

# Into the looking glass on cultural and religious competent care: Optimizing healthcare for Haredi individuals with mental illness

Eliana Rohr et Rob Whitley

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## INTO THE LOOKING GLASS ON CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS COMPETENT CARE: OPTIMIZING HEALTHCARE FOR HAREDI INDIVIDUALS WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

**Eliana Rohr<sup>1\*</sup>, Rob Whitley<sup>2</sup>**

1\* Corresponding author: Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Montreal, Quebec, Canada  
eliana.rohr@mail.mcgill.ca

2 Department of Psychiatry, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Montreal, Quebec, Canada

**Keywords:** Haredi communities, Mental health

**P**revious research has shown that minority groups tend to underuse healthcare services. One community whose experiences remain particularly under-researched in the Western world is Haredi Jews - a diverse group of individuals committed to traditional Talmudic and Halakhah teachings and observances.

This presentation aims to enhance participants' understanding of mental health-seeking behaviours and challenges faced by Haredi individuals. We conducted a qualitative study that involved in-depth interviews with 24 adults who identified as Haredi and used mental health services, as well as informal consultations with local rabbis and community leaders. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. Analysis revealed several important themes, including:

- (1) Strength of religious practices, community, and relationship with God as a factor determining mental well-being.

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- (2) Implications of devotion to religion within the patient-physician encounter.
- (3) Stigma and acknowledged lack of awareness surrounding mental health in Haredi communities.

These themes will be explored in the presentation, which will aim to bring light to participants' lived experiences. We hope to address the proverbial "elephant in the room" often ignored or overlooked, as encountered by Haredi community members and their interactions with the healthcare system. We will present the unique strengths and challenges related to mental health encountered by Haredi Jews in our study, while discussing potential measures that can produce better health outcomes and culturally sensitive care for Haredi individuals. ■