

SOCIAL WORK & CHRISTIANITY

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

VOLUME 40, NUMBER 2 • 2013



SPECIAL ISSUE: HIV, AIDS, AND A CHRISTIAN SOCIAL WORK RESPONSE

INTRODUCTION TO SPECIAL ISSUE

Social Workers Take a Closer Look at HIV & AIDS

ARTICLES

Increasing Christian Social Workers' Basic Knowledge of HIV and AIDS:
The Beginning of Competent Practice

HIV/AIDS and Grief: Implications for Practice

A Systematic Review of the Roles of Congregations and Faith-Based
Organizations in the Care and Support of African Americans Living
with HIV/AIDS in the United States

Preaching and the Trauma of HIV and AIDS: A Social Work Perspective

TEACHING NOTES

Teaching Social Welfare Policy through a Practice Informed Assignment
in Baccalaureate Social Work Education: Utilizing the Topic of HIV/AIDS
Towards CSWE Competency Based Education

PUBLICATIONS

HIV, AIDS, AND A CHRISTIAN SOCIAL WORK RESPONSE

Social Workers Take a Closer Look at HIV & AIDS

Allison M. Tan, Guest Editor

This brief introduction to the special edition on HIV offers the author's personal reflections on a career-long journey of social work service provision and research in the field of HIV and AIDS. It is her conviction that every Christian social worker must have a basic working knowledge of the epidemic. Toward that end, a selection of articles have been compiled to represent the latest work being done by Christians in social work to advance awareness of and service to individuals living with HIV and AIDS.

WHEN SOCIAL WORK & CHRISTIANITY EXPRESSED INTEREST IN PURSUING the possibility of a special edition focused exclusively on HIV and AIDS, no one knew what to expect. How much interest would there be among authors and researchers to contribute to such an edition? What kinds of writing, research, and practice were Christian social workers engaged in related to individuals living with HIV and AIDS? Thirty years after the HIV epidemic emerged in America, what kind of roles are social workers and Christians playing today? Is this still a relevant issue at all? When we conduct audio conferences, offer convention workshops, or engage in roundtable discussions addressing HIV and AIDS, Christian social workers are always eager participants. And when we disseminated a call for papers on the subject, we did receive a number of submissions.

Yet, we also know that many Christians in social work practice and

research feel disconnected from the field of HIV and AIDS on a daily basis. Toward that end, we believe the collection of articles and resources included in this special edition can be an important tool for all Christian social workers committed to continually challenge themselves personally and professionally by building new areas of competence and wrestling with difficult social issues. It is my personal conviction that as social workers begin to take a closer look at HIV and AIDS, they will encounter a myriad of ways in which this social issue can and will influence their own social work practice.

As I reflect on my career-long commitment to men and women living with HIV and AIDS, I can personally attest to the relevance and importance of maintaining a level of competent knowledge about the HIV epidemic. Now that I have transitioned my primary social work responsibilities out of direct social work practice and into academia, I often find ways in which my knowledge of and experience with the HIV world serve as a source of strength and learning for my students. Regardless of the course, it is a rare semester when I do not weave into our discussion examples from my work with HIV-positive individuals. This is because I want my students to understand (as I now also want the readers of this special edition to understand) that HIV and AIDS will impact social work practice of any and all kinds. Most of my students will not end up dedicating their entire careers to the field of HIV (just as most readers of this special edition have not). However, I can say with absolute certainty that a basic working knowledge of the HIV epidemic is essential for all social workers, whether working in schools, churches, private practices, hospitals, prisons, homeless shelters, and anywhere else their careers take them. The article I have written for this special edition is designed for this specific purpose.

The collection of articles that follows further illustrates the wide range of application for Christian social workers and the issues of HIV and AIDS. One of the most interesting and, for me, exciting observations to be made about the articles contained in this special edition relates to their authorship. Other than myself, none of the authors represented here is currently in full-time practice with HIV-positive clientele; none of these authors are “career HIV” social workers. This does not mean they are not experts at what they have written—far from it. Instead, what it means is that each of these authors brings to the table a unique perspective on one specific way in which the HIV epidemic has impacted them personally and/or professionally within the settings where they practice.

This is a perfect example of the vast array of interests and unique niches that exist within the broad topic of HIV and AIDS social work. Dr. Adedoyin has contributed a thorough review of the ways in which the African American church has responded to and supported those living with HIV and AIDS; given the continued rise of HIV infection among African men and women, this is a timely and vitally important contribution. Dr.

Streets has written a compelling article about the effects of sermon content on individuals living with HIV and AIDS in our congregations and offers critical implications for all of us in the church to consider. Dr. Peters shares a career-long set of experiences working with clients experiencing grief and loss, looking specifically at how those infected with and affected by HIV and AIDS experience grief and make sense of loss. Lastly, Dr. MacDonald presents a unique perspective on teaching Christian social work students about both the personal ethics and policy implications of the HIV debate through the incorporation of classroom content and assignments. We are thrilled to have each of them contribute to our special edition.

Taken together, the articles in this special edition represent one handful of possible connections between HIV and AIDS, social work practice, and our Christian faith. It is my hope that this special edition will both inform its readers and also inspire them to consider even more implications. As I use examples from the field of HIV and AIDS in my social work classes, I become more and more aware of the ways in which this social issue can be an ideal case example for social work students. The HIV epidemic is a great example of social problems and policy analysis. It is also always an important example in a discussion of values and ethics. Likewise, the service delivery models common in the HIV social service continuum (including, but not limited to, case management, peer-based programming, and multidisciplinary teams) offer important lessons for practice in all settings. As Christian social workers continue to take a closer look at HIV and AIDS, we hope that this special edition can serve as a challenge and a source of new knowledge for its readers. The HIV and AIDS epidemic is not over, and a closer look at ways to acknowledge it ensures that we will continue to learn from society's response to it as well as from the HIV-positive men and women who continue to struggle to live well. ❖

Allison M. Tan, Ph.D., MSSA, Visiting Assistant Professor of Social Work, University of St. Francis, 500 Wilcox, Joliet, IL, 60546. Email: atan@stfrancis.edu. Phone: (815) 740-5031.

Key Words: Christians, Social Work, HIV, AIDS