

Family skeletons detrimental to healing

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Family secrets such as alcoholism, abuse and unwanted pregnancies are quite common and an obstacle to healing when disease strikes, according to Marie-Dominique Beaulieu, a professor at the Université de Montréal's Department of Family Medicine.

"I see it in my practice," says Beaulieu, who also holds the Dr. Sadok Besrouer Family Medicine Research Chair. "[Family secrets](#) lead to feelings of guilt, anger and helplessness. These feelings have a considerable impact on health, specifically on the capacity to adapt and find a balance in times of [disease](#)."

American actor Jack Nicholson discovered in the newspaper that his maternal grandmother was, in fact, his mother and that his mother was in reality his sister. Not everyone carries such dramatic secrets, yet difficult family situations are quite commonplace.

New research increasingly shows that emotions such as anger and feelings of helplessness lead to a higher risk of disease. For instance, correlations have been established between anger and coronary heart disease. "As a researcher, it's hard to prove," says Beaulieu. "It would require longitudinal studies and we would also need to know those secrets. But I am convinced that family secrets are detrimental to healing."

Someone can be perfectly happy even if they carry heavy secrets. "To speak about subjects that have tarnished a family's history is a liberating process for oneself and for future generations," says Beaulieu who

follows all research conducted on the issue.

Source: University of Montreal ([news](#) : [web](#))

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