

Suffering: Is the Concept Significant among Low German-speaking Mennonites?¹

**Judith C Kulig, *University of Lethbridge* and
HaiYan (LingLing) Fan, *University of Lethbridge***

Numerous Christian religious groups emphasize the idea of “suffering” as an important concept within their belief system. In this context, suffering refers to both emotional and spiritual aspects that may impact one’s behaviors and ultimately one’s faith. Thus, steps may be taken by the individual to avoid or deal with suffering in order to be spiritually ready for their own death. The purpose of this paper is to examine the concept of suffering among the Low German-speaking Mennonites who live in several geographic settings within Canada. Data generated from three separate but inter-related studies with this group will be used to discuss the significance of suffering to everyday life among Low German-speaking Mennonites including the development and maintenance of their spiritual beliefs. Of importance is increasing our knowledge of this group’s worldview on suffering to enhance our understanding of their perspectives and the potential impacts on their health and life choices including their willingness to accept or decline medical treatment.

Describing the Low German-Speaking Mennonites

The Low German-speaking (LGS) Mennonites who are currently living in several provinces within Canada (i.e., Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario) and selected areas of the United States (i.e., Kansas and Texas) originate from the families who left Canada in the 1920s for Mexico for religious freedom, specifically related to education (Sawatzky, 1971). Approximately 84,000² LGS Mennonites reside in Canada, the majority in Manitoba and Ontario with a smaller but growing population in Alberta. Among them, there is a range of affiliations with a variety of Mennonite churches: some ascribe to the more conservative beliefs found among the Old Colony while others have become more liberal and attend such churches as the Kleine Gemeinde, the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference (EMMC) or the Bergthaler Mennonite Church. However, it would not be appropriate to say that individuals who identify with one or the other of these churches necessarily believe or act exactly according to the principles set out by their ministers. Thus, some more conservative LGS Mennonites do access resources such as computers even though such a behavior, if known by their church communities, would not be supported. There are also differences between provinces, with most conservative behavior noted among the Alberta Old Colony Mennonites. However, this article will not compare the Mennonite groups between and within the provinces, and in addition does not focus on comparing differences among the ways in which different Mennonite church groups perceive the concepts we describe below.

A few scholarly studies on health culture among this population have been conducted among the LGS Mennonites, but none have focused on suffering specifically. One study on the colonies in northern Mexico provided information on suffering. For example, it noted that physical illness could originate in the soul as the result of being confronted with evil or Satan. Although home remedies were used to address physical illness, it was also believed that health could be restored through prayer and assistance from their ministers (Reinschmidt, 2001). This example clearly shows the links between physical and spiritual health (and the relief of suffering) among this population.

Background of the Studies

Several similar studies have been conducted over the last fifteen years in Canada (mostly in Alberta) in an attempt to generate useful and useable information for health and social service providers, as well as teachers and other relevant community agencies. All the studies

(two completed and one ongoing) have included participation of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) personnel and board members as well as clinicians and decision-makers to help ensure that the questions asked, and the information generated, address the LGS Mennonites' ongoing needs. In each of the studies, interviews were conducted by Mennonites who were trained as research assistants (RA). These individuals speak Low German but did not necessarily belong to the group of Mennonites who have returned from Mexico. Instead, several of them descended from families who had lived in Canada since the late 1800s or the early 1900s and attended more mainstream Mennonite churches. Each of the RAs underwent training that included determining the most appropriate Low German word(s) to use in the interviews to ensure full understanding by the participants. Sensitive topics such as terminology for abortion and miscarriage were discussed ahead of time with the RAs and Mennonite advisory members also in order to develop an appropriate explanation for the use of such explicit terms. This helped ensure that the individuals being interviewed were comfortable holding such a conversation and expressing their beliefs and thoughts.

The first study specifically focused on LGS Mennonites' beliefs and practices in relation to health and illness (Kulig & Hall, 2004). In total, 47 households were included and 86 participants were interviewed (41 males and 45 females). This exploratory, descriptive qualitative study generated information about physical, mental and spiritual illness among this group in Southern Alberta. The findings indicated the inter-relationship between the three health categories and their significance for suffering.

The second study explored the linkage between sexuality and women's health among the LGS Mennonite women in Southern Alberta. The 38 women who were interviewed shared numerous intimate details about their beliefs, knowledge and practices in relation to pregnancy, postpartum and menopause (Kulig, Babcock, Wall & Hill, 2009; Kulig, Wall, Hill & Babcock, 2008). The women shared the challenges of having many children (i.e., the economic, physical and emotional work required to raise children) and the need to meet both spiritual (women need to have as many children as God wants them to have; the souls of unborn children will prevent them from entering heaven) and community expectations (families need to follow the behaviors of others in their community).

The third ongoing study explores death and dying practices among LGS Mennonites in Alberta and Manitoba; the end result will be the development of best practice guidelines for end-of-life and palliative care situations among this group (Kulig, ongoing). In total, 58 LGS Mennonites and 36 health and social service personnel and funeral

directors in the two participating provinces have been interviewed. The findings generated focus on LGS Mennonites' experiences of caring for their dying relatives, preparation for funerals, special circumstances of death and dying (i.e., suicides, excommunicated individuals) and expectations of the health and social service system in relation to caring for them during palliative circumstances. Specific questions have also been asked about the meaning of suffering and the significance of spiritual assistance (i.e., prayer, laying of hands, visits by ministers) for those who are dying as well as their family members.

While analyzing the data on death and dying, common themes were identified with the previous two studies. It also granted the opportunity to differentiate the meaning of suffering among the more conservative LGS Mennonites who did not experience the evangelical movement within their Mennonite churches in Mexico and other Latin American countries and those that were drawn to evangelicalism. This is an important differentiation because the evangelical group emphasizes the idea of "assurance of salvation" (Quiring, 1997). Suffering then may have a different connotation for this group and the findings from our research may provide some direction in this regard. The biblical quotations included in the article were provided by Mennonite ministers to suggest ways in which LGS Mennonites of both the more conservative and more liberal or evangelical traditions approached suffering. Regardless that the participants represented a variety of churches illustrating the full range of conservative to liberal beliefs – interviewees included members of the Old Colony, Sommerfelder, Reinlaender, and Kleine Gemeinde congregations -- this study represents all of these congregations and viewpoints rather than just particular church affiliations. We suggest that suffering can vary from one group to another but that it is an important concept to understand across all of these congregations. Finally, the perspectives of the research teams involved in the studies described here has reinforced the importance of not separating out the different religious groupings among the LGS Mennonites but instead looking for commonalities regarding concepts and beliefs.

The Low German-speaking Mennonites' Understandings of Suffering

Learning about Suffering

How have the LGS Mennonites tried to understand the complex topic of suffering in a meaningful way? For many LGS Mennonites, direct access to the Bible is limited because of their low literacy in High German (the language of the church and hence of the Bible). In some

homes, hymn books may be accessed and from these an understanding of suffering may be developed. Many of the LGS Mennonites we have met report an understanding of the meaning of suffering based on their ministers' interpretations of the Bible. This understanding, which may be reemphasized by their hymn books, can vary from one congregation to another and from one province to another. For example, members from the more conservative churches place greater emphasis on suffering on earth and on the need to avoid behaviors that will lead to suffering. Furthermore, from a geographic variation, there are fewer ministers and less opportunity for the circulation of ministers from one congregation to another in Alberta, and hence less theological knowledge in Alberta. Although ministers do visit different provinces this is an uncommon event and not all congregations experience such opportunities.

We have learned that among the LGS Mennonites, suffering related to physical illness is linked to spirituality, (i.e., belief in God) and the idea that illness tests one's faith and is necessary in order to know and appreciate happiness. In general, suffering has been seen as part of the individual life experience, unavoidable for all human beings. Some writers emphasize that Mennonites have been taught to accept suffering as did their ancestors who underwent persecution in the name of their faith (Sawatzky, 1971). Other writers see the Mennonites' view on life as consisting of two paths: a narrow and difficult one or a joyful, easy one (Bottos, 2008). The first path includes suffering as a means to imitate Christ and to embody separation from the world, a path necessary for salvation. The second, an easy path that would lead to damnation, acquiesces to physical desire and to Satan's temptations. Thus, if worldliness is to be avoided suffering is to be expected and can be an indication that one is on the road to salvation. Simultaneously, being spiritually healthy is an important aspect of everyday life; participants talked about the need to go to church, *listen* to what is being said, and pray to God for mercy.

Although LGS Mennonites believe that God is the creator of the world, some of them have emphasized that people's suffering is not always God's will. God is good, and "it was not God's original plan for us to suffer, but now it is part of our life because of sin entering the world in the Garden of Eden," a participant states. In other words, God does not cause suffering, but all human beings are subject to it including other Mennonites even though they are God's chosen people who live in the physical world which is also considered a fallen world.

The Causes of Suffering

Unlike the biomedical explanation of suffering which focuses on people's physical pain, LGS Mennonites, thus, explain suffering as a *test* from God. The test can be given in various forms, such as the experience of disease, miscarriage, dying, financial problems, or broken relationships with family members. For example, some participants indicated that their experiences of personal sufferings were the result of having certain kinds of diseases or illnesses, such as stress, or self-diagnosed "heartache" or experiencing family strife (through an abusive husband) or having multiple miscarriages. One of the men we interviewed described suffering as "being sick. It's a test. Because we don't listen to God." Death was perceived as a release from suffering.

There was a clear relationship between spiritual and physical health, two of the categories identified in the interviews. For example, some participants noted that having a good spiritual attitude would help ensure physical wellness. Issues with one's heart (sadness, worry, having a "soul" problem i.e., disbelief in God) could cause physical, mental or spiritual illness. Not believing in God or the guilt associated with not believing in God could also cause mental illness (sometimes referred to simply as "nerves"). For many of the participants, mental illness was seen as a result of the negative influence of Satan because it was believed that the individual had moved away from God. Acting inappropriately (i.e., not living as directed by the ministers or according to the principles of the church) and engaging in behaviors such as substance abuse were other signs of spiritual illness (i.e., straying from God) and the basis for causing family and individual strife and suffering. The discussion of the links between Satan, good or poor health and illness were a common theme in the interviews.

Some women talked about the emotional aspects of miscarriages within a community context that did not always offer social support or spiritual guidance to deal with their loss. One female participant related that when a woman experienced a miscarriage, that it was God's way of showing grace because otherwise the child would have been born with health problems. Furthermore the experience of the miscarriage would provide an opportunity for the woman to place her trust in God. On the other hand, choosing to have an abortion and not having as many children as God allowed would cause personal strife and suffering for the individual woman; one woman noted her belief that the souls of the aborted unborn children meet the mother at the gates of heaven and block her entry. Some women talked about a fear of encountering snakes (likely a form representing Satan) during pregnancy, specifically the fear that such encounters were the cause of miscarriages. Finally, if a woman does not "act properly" (i.e. smoking,

drinking, straying from God), her pregnancy may result in the birth of an ill or disabled child. In these instances, a repentance and atonement of the woman's sins could resolve the child's health issues.

Examples from throughout the three studies suggest that suffering can result from physical or emotional abuse within the family unit: "I mean there's the abuse and suffering of women to accept whatever your husband doles out. This is your lot in life and that kind of subservience [is expected]," was noted by one LGS Mennonite woman. Through the interviews we learned about some women, who in their desperation, had performed activities or ingested substances to stimulate an abortion. These women were either in abusive marriages and could not physically or emotionally bear to have more children or were pregnant outside of marriage and could not cope with the shame associated with their indiscretion. These examples provide another viewpoint of suffering, that is, personal suffering so great that the women choose to engage in a behavior that is not supported by their faith in God or their religious teachings.

One scholarly study notes that "Human suffering occurs when a human being perceives an inability to function as the highly organized being he or she is" (Hill, 1992, p. 79), a dysfunction that may be caused by the absence or the change of certain things in people's lives. Some LGS Mennonites similarly explain suffering as the "lack of something that you need." One of the Mennonite participants pointed out that "people experience suffering because they are left alone, no one pays attention to them." Another participant insisted that "suffering is caused by not having faith, [being] emotionally down" and furthermore is supported from the Bible and from the ministers' sermons. One LGS Mennonite woman explained that: "We all need to suffer, it's God's will that we suffer and...to try us whether we will remain in the faith."

Many LGS Mennonites emphasized that inappropriate or sinful actions can result in physical and spiritual suffering for the individual or for the family. In one example a woman was encouraged to confess her sins during pregnancy in order to ensure a healthy child. When the woman failed to do so, the birth of her unwell child was attributed to her sins and unwillingness to atone for them. However, when the woman acquiesced, and asked for forgiveness, the child's health improved, a change she believed to be directly related to her own behavior. In other cases church leaders used people's suffering experience to teach the congregation. For example, a tragic death due to drinking and driving provided the minister with an opportunity to preach to the individual who had been intoxicated about the links between "sinful" behavior and the death of others. Participants also emphasized that God might punish people for their sinful behaviours and that the punishment could include the experience of tragedy and death. Sinfulness was

seen as a spiritual burden that weakened people's spiritual conditions (Schumm & Stoltzfus, 2004) but it was also seen as a condition that could be rectified. For instance, one man we interviewed talked about stopping his drinking behavior because "it did not please God." Most participants, however, did not support the idea that persons who suffer are sinful or that this idea was supported by scriptures. Still, some LGS Mennonites believe that God shows his sovereignty in people's weaknesses. In line with this notion, one LGS Mennonite expressed, "I sometimes have to be sick to reflect on God and to pray more."

The Purposes of Suffering

As noted above, many LGS Mennonites believe that suffering may be a sad, but not necessarily an unfortunate event. The first reason is that suffering is seen as providing opportunities for people to show their faith in God, who uses pain and difficulties for good. Their ministers note that the Bible provides many examples of this idea which is also born out in the history of the Mennonites in general and grounded in the experiences of the LGS we interviewed. They suggest that God uses suffering to teach his children to be obedient, and that it is for the children's own benefit. They cite biblical verses that support this teaching, including Hebrews chapter 12 verse 11 which states: "Now, discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." In other words, God's discipline may be harsh, but what God has been doing is for the believers' own benefit. One woman equated suffering with walking barefoot on gravel and insisted it occurred so that she would learn not be proud. One woman in reflecting on her disabled child noted that "sometimes I just talk to family and friends, but mostly I keep to myself. I just think that this is a cross that I have to carry and you just do that." In other words, individuals must accept and deal with the circumstances of their life. This example also illustrates that suffering allowed the LGS Mennonite woman to review her spirituality which was being challenged by the difficulties she was experiencing. It also encourages the biblical understanding that "If you are able! – All things can be done for the one who believes." (Mark 9:23) It must be noted that not all participants related to the analogy of bearing the cross to suffering; for these individuals, taking up the cross was seen as a voluntary act and experiences such as being ill or being in an abusive relationship, they pointed out, are not voluntary.

In our studies numerous links were made between evil and Satan and one's experiences of illness or the choices one makes that eventually cause illness or poor health outcomes. By and large, the most common

example was straying from God and becoming an alcoholic or addicted to illegal drugs³. Upon reflection of this behavior, many participants (some of whom had been substance abusers) insisted that the individual and their family members suffered because of the individuals' misbehaviors. The participants made several observations. First, and importantly, suffering could result from a lack of good spiritual health (i.e. the individual was not connected to God and did not behave in a manner that would please God). Second, poor spiritual health could be seen in instances in which people mistreated their family members (i.e. by being physically or emotionally abusive). Third, abusive situations could arise when family members did not have sufficient resources to deal with the financial and emotional strain related to the addictive behaviors. Fourth, in some circumstances, family members did not receive the emotional or spiritual support from their church ministers or church members, thus increasing their personal suffering and sense of being alone in dealing with such difficulties.

According to Davis, suffering is often seen by Christians as a life lesson on happiness received from the Lord, meaning people will have a better understanding of how to regain happiness through building a strong faith in God. In our studies, some LGS Mennonite participants expressed a similar idea, one woman stating that "we are expected to suffer so that we will trust God and (also) for (receiving) his help and strength." Another woman talked about the challenges of her life which included an abusive husband who had had incestuous relationships with their daughters resulting in the birth of two grandchildren who were being raised as daughters within the family. This woman talked about how she had decided to commit suicide and was going to drown herself. However, when she got to the edge of the lake, she saw a white light and abandoned her plan; she viewed the light as a sign from God not to end her life. Although the woman's life continued to be difficult, eventually the husband was removed from the home and the woman and her children (and grandchildren) began to move forward with their own lives in Canada.

The scriptures noted above and the participants' reflections illustrate a belief that people learn to be more appreciative of the joy in their lives after they suffer, but also that God's mercy on people is *greater* than their sufferings. Indeed, they emphasized that it is God's mercy that has kept them going despite the challenging circumstances within which they lived. Such circumstances ranged from dealing with personal decisions and behaviors (i.e. substance abuse and addiction) that caused suffering by the individual and their family to being subjected to physical and emotional abuse.

The Meanings of Suffering

Clearly suffering is an important concept among the LGS Mennonites. The comments from the interviews indicate that Jesus Christ suffered for people. Additionally, God suffers with people, and heals their wounds regardless of the fact that ordinary people may not be able to see Him. The LGS Mennonites see their lives as the embodiment of Jesus' suffering and of God's work. God allows suffering to happen to people not for His own pleasure but for the good of those who follow Him (Jacobsen, 2003). As one LGS Mennonite explained in an interview, God allows His only son to suffer "for the good of mankind. Yes, because it [suffering] works like soap to make people clean." Another comment from one of the participants further supports these ideas: "God allows us to suffer so that people's faith can be strengthened, and that seems to be part of the reason why we are expected to suffer on earth." More than that, since LGS Mennonites are God's children, they should follow Jesus' steps to suffer and to serve God.

As researchers we conclude that the LGS Mennonites' willingness to suffer as Christians is the place from where they can draw their strength to endure in their faith in God and to realize what God can do in their lives. Suffering for and with Jesus is a way to please God, and is not necessarily to be avoided. As Gunderman (2002, p. 43) has indicated, "It is not suffering that destroys people, but suffering without meaning." For the LGS participants, suffering had this particular meaning. Additionally, they may try to find religious solutions to the problems they have experienced. Suffering may help a person pay more attention to sinful behaviours, words or thoughts. The two general approaches the LGS Mennonites note that can correct misbehaviours are prayer and confession or atonement of one's sins. As Gunderman argues suffering allows people to reflect on their moral and spiritual conditions (Gunderman, 2002). This linkage can lead to some anxiety in the sense that some LGS Mennonites may consider their physical or mental challenges as a symbol of their personal spiritual deficiency (Schumm & Stoltzfus, 2007). Simultaneously, however, some LGS Mennonites also have tried to make sense of suffering based on their own or others' stories of suffering and healing, allowing them to integrate their religious values into everyday meaning. For example, one person in the interviews sees suffering as "an acceptance of God's will." No specific medical or moral reasons for people's sufferings are indicated in this explanation. Nonetheless, such participants have reconstructed the purpose of suffering in their lives. The exception may be suicide which might be as a result of suffering or of being unable to address one's suffering.

Suffering Creates Hope

LGS Mennonites emphasize that according to the Scriptures, the only place where there is no pain and suffering is heaven. They also note that through suffering, people will gain more spiritual power, and strengthen their faith in God. One health care provider explains a kind of rationale held by some of his LGS Mennonite patients that “Yes, and that’s what we’re here for, to suffer with our Lord, and when I’ve suffered enough, God will take me home.” For LGS Mennonites who are more liberal in thinking, suffering provides an opportunity to become closer to God and develop a more personable relationship with him, something that they desire.

However, it seems that two kinds of general understandings of hope are held by different LGS Mennonite congregations. Evangelical church members tend to emphasize that they have accepted God as their only savior, and have a strong faith in Him. They speak about an assurance that they will go to heaven after their death. Others, especially the people from some non-evangelical churches, also state their hope for going to heaven. However, they also express that God is the only one who can judge and if they say they are going to heaven, then they are really saying that they know more than God. The word “hope” in this case refers to their desire to maintain a persistent faith in God, and the trust that He will accept them into heaven when they die. John Friesen (2004) indicates that “Their hope in eternal salvation was seen as a lifelong process that continued after baptism. They lived in the hope that God’s grace would be sufficient to sustain them as faithful followers of Christ” (p. 136).

In conclusion, combining the findings from three studies conducted among LGS Mennonites, we have learned that suffering is a concept that permeates beliefs, knowledge and practices across their different human physical and emotional experiences including making choices in one’s life that relate to illness, having disabled children, miscarriages, and death and dying. Our findings show that the LGS Mennonites believe that illness and disease can be caused by evil, Satan, or their own sinful behaviours, such as substance abuse. Such perspectives seemed to be more commonly held among this group of Mennonites than among Mennonites who have lived in Canada for decades and assimilated to more modern ways of thinking and understanding about the human body and how it functions (and malfunctions).

Many LGS Mennonites we interviewed believe that an “atonement” of sins can alleviate suffering because sickness can be curtailed and inappropriate behaviors, such as substance abuse, can be prevented or stopped, especially if they renew their spiritual health and return to following God. This also helps to ensure that family members also

do not have to suffer from issues such as addictions and its related issues. Finally, death is perceived by some of the LGS Mennonites as a way to release individual suffering as well as the pain and distress experienced by their family members. Suffering is also seen as a means to guide one's life and life choices and to spiritually prepare for one's own death by asking for forgiveness or forgiving those who acted inappropriately.

What can we make of the findings and the points raised in this article? Perhaps the importance is in assisting LGS Mennonites as they suffer and experience life challenges (i.e., substance abuse), especially because of their interpretation of the close link between Satan and individual choices. In addition, it is important to acknowledge a lack of assistance for some who are suffering through life's circumstances (i.e., women who experience miscarriages) or the choices one makes (i.e., those who are substance abusers). Finally, by understanding the meaning of suffering among the LGS Mennonites, health and social services providers can better understand not only the range of LGS experiences of health and illness but their lives in general.

References

- Bottos, L. C. (2008). *Old Colony Mennonites in Argentina and Bolivia: Nation making, religious conflict and imagination of the future*. Boston: Brill Academic Publishers.
- Davis, C. (1976). *Body as spirit: The nature of religious feeling*. New York, N.Y: The Seabury Press.
- Friesen, J. J. (2004). Old colony theology, ecclesiology, and experience of church in Manitoba. *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, 22, 131-144.
- Gunderman, R. B. (2002). Is suffering the enemy? *Hastings Center Report*, 32(2), 40-44. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3528523>
- Hall, B., & Kulig, J. (2004). Kanadier Mennonites: A case study examining research challenges among religious groups. *Qualitative Health Research*, 14(3). 359-368.
- Hill, C. S. (1992). Suffering as contrasted to pain, loss, grief, despair, and loneliness. In P. L. Starck & J. P. McGovern (Eds.), *The hidden dimension of illness: Human suffering* (pp. 69-80). New York: National League for Nursing Press.
- Jacobsen, D. (2003). *Thinking in the spirit: Theologies of the early Pentecostal movement*. Bloomington, In: Indiana University Press.
- Kellehear, A (2009). On dying and human suffering. *Palliative Medicine*, 23(5). 388-397. doi: 10.1177/0269216309104858
- Kulig, J., & Hall, B. (2004) Health and illness beliefs among southern Alberta Kanadier Mennonites. *Journal of Mennonite Studies*. 22, 185-204.
- Kulig, J., Wall, M., Hill, S. & Babcock R. (2008). Childbearing Beliefs among Low-German-Speaking Mennonite Women. *International Nursing Review*, 55(4), 420-426.
- Kulig, J., Babcock, R., Wall, M., & Hill, S. (2009). Being a Woman: Perspectives of Low German-Speaking Mennonite Women. *Health Care for Women International*. 30(4), 324-338.
- Kulig, J. (ongoing). *The Discovery of Death and Dying Beliefs among Low German Speaking Mennonites: Application to Best Practice Guidelines*. Research funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

- Quiring, (1997). *Mennonite Old Colony Life: under siege in Mexico*. Unpublished Master's Thesis: University of Saskatchewan.
- Schumm, D., and Stoltzfus, M. (2007). Chronic Illness and Disability: Narratives of suffering and healing in Buddhism and Christianity. *Journal of Religion, Disability and Health*, 11(3), 5-21.

Notes

- ¹ The studies discussed here could not have been completed without the participation of the Low German-speaking Mennonites participants, the Mennonite Central Committee, and the numerous clinical agencies and representatives in Alberta and Manitoba. Thanks as well to the graduate and undergraduate students who worked on the various studies and received funding from the Chinook Research Summer Award program at the University of Lethbridge and the Canadian Institutes for Health Research Health Professional Student Research Award program. Funding for the studies discussed here was gratefully received from: Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research {Health & Illness Beliefs among Low German-speaking Mennonites}; Canadian Institutes for Health Research & Institute of Gender and Health {Exploring Kanadier Mennonite Women's Health: Identifying Their Knowledge and Need for Health Promotion} and the Canadian Institutes for Health Research {The Discovery of Death and Dying Beliefs among Low German-speaking Mennonites: Application to Best Practice Guidelines}. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Mennonites, Melancholy and Mental Health: A Historical Critique, October 14 – 16, 2010, Winnipeg, Manitoba.
- ² This number is based upon information from the Mennonite Central Committee Ottawa Office; no precise numbers are available for this group but it is based on the number who move to Canada as well as the number of households already here.
- ³ Our participants more often spoke about an addiction to illegal drugs rather than prescription drugs.