



Faculty Work Comprehensive List

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5-3-2022

## Shining a Light on Mental Health


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## Shining a Light on Mental Health

### Abstract

"Each profession faces unique situations when it comes to serving those needing support with mental health, and it is important as Christians that we come together with a holistic approach."

Posting about care for individuals with mental health crises in the various professions from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<https://inallthings.org/shining-a-light-on-mental-health/>

### Keywords

In All Things, mental health, law enforcement, psychology, nursing, social work

### Disciplines

Christianity | Mental and Social Health

### Comments

*In All Things* is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt University](#).

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# Shining a Light on Mental Health

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**May 3, 2022**

May is Mental Health Month, and for Reformed Christians, it is important to remember that God created all things, including our minds. It is important to come together as a church, seeking serviceable insight as we learn about and approach the topic of mental health.

In both the United States and Canada, 1 in 5 people are affected by a mental health condition, and the need for effective treatment is extremely high.<sup>1</sup> For example, nearly 60 percent of adults and 50 percent of minors with mental health issues did not receive services in the past couple years in the U.S.<sup>2</sup> The reasons for not receiving services are complicated, including lack of insurance, transportation, education, counseling, stigma, available beds, and more.

Thankfully, Reformed Christians serve in numerous professions that provide mental health support and can share their insight. Each profession faces unique situations when it comes to serving those needing support with mental health, and it is important as Christians that we come together with a holistic approach.

Below are perspectives from Dordt professors providing brief insights into various professions and how they serve those who might be experiencing a mental health challenge.

## ***Law Enforcement and Mental Health***

There is a huge gap nationally with law enforcement's understanding of how to effectively work with those that suffer from mental illness. The problem began in the 1960s with the closing of permanent mental health residencies, turning patients to resources in their own communities. These decades of underinvestment in intensive community mental health resources followed by deinstitutionalization have often left police officers as the first line of response during a mental health crisis.

Law enforcement agencies report that 5 to 15 percent of their annual calls for service involve an individual struggling with mental illness. Although these calls for service may not include actual criminal activity, they may include missing or endangered individuals, erratic behavior by someone, or someone threatening to harm themselves or others. People with mental illnesses kill law enforcement officers “at a rate 5.5 times greater than the rest of the population.”<sup>3</sup> According to The Washington Post, 25 percent of police shootings in 2015 involved people “in the throes of emotional or mental crisis.”<sup>4</sup>

Jon Moeller writes, “We, as Christians, in law enforcement need to learn how to address these challenges with compassion and mercy, while keeping our officers safe when coming alongside someone in crisis.”

-Jon Moeller, former police officer and retired FBI agent, current professor of criminal justice at Dordt University

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## ***Psychology and Mental Health***

While law enforcement officers may not have the opportunity to develop relationships with those experiencing mental health challenges as they respond to different calls, mental health professionals such as psychologists can develop long-term relationships with clients of all ages with the hope of experiencing growth, flourishing, and shalom as they face a variety of mental health challenges. For example, a second-grade student might be anxious about starting at a new school after moving with her family to a new community. A fifth-grade student may be bullied, and he doesn't know who to tell or how to respond. A sophomore in high school wants to be accepted by her friends and feels pressure to be thin, leading her to exercise excessively and limit her calorie intake. A college student is coming to grips with memories of childhood abuse and desires to process these memories for the first time with a counselor.

Dr. Mark Christians writes, “At all stages of life, we can encounter events or seasons of life that challenge our mental health. The Christian community, and especially those trained in psychology and social work, have a responsibility to assist and guide those who are struggling—to walk alongside those who are hurting emotionally, physically, and spiritually; and to help clients find ways to heal and connect positively with their families, friends, co-workers, or classmates.”

—Dr. Mark Christians, professor of psychology at Dordt University

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## ***Nursing and Mental Health***

Health care professionals, specifically nurses, serve and promote mental health in a variety of settings in hospitals and in the community. Nurses have the unique calling to care for patients and their families as they both promote mental health and respond to mental health crisis. Mental health is often perceived as a specialty area. In reality, nurses in all arenas care for patients and families who are experiencing crisis. Mental health is closely linked to physical health, so it is vital for nurses to address both as they care for God's children holistically.

Melanie Wynja writes, "From working in a rural hospital, to providing occupational health services at a manufacturing plant, to working with students in the clinical setting at a state mental health hospital, patients and families dealing with crisis can be found everywhere. It is important for Christian nurses to see all patients as children of God, regardless of what they are experiencing physically or mentally, the behaviors they are exhibiting, or the things they have done. Being nonjudgmental in our care for both the patient and families as they seek to help their loved one get the needed treatment is essential. As Christian health care providers, we strive to care for, model, and educate others on the reality and importance of mental health to decrease the stigma of mental illness."

—Melanie Wynja, registered nurse and professor of nursing at Dordt University

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## ***Social Work and Mental Health***

Social workers serve in many different capacities to assist those with mental health concerns. Social workers work in policy development and community organizing to create changes at a local, state, or national level. Many social workers serve in fields that allow them to educate communities or groups about the increasing needs of mental health; this could be in schools, hospitals, prisons, substance abuse treatment, nonprofit agencies, and more. Social workers are also in direct practice fields with clients providing counseling, advocacy, education, and resources. Social workers provide a wide array of services to those struggling with mental health concerns.

Leah Mouw writes, "A few barriers that prevent services are limited health insurance or a limited amount of in-network providers which makes getting an appointment difficult. There is a shortage of mental health providers to meet the demands, and for those in a rural area, that need is even greater."

—Leah Mouw, licensed social worker and professor of social work at Dordt University

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Professionals in social work, law enforcement, psychology, and health care serve those experiencing mental health challenges in different ways, ranging from first responders, to relationship builders, to educators, to guides, to advocates. As Christians, it is important to serve well in each of these industries, understanding that each area is part of a bigger picture of the church.

This May, as we reflect on Mental Health Month, we are thankful for Reformed Christians serving in a variety of fields that support those who may need assistance with mental health. After all, the Bible calls us to love and serve others: “Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 4:10-11).

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1. National Alliance on Mental Illness, Canadian Mental Health Association
2. National Alliance on Mental Illness
3. Brown and Langan, Policing and Homicide, 1976-98: “Justifiable Homicide of Felons by Police and Murder of Police by Felons”
4. Treatment Advocacy Center, “Distraught People, Deadly Results”