**Child maltreatment: The role of the community socio-economic characteristics and ethnicity in Israel.**

Paper/oral presentation Background and Purpose: Studies show that there is a relationship between the cultural and socio economic characteristics of a community and the prevalence of child maltreatment. Most studies on child maltreatment and communities characteristics, focused on communities in western and dominantly Christian countries. The aim of this study is to describe the characteristics of child maltreatment in Israel, and identify the relationships between community ethnic and socio-economic characteristics and the levels of various types of child maltreatment. Further, the study examines the ways in which these communities respond to child maltreatment reports (e.g., the use of court order, waving reporting requirements) and explores to what extend these responses are associated with community characteristics. Methods: The study is based on the data bases of a national annual reporting system that gathers statistics on all new maltreatment reports filed in every local authority in Israel (n= 231 of Israel's 256 local authorities, covering 98% of all children in Israel), and on the prevalence of a range of protective service responses, such as court orders. These data were merged with the local census information provided by Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics. Findings: About 34,000 new reports were filed in 2008 (16-17 reports per 1000 children), of them 45% were of neglect, 34.5% physical abuse, and 17.3% sexual abuse. The number and type of reports were not consistently associated with socio-demographic characteristics of the local authority. Rates of maltreatment reports were significantly lower in Arab localities (11.6 per thousand compared with 18.9 in Jewish ones). Responses to maltreatment were also different for the two ethnic groups. For instance, fewer children were removed from home and fewer court orders were issued in Arab localities. Implications and conclusions: The discussion focuses on the cultural and social factors that may explain these patterns of reports. Explanations are offered both from the cultural perspective and the minority status of Arabs in Israel. The paper proposes ways to address the differences in local responses to maltreatment.

Contacts: **Yafit Sulimani-Aidan, Ph.D student**, Bar Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel, 52900

E-mail: yafitsoul@walla.co.il.

Rami Benbenishty, Ph.D. professor in School of Social Work, Bar Ilan University Ramat Gan, Israel, 52900 E-mail: ramibenben@gmail.com Asher Ben-Arieh, Ph.D, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel E-mail: benarieh@cc.huji.ac.il