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Women's health promotion through empowerment in community activities: The case of an elderly ultra-orthodox Jewish population

A popular area of research for understanding the relationship between mind and body is empowerment. Empowerment refers to individuals' feelings that they will be able to manage the challenges in one's personal and public life by gaining actual or even imagined control over one's experiences. Empowerment has been shown to have a positive impact on a person's mental and physical health. In particular, women, and within that group, senior citizens, have been helped by empowerment interventions and a related concept, active aging. Findings indicate that empowerment for women leads to healthier lives and further research in this area is strongly encouraged, especially for identifying which type of woman is most likely to be affected. In the present study, this concept was applied to a group of ultra-orthodox Jewish women aged 55 and over who were encouraged to attend health promoting activities in a community center. A careful examination of the relevant literature did not reveal previous empirical research with this group. The study hypotheses focused on testing whether attendance at the community center creates benefits medically, psychologically, and, especially, a change in participants' overall well-being. Scales for measuring loneliness, depression, and well-being were administered to these women when they joined the program and follow-up testing was planned periodically. Analysis of pre-test data for participants who completed all the protocols (N=43) showed that, as expected, well-being was significantly correlated with loneliness (-0.38) and depression (-0.39).

Biography

Meni Koslowsky received his PhD in Psychology from Columbia University and presently has a dual appointment as Professor of Psychology at Bar-Ilan and Ariel Universities in Israel. He is a Fellow of the APA, has written over 100 articles and has recently focused on geriatric research.

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