

Mental Health & Families

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Objectives:

- Understand prevalence of mental health issues
- Define family
- Intersection of mental health and family in the Orthodox Jewish community

Mental Health Issues Are Everywhere.

- Mental illness is very prevalent:
- $\frac{1}{5}$ of individuals have a mental illness in any given year
- 50 million struggle with mental illness

(NIMH 2023)

Diagnoses – What's the Issue?

- Diagnosis is behavior- and language-oriented
- Conflict with social, religious, and cultural norms

What is a Family?

- Families, according to Herbert and Irene Goldenberg (2013)
- Families are changing.
- Financial demands
- Families are changing shape, too.
- Divorce rates are on the rise in the Orthodox community
- Orthodox Jews also have unique reasons for divorce

Why Orthodox Jews Get Divorced

- Daniel Schonbuch, LMFT
- Yitzchak Schechter

Family Work is Systems Work

- Systems Theory (Michael P. Nichols, 2009)
- A system is “any entity maintained by the mutual interaction of its parts.”
- Family is a system operating within a larger system – society
- Assumes equifinality: in an open system a given end state can be reached by many potential means
- A **Triangle** is “a three-person system...the smallest stable unit of human relations.”

How Does a Family Work?

- Rules
- Narratives
- Complementarity: “reciprocity that is the defining feature of every relationship.”
- “In any relationship, one person’s behavior is yoked to the other’s, *and if one changes, the relationship necessarily changes.*”

Boundaries in the Family

- Boundaries are important –but they cannot be too tight or too loose.
- Rigid boundaries result in *disengagement*
- *Enmeshed* subsystems offer closeness and support but at the expense of independent competence –
- Boundaries are a two-way street, and boundaries with one family member are directly related with their boundaries with another.

Codependency In/And Addiction

- Unique relationship between individual with addiction and family members
- Termed “codependency” or “co-addict”
- A codependent is “one who has let another person’s behavior affect him or her, and who is **obsessed** with **controlling** that person’s behavior.”
- Codependency is a learned behavior
- The disease of addiction will kill the addict, and similarly, the disease of codependence can kill the codependent.

Are You Codependent?

- Codependency has a murky definition
- One-sentence definition: one who lets another person's behavior affect him/her and obsessed with controlling the other person

History of Codependency

- Began in treatment centers for alcoholics
- Was met with speculation
- Pioneers of codependent research noticed behavior patterns of family members of alcoholics

Codependency In Addiction

- A codependent person, according to Melody Beattie, is “one who has let another person’s behavior affect him or her, and who is **obsessed** with **controlling** that person’s behavior.”
- In the words of Rabbi Dr. Twerski, “ the addicted person is plagued by the *compulsion* to use substances...a codependent person has an *obsession* with the addict’s use and the need to control the addict.”
- Addiction and codependency often come together

If there are signs of codependency...

- Recognize
- Responsibility
- Helping or enabling?
- Specific therapies are focused on codependency

Codependency In Addiction

- Women who stay because of community
- Addicts are deeply insecure individuals who do not trust; so are codependents
- Like addiction, codependency is chronic and progressive
- Cannot be cured, but can be managed one day at a time

Family in Judaism

- Traditional and cultural emphasis on family
- A society that places high value on family
- How do we define value? A value is something that is laden with emotion, but more emotion than a preference. Additionally, it is backed by action
- Mitzvot that embody the value: honoring one's parents, having children, education, passing down the mesorah

Intergenerational Issues

- Heavy influence of Holocaust trauma (Dashorst et al.)
- Letzer-Pouew et al (2014) highlighted the gender differences in trauma transmission

Mental Health in the Orthodox Jewish Family

- Minority
- Tailor our understanding of stigma to culture
- What is culture?
- The religious immunity MYTH

What is Stigma?

- **Internalized**
- **Social**
- **Structural**
- **Courtesy**
- Constant fear of rejection and stress may exacerbate the initial diagnosis (Knifton 2012)
- Variation by role
- Variation by addiction type

Orthodox Jewish Stigma

- Rosen (2008) stigmatization models
- Divided rabbinic consensus
- “We are better than that”
- Schnall et al. (2016) multicultural counseling

Disclosure While Dating: When to Tell?

- Greenberg, Buchbinder and Witzum (2012) discuss how shidduch dating only increases stigmatization.
- Yichus
- The lengths we will go to...
- Issues faced by therapists in the Orthodox community

What Can We Do?

- Support groups
- Education: for community leaders
- Education: not just for community leaders