

# Cultural Diversity and its Impact on COVID-19 Crisis Management



Odeda Benin-Goren, RN, CEN, PhD



# COVID-19 Outbreak in Israel



- The Israeli government ordered the population to use a face masks, practice hygiene ,keep social distance, and keep home quarantine for those who came from abroad or have been in contact with COVID-19 patients, following the first COVID-19 cases in Israel in February.
- At the beginning of March, the Israeli government restricted social activities, public gathering, restricted use of public transportation, close of most of the private sector activities as well as schools and universities
- At the end of March, with the increased number of COVID-19 patients, the Israeli government declared a state of lockdown.



# Some Cultural Characteristics in Israel



- Israel is a multicultural country, with several minorities and religions: Christians 2%, Muslims 20%, Jewish 78%. Among the Jewish, about 8% are ultra-orthodox.
- Each community got its characteristics, beliefs, and religious rules.
- Bnei Brak is a city located at the center of Israel. The majority of its population are ultra-orthodox Jews, they regard themselves as the most religiously authentic group of Jews, characterized by a strict tradition.
- The ultra-orthodox community is composed of groups. Each of them is led by a Rabbi and follows the Halakha that is often translated as “Jewish law”.



# Daily Practice of the “Halakha”



- By choice, the ultra-orthodox are living in closed communities, and almost disconnected from the rest of the population in Israel.
- Most of them, do not use “regular” media and social media but follow the information spread by the community leaders through the local community channels.
- Their information source relays on community leader’s messages in the synagogues and through their radio stations/ community newspapers and “Pashkevil”- a broadside or poster that are hanged on public walls in the orthodox neighborhoods.
- Many of the ultra-orthodox community members gathered in the synagogues and the “Yeshiva”– the schools for Torah studies, that in a way, serve as community centers and are led by the Rabbis.
- The Rabbi's messages (such as praying in times of emergency...) were considered more important than keeping social distance and other governmental orders.

COVID -19 is preferable then heresy and desecration of Shabat



# Increased COVID-19 Cases in Bnei Brak



- At the beginning of April, the local media in Israel reported about 730 infected cases in Bnei Brak that were about 10% of 7,000 cases in Israel at that time.
- A total lockdown of the city was declared .
- The Police and the HFC took the responsibility for public order, and food distribution during the preparations for the holiday.
  - Special attention had to be given to food requirements due to the holiday customs.
- Following the next days, the number of COVID -19 patients increased dramatically:
  - on the 7/4/20 – 1669
  - on the 15/4/20- 2158.
- The government offered to use hotels that were converted to quarantine facilities.
- The ultra-orthodox people refused to be evacuated to those facilities.



# Building Trust and Cooperation



- With the recruitment of the Rabbis as leaders and the use of the traditional communication channels of the community , the authorities
  - Approached the people in the way they use in the community: “ Peshkevil”.
  - Provided the appropriate kosher food.
  - Respected their daily activities as an ultra-orthodox community.
- Trust has been built and cooperation established.
- The public followed the governmental order
  - Kept social distance while gathered for pray.
  - practice hygiene
  - Used masks.
  - Encouraged patients from the community to leave home and to seek care in the quarantine sites.

*Dangerous place.  
Unfortunate in this  
building, there is a  
confirm COVID-19  
patient*



# Mayanei Hayeshua Medical Center ("Spring of Salvation" Medical Center)



- Community Jewish ultra-orthodox hospital.
- The hospital is strictly managed according to all Jewish religious law.
- Additionally, to the medical nursing and administration management, there are rabbis and community leaders involved and assure that the hospital act and respect the religious restrictions.
- During the first wave of COVID-19, the medical center admitted 290 COVID-19 patients, which is about 82% of its beds capacity.
  - 256 minor patients,
  - 39 moderate patients,
  - 34 critical patients
  - 6 ventilated patients.
  - 26 patients passed away.



# COVID-19 Further Developments



- The lockdown was released in Israel at mid-May.
- In parts of the country, people were loosening the tension, gathering together, giving up the social distance, and took off masks.
- Within 3 weeks we faced another wave of COVID -19 outbreak with a bit different pattern.
- Bnei Brak's population in contrary to other parts of the country continued to keep order.
- Because Bnei Brak is the densest city in Israel, COVID -19 patients number in Bnai Brak is still high.
- The majority of the patients from the community are quarantined at dedicated facilities or homes.
- On the 27/7/20 there were 30 COVID-19 patients admitted in the medical center, of them: 6 in the ICOVID-19 ICU, 4 of them intubated.





# COVID-19 statues -27/7/20

- Total COVID-19 patients in Israel from February 2020: 61,764
- Recovered patients: 27,014
- Passed away: 473

## This week status:

- Active COVID-19 patients: 34,750  
- of them them 317- critical, 104 intubated.

## Bnei Brak Status:

- Total COVID -19 patients in Bnei Brak: 6,054  
of them 884 from this week. (including asymptomatic).
- Recovered patients in Bnei Brak:3,449
- Active COVID-19 patients in Bnei Brak : 2,605
- Total % of COVID -19 patients from Bnei Brak of Israel: 9.8%
- This week % of COVID-19 patients from Bnei Brak of Israel: 4.2%



This week Bnei Brak patients' number compared to other cities in Israel

# Lessons Learned

- The capability to contain and control the outbreak is limited and depends on objective issues such as population density, age of family members, housing, belief, and discipline.
- It is crucial to identify community leaders and recruit them to establish community collaboration.
- It is important to use communication channels that are being used by the community daily.
- Establishment of mutual responsibility and targets.
- Fight against fake news.



# Recommendations



- Like in any other disaster there is a need to understand cultural diversity as a fundamental tier in creating the community trust and cooperation with official authorities.
- Caregivers are required to have cultural sensitivity and competence, based on awareness of the existing cultural differences.
- To establish trust and efficient care we should involve the community leaders and delegate authorities to them.
- This may help to flatten the curve in the pandemic.

Thanks to:

Dr. Ronen Libster, ED's director and Michal Ofen ED's Head Nurse, Mayanei Hayesua Medical Center.

[odedab@gmail.com](mailto:odedab@gmail.com) / [odron@bezeqint.net](mailto:odron@bezeqint.net) / [www.odron.co.il](http://www.odron.co.il)