

Mental and physiological structures and mechanisms of overprotection in the aetiology of autoimmune disease**Anat Ben Salmon**

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Despite the prevalence of autoimmune diseases, and the variety of proposed factors involved in their aetiology, the exact cause of autoimmune disorders is still unknown. As psychotherapists specializing in work with parents for the last sixteen years, and a physician who has worked with adolescents for seventeen years, in this presentation, we propose to consider the analogy between the dynamics of the overprotective family and those of the overactive immune system in autoimmune disorders, and that they are both manifestations of the structures and mechanisms of narcissistic anxiety. The impact of overprotective family dynamics upon the emotional development of a child had been extensively discussed. The overprotective parenting style is characterised by parents who present guarding behaviour that is excessive considering the child's developmental stage and the actual risk level in their environment. Overprotective parents tend to obsess over their children's physical and emotional safety, at a level that exceeds the actual level of risk. Analogous to this, autoimmune diseases are clinical manifestations of aberrant and "hyper-reactive" autoimmune responses to self-antigens of normal bodily constituents leading to inflammation, cell injury, or a functional disturbance. Medical literature has suggested the correlation between emotional disorders and a variety of autoimmune diseases. This presentation suggests to consider that high levels of anxiety underlie both overprotective manifestations. Instead of functioning as defence mechanisms aimed to protect the self, they are diverted into a direct attack on it.

Biography

Together with Ofer Erez, Anat is the co-manager of Kelim Shluvim L.T.D (est. 2006) that specialises in diagnosis and therapy and for individuals and families in both clinical and home settings. She has more than 16 years of practical experience working with children, adolescents and parents, and has treated hundreds of couples and families. Together with Ofer Erez, Anat is the co-manager and lecturer at ROTeM centre for practical professional training and has been teaching and supervising students in parental counselling for the past nine years and in psychotherapy for the past five years. Anat serves as the chairman of the Israeli Parental Counselling and Family Counselling Association. Anat is involved in ongoing research of her practice and interdisciplinary research with a medical doctor and has published several academic publications in the last year. She serves on the editorial board of "Clinical images and case reports journal".