

The Importance of the Cultural Context - Caregiver Interactions of Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Women and their Family Members with Mental Illness

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The role of cultural dynamics and norms within families of persons with mental illness has been an underexplored subject despite the recognized influence of the familial context. This subject was studied with 24 ultra-Orthodox Jewish mothers of persons with mental illness who live in a relatively closed religious community. These women participated in the Keshet educational course, designed for family caregivers of persons with mental illness. This course deals with the use of occupational therapy task analysis of verbal interactions to improve family caregiver communication skills. Participants' were asked to write Meaningful Interactional Life Episodes that involved a dialogue exchange in their lives. Qualitative analysis of 50 episodes illuminate the significant role that religious and cultural norms have in the perceptions of what are considered stressors and the dynamic in these families surrounding these stressors. The necessity and value of incorporating cultural competence into family educational programs and interventions is emphasized, as this may contribute to the potential use and success of mental health service models within a population that essentially underutilizes these services. Occupational therapists must relate

to the cultural context of their clients, thus playing a role in health promotion of populations with unique cultural needs.