

P-1179 - MENTAL ILLNESS AND MASS MEDIA: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE SINCE 1950 UP TO DATE

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Introduction and aims: Mass media have become the main source of information on mental illness. In recent years, numerous studies documented a relationship between a stigmatizing presentation of psychiatric disorders and negative perception of mental illness by general population. This paper aims at analyzing how mental illness is described in scientific articles published by journals and magazines and delineating the average portrait of a psychiatric patient offered by media to the general population.

Methods: Scientific articles published from 1957 until August 2010 were reviewed, collecting positive and negative expressions commonly associated to mental illness; a qualitative assessment method of these was then applied.

Results: Negative descriptions of mental illness resulted by far more common than positive ones; generally, the tone and the negative attitude that describes mental illness are in the titles and in short articles, often sensational and dramatic, put on the front page, referring to stories of crime and danger. The titles are often inconsistent with the contents of the article. Moreover, there is a discriminatory and derogative language or a language of derision or pity. If there are positive descriptions, they are associated with the involvement of mental health experts, the active role of the psychiatric patient in the mass media or the effect produced by anti-stigma campaigns towards journalists.

Conclusions: Although negative and stigmatizing depictions predominate, there are still opportunities for improving media reporting of mental illness, which should be taken up in future media strategies.