



# Million Minds Renewed Project

## Why We Need This Now More Than Ever



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## The Problem

In 10 years something has happened, hasn't it? The things that we had to face as a culture have drastically changed. Most of us sense that there has been a major shift. Something is happening in us. Something is happening to us, something is happening around and even between us that has happened very quickly. So fast that I think that it is hard at times to put terms around it because we are still trying to understand what that "something" is.

In 2015, two Princeton economists, Anne Case and Angus Deaton began to notice a trend in our culture that was quite disturbing. Our life expectancy was starting to drop. What do we mean by this? If you have children they will on average live less life than they would had they been born before 2015. So the amount of years that our culture is now expected to live is shorter. Shorter than it was in 2014.

So Anne Case and Angus Deaton continued to watch this statistic. This trend continued to decline as it happened in 2016, and then again in 2017, 2018 and 2019. In 2020 Case and Deaton released a book called *Deaths of Despair* to outline what they were seeing. They set out to find out why. Why are we seeing this trend in the wealthiest country in the world where we have very accurate access to advanced medical treatment and yet life expectancy was dropping in the US of all places.

In *Deaths of Despair* there is a chart in Chapter 2 which is entitled "All things fall apart". This graphic depicts where life expectancy was both increasing and decreasing in many nations around the world. What was so mysterious was that the life expectancy of nations like the UK, Sweden or France were all increasing. But the United States was the only nation that had a trend that was decreasing. So Case and Deaton set out to find out why we were seeing this increase in mortality and why were we seeing people die younger.

In their study, they found three things that were contributing to this decline.

1. Overdose from drugs
2. Suicide
3. Liver disease from alcohol

So let's step back and think about this for a second. So in the US we all now have less life ahead of us due to the number of suicides and the amount of drug and alcohol being used. This is unprecedented. And now what's even more interesting is what makes this drop in life expectancy even more unique than what has happened in the past is that this is not disease driven. This is in fact self induced. These deaths of despair are a result of decisions that as a culture and as individuals we are choosing to engage in that are altering our life expectancy.

So we are not just seeing a decline in life expectancy because of a disease that's just popping up. We are seeing a decline in life expectancy because we are choosing things that are killing us. This is something that is happening in us and around us and to us that is manifesting itself in mental illness.

So Case and Deaton point out something very interesting in their book *Deaths of Despair*. When you look at the last 20 years of data and then segment that into different ages you come to see that depending upon the age group that you are focused on the deaths have gone up. However the older the age group the lower the percentage so this most impacts the younger generation. This is a real conversation that we now need to not only have in our culture, but with our children. This is now one of the new talks that you need to give your kids. It's not just the birds and the bees anymore. It's now about deep subjects like suicide, alcohol-related disease and drug overdoses.

## Our Understanding

- In 2019, the American Psychological Association ( APA ) reported a 52% increase since 2005 in adolescents suffering from major depression ( Twenge et. Al., 2019 )
- For young adults ( ages 18-25 ), it was a 62% increase
- The same study by the APA showed a 71% increase in those reporting serious psychological distress since 2008.
- Since 2008, Twenge and her co-authors showed a 47% increase in young adult suicidal ideation.
- Interestingly, there was no similar increase in older adults. In fact, the authors saw a slight decrease in psychological stress in individuals over the age of 65.
- In January 2022, the National Institute of Mental Health ( NIMH ) reported on data collected by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in their 2020 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH)
- The two organizations found that 49.5% of adolescents ( age 13-18 ) had a mental health disorder, or Any Mental Illness (AMI)
- Of those with AMI, 22.2% demonstrated a mental behavior or emotional disorder that resulted in serious functional impairment that substantially interfered with or limited one or more major activities. This 22.2% is clinically understood to have a serious mental illness or SMI.
- Mental Health America reports 19.86% of adults have experienced AMI on average in 2022. That is nearly 50 million people
- 19.3 million adults report having a Substance Use Disorder
- 11.4 million adults have seriously considered suicide
- 15.08% of youth ( age 12-17 ) report at least one major depressive episode

So obviously these shocking numbers have caught the attention of the mental health industry because this is becoming a crisis of the mind. This crisis is taking life away from us as it is reducing life expectancy. So in the last couple of decades the mental health profession has pumped 20 billion dollars into this problem though research on mental health.

The organization that typically leads this research is the National Institute for Mental Health which has for the most part in this century been led by a man by the name of Thomas Insel. In the 2022 book *Desperate Remedies* written by Andrew Scull, the author writes about Thomas Insel's work.

*“ In 2015, no longer directing the National Institute of Mental Health ( NIMH ) and dispensing billions of dollars for research, Thomas Insel insouciantly summed up what all these dollars had purchased. “ I spent 13 years at NIMH really pushing on the neuroscience and genetics of mental health disorders and when I look back on that I realize that while I think I succeeded in getting lots of really cool papers published by cool scientist at a fairly large cost – I think \$20 billion – I don't think we moved the needle in reducing suicide, reducing hospitalizations or improving recovery for tens of millions of people who have mental illness “*

Basically, the mental health industry is trying to understand what is happening, but there are more questions than answers. Clearly, people are trying to make progress, but despite a lot of time, effort and money it does not appear as if the industry is gaining on this problem.

As if all of that information was not enough evidence to explain the problem that we face, Thomas Insel released his own book called *Healing* in 2022 and he agrees with this assessment of his performance.

*“ I knew that nothing my colleagues and I were doing addressed the ever-increasing urgency or magnitude of the suffering millions of Americans were living through and dying from. The scientific progress of our field was stunned, but while we studied the risk factors for suicide, the death rate had climbed 33 percent. While we identified the neuroanatomy of addiction, overdose deaths increased threefold. While we mapped the genes for schizophrenia, people with this disease were still chronically unemployed and dying twenty years early. Why with so much progress in neuroscience and genetics, had we not reduced deaths or disability for people with serious mental illness “*

- Insel, offering us insight, speaks of mental health disorders/illness as “years of productive life lost”
- Insel believes the word that most accurately captures this loss of life is disability.
- In fact, the Global Burden of Disease ( GBD ) which monitors health statistics across the world, also understands mental illness as disability. Their “ ongoing “ study indicates mental illness is the number one cause of years lost to disability
- The GBD defines disability as “ Restriction or lack of ability to perform activity in the manner or within a range

What is Insel’s solution to this loss of life. Recovery! Insel defines recovery as “more than a reduction in symptoms: It is the return to a full and meaningful life within the context of the individual. So, when mental health professionals hear about the mental health crisis, the opioid epidemic or the alarming adolescent suicide rates, we should understand this data through the lens of years of a full and meaningful life lost.

So what does the recovery that Insel was writing about look like? He is referring to the condition that a person experiences when they are completely recovered from the illness and are given their life back.

So recovery is more than just a reduction in symptoms. As an example, if someone goes to a counselor and they have depression then the goal is to figure out how to help the person be less depressed. But Insel is saying it's way more than just fixing the problem. It's about restoring the person to their original condition.

### **The Cause**

In June, 2021, David Rosemond published an article in Scientific American called " Psychiatry needs a reckoning with God ". In the article, he says something very interesting.

*" In the past year, American mental health sank to the lowest point in history. Incidences of mental disorders increased by 50% compared with before the pandemic. Alcohol and other substance abuse surged and young adults were more than twice as likely to seriously consider suicide than they were in 2018. But there was one group that actually saw an improvement in mental health during COVID. Interestingly, the only group to see improvements in mental health during the past year were those who attended religious services at least twice weekly whether in person or online. That group reported a 46% excellent mental health verses 42% a year before "*

He goes on to say that healthcare professionals falsely disconnect common spiritual solutions to our mental health crisis even when our own wellbeing is worse than ever. So was he making the point that a belief in God was associated with scientific results that resulted in better treatment outcomes for acute patients? Yes! It's fair to say that many mental health professionals ignore potential spiritual solutions. But to be honest, even people of faith deal with mental illness just as much as anyone. The difference is that people of faith have a perspective of something bigger than themselves on which to live their lives.

In the fall of 2020, Dr. Ryan Burkhardt, Associate Dean at Colorado Christian University started to see something very interesting in the clients that they were counseling. In fact, they created a name for the condition that they were observing. They called it *treatment resistant depression* and *treatment resistant anxiety*.

Here is what is meant by those terms. The counselors were addressing the depression and anxiety of their patients through their normal treatment protocols. The challenge was that the patients were not showing any sign of improvement. At first it was assumed that this condition was caused by the COVID conditions that we were facing in culture. But after repeated unsuccessful attempts to deal with the symptoms, the doctors decided to take a dramatic step.

They decided to tell the clinical supervisees that instead of treating the patients as if they had depression and anxiety, they would start to use a theory that is called *existentialism* and another theory called *logotherapy* which deals with meaning, purpose and hope. As the interactions and conversations shifted and as the patients began to discuss meaning and purpose in their lives, their conditions began to improve and they had more hope.

So what was happening? It was becoming clear to all who participated that meaning, purpose and hope had been so absent with the patients that when the subject was raised, it immediately improved their mental wellbeing. It was also becoming quickly apparent that as a culture we have spent that last several decades of tearing down anything and everything that gave us meaning, purpose and hope outside of ourselves. It did not take much meaning and purpose on the part of the patients to begin to show some very dramatic improvements and much needed hope.



How do we process this encounter and what was the big takeaway that would give us some insight in how to improve our mental health? Clearly, we are wired in a way that if there is nothing outside of us that is going to be giving us meaning then mental illness simply occurs. It's almost like a math equation. We are starved for meaning and when we receive it, our mental condition will start to improve, sometimes very quickly.

A man called Victor E. Frankl, who survived the WWII concentration camps, wrote a book called *Man's Search For Meaning*. This is a slam dunk book that everyone in our culture needs to be reading right now. Everything that we are seeing he calls noogenic neurosis. *Noo* is the Latin word for meaning. So *noogenic neurosis* is a cognitive tension or illness that arises not from psychological problems, but from the mind because of existential frustration specifically around our meaning. It is a life philosophy problem. It is a worldview problem. It is a state of having no meaning, no purpose and no hope and nothing giving it to us. As a result of this, mental illness occurs.

After a lifetime of counseling, Frankl was able to summarize much of his work with this one thought. " We distract ourselves with pleasure when we can't find a sense of meaning ". He was also able to drill down his definition of meaning to include three distinct components.

## **The Formula For A Life Of Meaning**

1. Take action creating a work or performing a deed.
2. Experience something or encounter someone that you find captivating and that pulls you out of yourself.
3. Have an optimistic attitude toward the inevitable challenges and sufferings you will experience in life.

## **Our Engagement**

There are three things that all of us can engage in that can begin to restore our mental health.

1. In order to help others, we must first be working on our own mental fitness. The journey of a healer is a journey of being healed. We are all broken. Do you know your who you are? Do you know what you want? Do you have clarity your future?
2. Once we have found meaning for our lives, we need to bring that to others. To share with them how they too can find that for their own lives.
3. We need to create mental fitness movement in our families, churches, schools, businesses, government and communities.

## **Conclusion**

It is becoming desperately obvious that we need answers to this “something,” this lack of meaning that is causing so much mental illness, disability and death these days.

It is our conviction that by creating a mental fitness movement that we can begin to generate recovery and restoration for those whose lives are being so negatively impacted by this rising tide of mental illness.

We will offer a new and innovative framework which will bring meaning and purpose to those who do not have a clear pathway to strengthen their minds. This will help to bring them clarity in a world of confusion. We will blend neuroscience with the popularity of social media to create a fun and captivating ways to bring mental fitness to those who what to grow in this creative economy.

We believe that it is appropriate to conclude The Mental Revolution document with another quote from Victor E Frankl. It describes an amazing insight that he received as he was in the Auschwitz concentration camp attempting to minister to those around him in order to bring them meaning, purpose and hope.

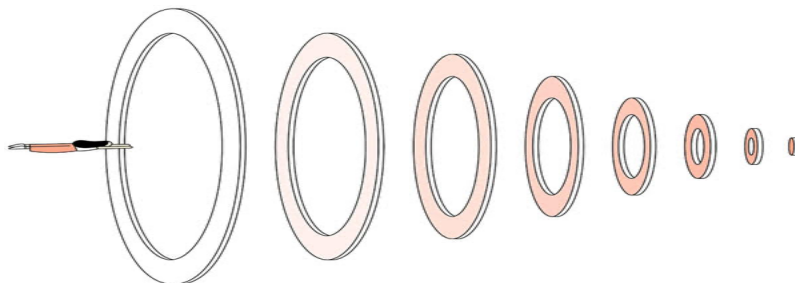
*“ It did not really matter what we expected from life, but rather what life expected from us. We needed to stop asking about the meaning of life, and instead to think of ourselves as those who were being questioned by life – daily and hourly. Our answer must consist, not in talk and meditation, but in right action and in right conduct. Life ultimately means taking the responsibility to find the right answer to its problems and to fulfill the tasks which it constantly sets for each individual “*

How is your mental wellbeing?

Find out at:

[www.MillionMindsRenewed.com](http://www.MillionMindsRenewed.com)

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