

Thesis topic: The challenge of Culturally Sensitive Genetic Counseling in a Multicultural Society. A Case Study of the National Religious Society in Israel.

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A short summary:

Genetic counseling is an interpersonal process in which information is offered on issues connected to human genetic diseases and their nature, inheritance, implications, and recurrence in a family at risk. The central aim of my research was to examine and analyze the components of culturally sensitive genetic counseling in a multicultural society by investigating and characterizing the Israeli undergraduate students' attitudes, moral reasoning and decision making considerations towards genetic testing, counseling and dilemmas. The questions that guided this research were: 1. What characterizes culturally competent genetic counseling in a multicultural society as perceived by experts in genetics during their counseling experiences? 2. What are the attitudes of undergraduate Israeli students being part of a multicultural society to genetic testing and to genetic counseling? 3. What are the moral considerations of undergraduate Israeli students who are part of a multicultural society regarding genetic testing and genetic counseling? 4. In a case study of the National Religious students (who are part of a multicultural society): what characterizes their considerations and decision making with regard to genetic testing and to genetic counseling?

The population of this mixed-method approach study consisted of 15 genetic experts from diverse hospitals and clinics and 51 National Religious students who were all interviewed in depth. In addition, 490 religious and secular undergraduate students were given a closed ended Likert type questionnaire and 449 religious and secular undergraduate students from a variety of universities and colleges answered an open ended questionnaire.

The findings from the qualitative analysis of experts' interviews paint a broad and complex picture in the context of genetic counseling. I suggest that these findings reflect issues relating to four key questions: 1) Why is culturally competent genetic counseling important? 2) Who are the recipients of the genetic counseling? 3) What should the content of genetic counseling be? 4) How should we perform culturally competent genetic counseling? In addition, they show that religious students have less positive attitudes towards genetic testing than secular ones. Moreover, those of the religious students who do not study life sciences were less in favor of knowing about their genetic situation, suggesting that studying life sciences and developing a scientific approach moderates the cultural differences that exist between the religious and non-religious students. In examining the students' moral reasoning, I found that

their religious belief was the most influential of the factors I assessed. The findings from my close examination of the National Religious showed that they were largely exposed to and influenced by Western attitudes to genetic testing, i.e. attitudes that resemble the Western, secular society in which they are fully integrated. Altogether, the results of the study as a whole, from the interviews with the experts to the in-depth analysis of individual students, support the conclusion that culturally competent genetic counseling is essential for informed decision making.

All four chapters raise the need to place the individual in the center of the counseling process, suggesting that culturally competent genetic counseling should address not only the general religious affiliation but also the specificity of each patient - the personal features that are reflected through each individual's attitudes, knowledge, perceptions norms and values. All these influences together add up to a unique individual, who requires unique genetic counseling particularly adapted to that individual's needs, while taking into account his participation in the collective character of a cultural group.

The main contribution of this research is its portrayal of the complexity of culturally competent genetic counseling. This is demonstrated via the "Triple C model", constructed in the final chapter of the study, which illustrates the highly personal elements involved in genetic counseling, showing how the procedure is influenced by individuals' culture, shaped by their norms, values, genetic knowledge and perceptions.