

Global Mental Health and Illness; Occupational Therapy's Contributions

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“Mental illness more disabling than cancer” read a headline in my local paper recently; it caused me pause, since I was preparing this talk at that time. As occupational therapists, we embrace beliefs and values that speak to enabling people to regain meaningful occupation in their lives, to become reengaged in their families and communities. This does not mean focusing upon their physical and cognitive selves and ignoring their affective and social selves, nor centering practice on what can be objectively measured and side-stepping what is intangible even spiritual. Mental health and mental illness is emerging as a global epidemic with specific attention being paid to its treatment and management by the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations (UN) and multiple patient/client centred organizations worldwide.

This presentation will provide some data that illustrate the profile of mental illness around the globe and suggest roles that occupational therapists can play to improve the situation.