student, Dr. Avigdor Kaner( (1955-2024), of blessed memory,** who passed away in September 2024 after fighting a long illness. **Avigdor z"l** was supervised by **Prof. Dorit Segal-Engelchin & Prof. Julie Cwikel**.

Avigdor was born in Romania and came to Israel at the age of 3. He studied Mechanical Engineering at the Technion and also had a degree in Business Administration. He studied conflict resolution and reconciliation in TAU for his MA. He opened two centers for family reconciliation in Beer Sheva and Tel Aviv. He leaves behind his wife Anat (who works at BGU in the psychology department) and three sons and 3 grandchildren. May his memory be a blessing to all who knew him.

We managed to publish the most important parts of his thesis as “ **The Transition to Fatherhood – evaluation of an online intervention for new fathers**”, in the prestigious British journal: **Psychology Health and Medicine**.<sup>2</sup> and his study was already included in a 2024 scoping review of qualitative studies of paternal perinatal support.<sup>3</sup> For his doctoral research he led 13 online

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<sup>1</sup> Sliman, N, Anson, O., Cwikel, J, Anson, J. (2024). Grandmothers, mothers and infant morbidity among Arab Israeli women. (2024). *Bitachon Soziali*, 123: 115-138.

<sup>2</sup>Kaner, A., Cwikel, J., & Segal-Engelchin, D. (2023). The transition to fatherhood – evaluation of an online intervention for new fathers. *Psychology, Health & Medicine*, 29(5), 1011–1019. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13548506.2023.2260600>

<sup>3</sup>Watkins, A. E., El Zerbi, C., McGovern, R., & Rankin, J. (2024). Exploration of fathers' mental health and well-being concerns during the transition to fatherhood, and paternal perinatal support: scoping review. *BMJ open*, 14(11), e078386.

groups for fathers, essentially establishing a new intervention mode for working with fathers in their transition to parenthood. From his research insights he wrote two children's books **"The Gift that will Stay Forever"** and **"The Stubborn Teardrop"** about how important it is to express what feelings we have stuck inside ourselves.



## **Continuing Ph.D students**

**Lior Deray:** Lior is in the final stages of writing of her PhD as a student in social work, supervised by **Prof. Julie Cwikel**. Her topic: **adjustment of soldiers in combat support roles: effect of background variables, coping strategies, gender and unit atmosphere on drop-out**. This research is taking place in the IDF mental health unit with the collaboration of **Dr. Avishay Antonovsky**. Lior somehow managed to juggle the demands of a PhD with being the Mental Health Officer for IDF in charge of the Gaza region -a job that became immensely more challenging following the October 7<sup>th</sup> War (2023). She since has been promoted to be the Head of the IDF mental health unit for the whole country, taking over the position that was filled until this May 2024, by my other PhD graduate, **Dr. Alex Davidov**, all while being the proud mother of three children.

**Merav Daniel:** Merav is an educational psychologist who is now writing her thesis on testing a cognitive-behavioral protocol to promote the return to work and earlier functioning among women recovering from breast cancer. Merav started her PhD work just at COVID19 began and this complicated the ability of breast cancer “graduates” who wanted to return to work. She has now completed all her data collection and is in an intensive period of writing. She is being jointly supervised by **Dr. Ofer Edelstein** and **Dr. Svetlana Prokashev** together with **Prof. Julie Cwikel**.

**Ilana Schmidt,** Senior Supervisor, Mom to Mom (M2M), this past year became a doctoral student in combined MA thesis-PhD thesis track. Thesis topic: **Evaluation of positive parenting intervention with parents in the NICU (neo-natal intensive care unit) to improve parental reflective functioning**. Supervisors: **Dr. Kyla Marks** (head MD from the NICU), **Prof. Eyal Sheiner**, Chair of Department of OB-GYN, BGU, **Prof. Julie Cwikel** and **Prof. Ephrat Huss**. She is in the middle of data collection and has completed two rounds of parents’ groups.

## **Post-doctoral supervisor of two PhD students**

These past four years, we were joined by psychologist, **Dr. Alison Stern Perez**, whose expertise is the linguistic structure of **trauma narratives**. We analyzed traumatic birth stories, supplied by **Dr. Tahli Frenkel** of the Interdisciplinary Center in Hertzelia. Alison has developed the **ACORD model** which analyzes both the structure of the spoken message such as the use of pronouns and the non-verbal aspects of the message such as the speed and timbre of the speech patterns. Together, we supervised the PhD work of two students, **Noah Shviger-Weiss (now the clinical director of**

**Isha Be-Shela)** and **Shani Vilchenski-Tannenbaum**. Starting this year, **Dr. Ofer Edelstein** is supervising Noah. Both Noah and Shani are senior clinical social workers working in women's health who are analyzing the birth narratives of women with instrumental interventions at birth (e.g. C-section) and the differences between first and second births, respectively.



Prof. Julie Cwikel and six PhD students past and present

From the left to right (Dr. Efrat Cohen-Neuman, Netta Magen, Julie Cwikel , Dr. Yael Damri, Dr. Merav Rabinovitz, Meirav Daniel and Dr. Shimrit Engelsman)

## ***Isha Be-Shela – Counselling Service for Women and Men in the Negev***

The Center's counselling service, which is the first counselling service in the Negev designed specifically to meet the needs of women and now men, has now been operating for 22 years. During these years, this service has become a well-known and highly regarded psychotherapy service in the Negev. This is reflected in both the growing number of clients who seek our counselling services and in the growing number of referrals from the professional community. Since the beginning of the project, we have seen close to 900 women and men in psychotherapy treatment, with around 80 persons in treatment at any given time, with the average age of 30. Most of them are BGU students. At this current time, we have a waiting list and more people looking for treatment than we have room with the current group of 6 psychotherapists. **Ms. Limor Niego** was the clinical coordinator until November 2024 and conducted the intakes and connects between those looking for therapy and the available psychotherapists. **Ms. Neta Magen** provided supervision in small groups and if needed, individual supervision. **Ms. Matan Einav** also provided small group supervision and gave a workshop on how to terminate treatment in a therapeutic fashion. Matan left this summer as she and her partner have relocated to the UK. Each psychotherapist has their own expertise ranging from complex trauma, eating disorders, health-related issues in psychotherapy including substance abuse, the use of CBT, family therapy, and art in psychotherapy, among other topics. Recently three new therapists joined the Isha Be-Shela group.



After the events of October 7, 2023, we were as shocked as the entire State of Israel.

In the first few days we were busy being in direct and personal contact with the nurses of Soroka and helping as much as possible. As soon as possible, the therapists returned to treat people on Zoom.

After about two weeks, it was possible to return to face-to-face care and the therapists slowly began to return to the therapy clinic's rooms at the university. During this period, we shared with the therapists' team plenty of material and knowledge about trauma, crisis care including self-care for themselves and their families.

A month later, a team meeting was held on zoom where additional tools were taught and there was a fruitful group discussion about the common coping during this challenging time. Later in December 2023 a frontal team meeting was held in which we practiced and studied SE (somatic experiencing) techniques.

During February 2024 we met for training on the subject "guilt" among psychotherapists and in April 2024 we met for a team meeting on the subject "sexuality in the treatment room".

On August 9th 2024 we met for a final meeting for this academic year, where we practiced yoga and built an therapy tool together called a Shake-a-shake "snowglobe". We did this to memorialize one of our colleague, **Lilach Kipnis, z"l** who was murdered on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023 on Kibbutz Beerli and was a graduate of our department and worked with trauma and children in the Gaza Envelope Region.



## **PODCASTS recorded about trauma topics, how to teach them and how to deal with it in therapy**

With the help of the BGU radio manager **Dr. Buzi Raviv** we were able to use the BGU recording studio to record educational and therapeutic training podcasts.

We have recorded a series of 11 podcasts on trauma, entitled: **“Dealing with trauma, depression and grief”**:

1. Trauma and stress - theory and practice (Dr. Tammy Arush and Limor Niego).
2. Trauma sensitive intake (Prof. Julie Cwikel and Limor Niego).
3. Treatment of trauma through the body (Prof. Julie Cwikel and Limor Niego).
4. Treatment of trauma with yoga (Orit Cohen Rothman and Limor Niego).
5. A narrative approach to trauma therapy (Dr. Taly Leshem and Yulia Yehezkel).
6. Postpartum depression (Prof. Julie Cwikel and Limor Niego).
7. Postpartum depression in Bedouin society (Prof. Julie Cwikel and Dr. Samira Alfiumi-Ziadana).
8. Postpartum depression in Bedouin society (in Arabic) (Dr. Samira Alfiumi-Ziadana and Roza Abu-Agina).
9. Grief - theory and practice (Prof. Julie Cwikel and Limor Niego).
10. Grief – A personal story of coping (Dr. Michal Zaidan and Limor Niego).
11. Sexual issues in the treatment room after 7.10 (Dr. Lital Leshem and Limor Niego).

## ***Tammy Rubin visited us in March 2024***

We were very fortunate to have made the connection with **Ms. Tammy Rubin**, a generous supporter of the Center and the trauma work done by therapists after October 7th. Tammy came to visit in March 2024 to meet our staff members personally. We took her to lunch in the Indian Restaurant in Ringlebloom Street near the BGU campus and then we went to Sde Boker to visit the campus.



## ***John Goldsmith Memorial Award for Environmental Health***



This year's winner of the **Prof. John Goldsmith** memorial prize was **David Ben Shlomo**, a PhD student in the department of chemical engineering, supervised by **Prof. Ronen Berkovitz**. His thesis topic is: "**Development of Stochastic Wall Bounded Turbulent Flow Model to Resuspension**" and he delivered an excellent overview of his work at the prize ceremony which was held on May 6<sup>th</sup> 2024. **Profs. Tee Guidotti** and **Jeff Gordon** were the committee members who evaluated the candidates, and we thank them!

## *New Center publications*

### **The Book "New Methods in Feminist Treatment" PUBLISHED.**

#### **Book launch March, 2024**

The book was finally published in November 2023 by Resling Press and includes chapters by therapists of "Isha Be-shela" and other students and was edited by **Dr. Merav Rabinovich** and **Prof. Julie Cwikel**. The chapters explore the development of feminist treatment in Israel and worldwide and various applied issues in feminist treatment. The book contains these chapters:

#### **First section: the development of feminist therapy- historical aspects**

- a. On the development of the feminist therapy around the world.
- b. On the development of the feminist therapy in Israel.

#### **Second section: research on women and parenting**

- a. The experience of the mothers of sexually abused women.
- b. Between close and far from motherhood- research among women prisoners.
- c. Pregnancy and birth in the world of Halacha- feminist treatment, Orthodox women and the things between them.

#### **Third section: Clinical Practice**

- a. CB ART treatment with a woman who experienced a traumatic birth.
- b. Activist work with adolescents from the experiences in the mentoring program.
- c. Working with a cognitively challenged woman after sexual abuse.
- d. A model for working with treatment transference.
- e. The role of dissociative mechanisms and sensory sensitivity in self-injurious behavior among adolescent girls at risk
- f. Integrative therapy of a woman with Trichotillomania

- g. Transgender children and gender nonconformity: a unique developmental process

#### **Fourth section: Group work from a feminist lens**

- a. Mindfulness based movement therapy- attention and compassion in movement, improvisation and interpersonal relation.
- b. A story followed by painting: implication technique as a mean of conversation about sex roles in the frame of group work with children who experienced domestic violence.
- c. The use of art as an empowerment tool in social work with women in Israel.

**Due the security situation after the October 7<sup>th</sup> War, Prof. Laura S. Brown** was not able to come personally but participated in the book launch by ZOOM, which was hosted by **Sapir College** on February 1<sup>st</sup> 2024. **Dr. Merav Rabinovich** hosted the on-line book launch and collaborated with **Prof. Julie Cwikel, Prof. Shir Daphna-Tekoah** and **Ms. Tamar Wittenberg Szekely**.

We are now in the process of translating the book into English and have enlisted the authors to update their literature reviews. Three new chapters will be written for the new English version of the book, due in 2026. **Ms. Devorah Fine Sisú** is coordinating this project.



## ***Publications and Academic Activities of Center Researchers and Scholars (Listed in Alphabetical Order by Last Name)***

With great pride, we share with you the publications and academic activities of the Center's  
researchers and scholars during 2023--2024

### **Dr. Samira Alfayumi-Zeadna**

#### **Publications:**

Mesquita, A., Costa, R., Bina, R., Cadarso-Suárez, C., Gude, F., Díaz-Louzao, C., Dikmen-Yildiz, P., Osorio, A., Mateus, V., Domínguez-Salas, S., Voursoura, E., Levy, D., **Alfayumi-Zeadna, S.**, Wilson, C. A., Contreras-García, Y., Carrasco-Portiño, M., Saldivia, S., Christoforou, A., Hadjigeorgiou, E., Felice, E., ... Motrico, E. (2023). A cross-country study on the impact of governmental responses to the COVID-19 pandemic on perinatal mental health. *Scientific reports*, 13(1), 2805.

Daoud, N., Carmi, A., Bolton, R., Cerdán-Torregrosa, A., Nielsen, A., **Alfayumi-Zeadna, S.**, Edwards, C., Ó Súilleabháin, F., Sanz-Barbero, B., Vives-Cases, C., & Salazar, M. (2023). Promoting Positive Masculinities to Address Violence Against Women: A Multicountry Concept Mapping Study. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 38(9-10), 6523–6552.

### **Prof. Aya Biderman**

#### **Publications:**

**Biderman, A.**, Avni, Y., Naimer, S., Polachek, Y., Tabenkin, H., & Shvartzman, P. (2024). Tribute to a founding father—Prof. Joe Herman—how to practice Family Medicine. *Family Practice*, 41(3), 386-387.

Zemer, A., Samaei, S., Yoel, U., **Biderman, A.**, & Pincu, Y. (2024). Ketogenic diet in clinical populations—a narrative review. *Frontiers in Medicine*, 11, 1432717.

Hatsek, A., Hochberg, I., Daoud Naccache, D., **Biderman, A.**, & Shahar, Y. (2024). Design of a bi-directional methodology for automated assessment of compliance to continuous application of clinical guidelines, and its evaluation in the type 2 diabetes domain. *Plos one*, 19(5), e0303542.

Kannai, R., Krantal, S., Freud, T., & **Biderman, A.** (2024). Balint groups: an effective tool for improving health professionals' perceived well-being. *Israel Journal of Health Policy Research*, 13(1), 31.

Treister-Goltzman, Y., Samson, T., Rosenberg, R., Granek-Catarivas, M., Gaver, A., Alperin, M., & **Biderman, A.** (2024). Burnout among family medicine residents: a cross-sectional nationwide study. *Israel Journal of Health Policy Research*, 13(1), 5.

Sheffer-Hilel, G., Kachal, J., **Biderman, A.**, Shahar, D. R., & Amar, S. (2024). The attitudes and knowledge of family physicians regarding malnutrition in the elderly: a call for action. *Israel Journal of Health Policy Research*, 13(1), 42.

### **Prof. Julie Cwikel (ORCID Number 0000-0002-7890-8081)**

- 1) A member of the scientific committee of the 23rd conference of the **ICSD** (International Consortium for Social Development) which met August 23-26, 2023, in Gavle, Sweden.
- 2) Recently appointed the Academic Chair of “Engineers without Borders” at BGU which engages in environmental mitigation practice in different areas of the Negev and is starting a project in **Rusinga Island, Kenya** together with student **Yael Agur Orgal**, who is the student coordinator and my colleague, **Suzanne Oshry** of Los Angeles, California, who started the Bright Light Academy school and a CBO (community-based organization) that will be the basis of this initiative, led by **Salmon Iwidi**.

### **Publications:**

**Cwikel, J.** (2024) Social Work for a Greener Planet: Reframing Social Work Skills and Education to Mitigate the Climate Crisis. To appear in special issue of **Cogent Social Sciences**.

Sliman, N, Anson, O., **Cwikel, J.**, Anson, J. (2024). Grandmothers, mothers and infant morbidity among Arab Israeli women. (2024). *Bitachon Soziali*, 123: 115-138.

Kaner, A., **Cwikel, J.**, & Segal-Engelchin, D. (2023). The transition to fatherhood – evaluation of an online intervention for new fathers. *Psychology, Health & Medicine*, 29(5), 1011–1019.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13548506.2023.2260600>

Brown, H., Fisher, J., **Cwikel, J.**, Sarid, O., & Rowe, H. (2023). Cognitive Behavioural and Art-based program (CB-ART): a pilot study in an early parenting centre. *Pilot and Feasibility Studies*, 9(1), 140.

Prins-Engelsman, S., & **Cwikel, J.** (2023). Postpartum Depression Symptoms in Various Sects of Ultra-Orthodox Society in Israel. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 1-20.

### **Submitted Papers**

Yael Stein, Rhonda L. Nelson, Hunter M. Nelson, Julie Goldsmith **Cwikel**, Robert P. Turner, Tamara Tuuminen. (2024). Electromagnetic hypersensitivity syndrome (EHS): historic perspective, natural course of the disease and a treatment protocol. Submitted to Special Issue of Journal of Neurological Sciences. Editor: Dr. Jacques Reis.

Samira Alfayumi-Zeadna, Julie **Cwikel**, Anna Schmitt, Rosa Abu Agina, Ilana Schmidt, Jane West. (2024). Cultural adaptation of Mom to Mom to address postpartum depression and parenting stress among Arab Bedouin mothers in Southern Israel. Submitted.

## Dr. Johanna Czamanski-Cohen

### **Publications:**

Harel, K., **Czamanski-Cohen, J.**, Cohen, M., Lane, R. D., Dines, M., Caspi, O., & Weihs, K. L. (2024). Differences in emotional awareness moderate Cytokine-Symptom associations among breast cancer survivors. *Brain, Behavior, and Immunity*.

Hebi, M., **Czamanski-Cohen, J.**, Azaiza, F., & Weihs, K. L. (2024). Values and their relationship with emotion processing and physical and psychological symptoms among Jewish and Arab breast cancer survivors. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *14*, 1297377.

Weinfeld-Yehoudayan, A., **Czamanski-Cohen, J.**, Cohen, M., & Weihs, K. L. (2024). A theoretical model of emotional processing in visual artmaking and art therapy. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, *90*, 102196.

Hebi, M., **Czamanski-Cohen, J.**, Azaiza, F., & Weihs, K. L. (2024). Art and emotion processing among Arab breast cancer survivors: An exploratory study. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, *87*, 102123.

## Dr. Ofer Emanuel Edelstein

### **Publications:**

Shvedko, A. V., Versolker, Y., & **Edelstein, O. E.** (2023). Translation and Validation of the Motivation to Change Lifestyle and Health Behaviours for Dementia Risk Reduction (MCLHB-DRR) Questionnaire among the General Israeli Population. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *20*(3), 2622.

Malka, M., **Edelstein, O. E.**, Huss, E., & Hillel Lavian, R. (2024). Boosting Resilience: Photovoice as a Tool for Promoting Well-Being, Social Cohesion, and Empowerment Among the Older Adult During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Journal of Applied Gerontology*, 07334648241234488.

## Ephrat Huss:

### **Publications:**

Matattov Sekeles, H., Zadok, I., Zur, H., & **Huss, E.** (2024). ‘I’m no longer myself anymore’: burnout and coping of educators-caregivers in day-care centres in Israel. *Early Child Development and Care*, *194*(5-6), 695-707.

Malka, M., & **Huss, E.** (2024). “What is it like to be (come) a social worker?” professional-identity formation from final-year social work students’ perspectives—photovoice-based study. *Social Work Education*, 1-27.

Ben Asher, S., & **Huss, E.** (2023). Strengthening resilience in refugee children through art and attention to their voices. *Journal of Education in Black Sea Region*. ISSN 2449-2426 [ICR: 2.678] (Online)

**Huss, E.** (in press). [In the place where the words are finished: To contemplate at the past and begin to imagine the future, the use of creative genogram in couples and family therapy]. (Hebrew). **Sichot**.

Malka, M., Edelstein, O. E., **Huss, E.**, & Hillel Lavian, R. (2024). Boosting Resilience: Photovoice as a Tool for Promoting Well-Being, Social Cohesion, and Empowerment Among the Older Adult During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Journal of Applied Gerontology*, 07334648241234488.

## **Dr. Michal Liebergall-Wischnitzer**

### **Publications:**

Shimony-Kanat, S., Gofin, R., Nator, N., Solt, I., Abu Ahmad, W., **Liebergall Wischnitzer, M.**, ... & Kerem, E. (2023). Mothers' Knowledge of Infants' Fever Management: A National Prospective Study. *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, 27(5), 815-823.

**Liebergall-Wischnitzer, M.**, Hopsink, T., Shimony-Kanat, S., Idilbi, N., Woloski Wruble, A., & Noble, A. (2023). Pelvic floor muscle training: A comparison between medical centres employed women, with and without urinary incontinence. *International Journal of Urological Nursing*, 17(1), 50-55.

Zubedat, A., **Liebergall-Wischnitzer, M.**, Solnica, A., Zusman, N., & Dior, U. (2024). An Integrative Approach for Endometriosis-Related Pain. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 46(11), 862-868.

Ilsar, T., **Liebergall-Wischnitzer, M.**, Solnica, A., Zusman, N., Rottenstreich, M., & Katz, L. Prevalence of faecal incontinence in patients with inflammatory bowel disease: Severity and its relationship with quality of life. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*.

Uriel, K., **Liebergall, M. W.**, Yellon, T., Zusman, N., & Solnica, A. (2024). The Prevalence of Urinary Incontinence, Knowledge and Practice of Pelvic Floor Muscle Training Among Female Recruits in Basic Training. *Urology*, 191, 57-63.

Amy Solnica, R. N., **Michal Liebergall, R. N.**, Mizrahi, I., Parnasa, S. Y., Abu-Gazala, M., Pikarsky, A. J., & Shussman, N. (2024). Exploring the Efficacy of the Paula Method of Muscle Exercises in Managing Low Anterior Resection Syndrome Using an Integrative Approach: A Preliminary Study. *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine*, 30(3), 10-14.

## **Dr. Merav Rabinovich**

### **Publications:**

**Rabinovich, M.**, Zion-Mozes, H., & Tuval-Mashiach, R. (2024). Embodiment-based self-management for Israeli breast cancer survivors after mind-body therapy. *Psychology & Health*, 1-18.