# **Abstract**

**Background**: Much research has demonstrated that lifestyle choices as well as emotional wellbeing, make a great impact on both general health, and, specifically, the incidence of obesity and chronic pain disorders. Few studies, however, have addressed health practices in the ultra-orthodox Jewish (Haredi) society, a population that has implemented relatively low levels of health-promoting behavior. The interplay between stressors and social support resources of in the Haredi community has not yet been studied in the context of chronic illness. This proposed study will examine the influence of religious, social and community elements on health behaviors and the manner in which healthcare perceptions determine health practices, and overall quality of life of Haredi adult men and women who are obese. We will utilize the “Cultural Capacity and Health” model, which focuses on the establishment ofindividual, family and community health behaviors while taking into account, social, religious, and cultural dimensions, that influence health behaviors and outcomes.

**The main purpose**: To examine the effect of unique aspects of the Haredi community(including social codes and religious authority) on healthcare perceptions and practices among Haredi chronic pain sufferers and obese adults, and to what extent these aspects influence participants’ overall quality of life and daily functioning.

**Research Process**

The data will be collected from patients suffering from chronic pain and being overweight/obese (according to their BMI calculation), and healthy matched controls. Chronic pain is defined as: X; Participants will be considered overweight if they have a BMI > X and obese if they have a BMI over X. Patients will be recruited via clinics, physicians specialists, institute directors, and nurse managers in community, pain and bariatric surgery clinics in central Israel and Jerusalem. Additional recruitment will be through referrals from treating physicians, local advertising, and internal notification within the Haredi population of the target area. The control group will be Haredi men and women, aged and gender matched, and recruited in the same way but without chronic illness or obesity. After identifying the participants, the researcher will provide information and explanation of the research goals, emphasizing the anonymity of their participation (the subjects will not be required to provide identifying details). Each participant will sign an informed consent form.

**Specific Goals:**

1. To examine the relationship between community characteristics and health behaviors, perception of illness among Haredi adults who suffer from chronic pain and/or are, obese,. 2. To study associations among individual characteristics (socio-demographics, type of illness (chronic pain or obesity) and health behaviors, perception of illness. 3. To study the interaction between community characteristics and individual traits and their influence on health behaviors, perception, and meaning of illness in obese adults 4. To investigate the effect of health habits and illness perception on the relationship between community and individual characteristics and quality of life and daily functioning. 5. To examine the effect of gender on health habits and illness perception?

**Research methods:** The proposed study is a comparative prospective study. The sample will be ~700 Haredi men and women, age range 18-70, from four sub groups within the Haredi community who suffer from chronic pain due to osteoarthritis or lower back pain, obesity, and/or depression (symptoms), alongside a healthy matched control group from the same communities.

Research Instruments:

Socio-demographic questionnaire: and health behaviors:

(1) A unique questionnaire will be designed for this study and is intended to sketch the personal and community profile within the social and health related context,

(2) Family Activity and Eating Habits Questionnaire,

(3) SF-12, 12 Item Short Form Health. Psycho-cognitive qualities: (a) Pain Catastrophizing Scale. (b) Illness Perception Questionnaire Revised. (c) Meaning of Illness Schema.

(4) PI-SF: Brief Pain Inventory – Short Form Questionnaire.

**Importance:** The implementation of the theoretical model in this study and the comparison of different sub-groups in Haredi society will provide a comprehensive data set that will enable an overview of the effect of culture on health perception and behavior. The findings of this study may promote an understanding of how religious lifestyle affects health status and is involved in the development of morbidity. The insights that we will gain – will strengthen our understanding of how cultural diversity and submission to rabbinic authority and community leadership in the Haredi society may affect individual health behaviors.