

Membership/Outreach

I tell new members that being part of a Jewish community has never been more important. It turns out that religious involvement is good for mental health as well.

Just ask Gargi Roysircar. She is a clinical psychologist who has studied Haitian mothers and their children who have been dealt twin blows: a 2010 catastrophic earthquake occurring in a context of deep poverty. Along with little to no food, 20 percent of Haitian children live with neither parent, and Haitian children have a 30 percent chance of dying before their fifteenth birthday.

Rather than trying to “fix” a third world problem, Roysircar partners with local communities and leads focused discussion groups with mothers to learn how they and their children are coping successfully. She terms this a “transnational feminist” approach. Among her findings, she describes how involvement with their church and prayer stand out as powerful tools for successful adaptation. Haitians are deeply religious and are for the most part Roman Catholic. Mothers involve their children in their religious practice. She has discovered complex relationships between mothers’ religious involvement and children's adjustments by examining the children's drawings. Roysircar believes that her findings support the connection between mothers’ spiritual and religious practice and their children’s positive development.

One final note. Roysircar summarizes studies that highlight how the effects of poverty on mental health are lessened when people know that others are praying for them. For her work Gargi Roysircar recently received an International Humanitarian Award from the American Psychological Association.

*~ Richard Finkelstein
Membership/Outreach Chair*