

TEAM

Tools for Entertainment and Media



Analysis of English and Spanish Language Newspaper Coverage of Mental Health Issues in California

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WELLNESS • RECOVERY • RESILIENCE



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I. Summary of Findings

The news media provide fundamental frameworks through which most Americans perceive and understand the contemporary world. When journalists frame a group in a negative light, it propagates prejudice and discrimination (Corrigan et al., 2005). Survey studies in several English-speaking countries have shown that newspapers frequently frame mental illness in a stigmatizing way. Recurring findings show that most articles discuss people with mental illness in terms of dangerousness or violent crime. The coverage of events and views expressed in the media both reflect public opinion and influence it. Media coverage of mental health care may have an impact on policies, and is therefore an important area of research (Huang and Priebe 2003).

In 2012, the Entertainment Industries Council's TEAM Up project, funded by California's Mental Health Services Act (Proposition 63), conducted an analysis of how California newspapers report on mental health issues. This research, which included articles from English and Spanish language newspapers published between 2010 and early 2012, will guide the work of the TEAM Up project and provide a baseline from which to assess the project's success in working with journalists.

The results of this media scan and analysis reflect a picture consistent with the existing body of research that shows individuals with mental illness continue to be portrayed in the media in ways that are negative. There are some bright spots in the findings as well, with more than half of the English language articles including information on services and treatment, prevention and assistance available.

In the scan of English-language newspapers and online outlets, 37 percent of articles framed mental illness and persons living with mental illness in a negative light; positive portrayals comprised 23 percent of the articles. Perceived dangerousness in regard to behavior is discussed in 62 percent of the articles. In addition, reporters wrote about mental health services and treatment in 51 percent of stories, and 61 percent of articles contained information about assistance available for treating mental health conditions.

The scan of Spanish-language newspapers showed that 70 percent of articles used negative language in discussing mental health-related illness, while one quarter (25%) contained positive descriptions. Perceived dangerousness in regard to behavior is discussed in 42 percent of the articles. In addition, reporters mentioned mental health services and treatment in 14 percent of stories, and 36 percent of articles contained information about actions to help the individual.

When more stories about people with a mental illness contain negative portrayals than positive ones, the public is likely to get a skewed picture of individuals living with mental illness and the experiences of recovery. For this reason, these results suggest that when identifying a person in a news story as having a mental illness, it is critical that the information is relevant to the story and from a reliable source. Finding opportunities to cover stories with a positive angle of hope and recovery is another important way of balancing out the overwhelming negative coverage and providing an alternate perspective on people living with mental illness.

II. Background

This media scan was performed to gain a baseline understanding of how the English and Spanish language news media in California report on mental health issues. The purpose of the research is to inform the work of the TEAM Up project headed by the Entertainment Industries Council, which provides assistance to news and entertainment media professionals to help them report accurately about mental health. By assessing the current state of mental health reporting, the project will be able to identify the key needs of journalists in order to create appropriate tools and resources. The media scan will be repeated in early 2014 to track whether there are changes in coverage resulting from the project's outreach and assistance to California journalists.

California is a diverse state with more than 37 million people living within its borders. A 2005 study of adults in California showed that nearly one in five (approximately 4.9 million) reported needing help for a mental or emotional health problem (Grant et al., 2010).

Californians view reality through many different lenses, based largely on their own life experiences. But one common element shared by Californians is a reliance on the news media to receive information about their environment. It is this dependence that helps shape ideas and perceptions about their worldview. The general understanding of traits and characteristics of those with mental illness is left up to society and popular culture to evaluate and disseminate, with the coverage in the media often leaving a negative impression about people with mental illness.

Studies have found a distinct connection between negative media portrayals of mental health challenges and public attitudes and stereotypes. As people may learn about mental illness from the news and entertainment media, inaccurate information can inadvertently promote stigma and discrimination (Edney 2004). From the 1950s to the 1990s, the percentage of Americans who viewed individuals with mental health challenges as dangerous nearly doubled.

One study suggests the public's fear that those with mental illness will be violent has not disappeared and that the perception of dangerousness is a misperception that needs continued attention by anti-stigma campaigns. Such initiatives appear to reduce barriers to people seeking psychiatric treatment and counteract the public's lingering fear of people with mental illness (Mossakowski et al., 2011). Programs that attempt to influence or alter mental health-related content in movies, television programming, and print media have been proven to be popular and effective.

Findings of the California Reducing Disparities Project, which examined mental health disparities for the Latino population, suggest that racial and ethnic minority groups in the U.S. fare far worse than their white counterparts across a range of health indicators (Smedley et al., 2003). A lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate mental health services, specifically access to bilingual and bicultural mental health professionals, are two factors that contribute to this divide. In addition, underserved and marginalized populations, such as Latinos, tend to lack the necessary resources to participate in the social and economic fabric of society (Woodward and Kawachi, 2000). As a result, social and economic factors combined with institutional racism

are among the most important causes of restricted access to quality mental health care for Latinos.

The notion that social environment plays a major role in shaping people's views and decisions about mental health is particularly true for Latinos. According to Refugio Rodriguez, Ethnic Service Manager of Santa Barbara, "Latinos are less likely to voluntarily seek help than non-Latino groups, and if they do seek help it is frequently when their condition has reached a crisis or chronic level." He also emphasizes that only a small percentage of Latinos who do come in contact with clinical services continue treatment for long periods of time. Research shows that poor outcomes and an increased care dropout rate result when Latinos feel misunderstood and experience distrust due to fear of stigma, of deportation, and of shame (Falicov 1998, 2009).

With this supporting evidence surrounding stigma in the Latino community and the impact that the media has on framing perceptions of all populations, we wanted to better understand how Spanish-language newspapers in California portray the topic of mental health. For the purposes of this study, we specifically focused on Spanish-language newspapers, in addition to the mainstream English-language coverage, to better understand how framing topics of mental health can impact how members of the Latino community in California perceive mental health issues and approach receiving mental health treatment.

III. Methodology

English-Language Articles

The research methodology for this analysis was modeled on a similar study conducted by the University of Washington to increase validity and reliability of the constructs (Stuber & Achterman, 2008). Reingold, one of the partners on the TEAM Up Project, did the analysis of the English-language articles. English-language news reports in California newspapers and online news sites from January 2011 to January 2012 were collected using six specific terms related to mental health. The six English terms searched were “anxiety,” “mental health,” “mental illness,” “mentally ill,” “schizophrenia,” and “schizophrenic.” The terms were selected based on research of the most prevalent words and phrases used online related to mental health news stories.

After the search terms were chosen, 10 English-language, California-based news organizations were selected for review based on their regional influence and varying circulation sizes. Although 10 newspapers were initially reviewed, a total of 21 news sources were recorded. This difference can be attributed to news outlets’ reprinting stories from the original sources. A scan of these newspapers based on the search terms was conducted on their websites and on the media monitoring service HighBeam Research. The 10 English-language news outlets were: *Appeal-Democrat* (Sutter and Yuba counties), *Inland Valley Daily Bulletin* (Ontario), *Los Angeles Times*, *Los Angeles Daily News*, *Oakland Tribune*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *San Jose Mercury News*, *Bakersfield Californian*, *Gilroy Dispatch*, and *Monterey County Herald*.

Results from the English scan showed 1,465 articles that included one or more of the six search terms. Due to limited resources, we narrowed the field to 655 articles, maintaining the same ratio of each search term as found in the original 1,465. Finally, we reviewed 178 articles deemed relevant, meaning, for example, the articles were longer than 250 words and were not advertisements. These relevant articles were also reviewed to gauge use of language and mental health-related themes present in the stories.

Coders were trained to ensure that they understood how to code each of the variables correctly. Intercoder reliability was established by taking an initial sample of 10 percent of the articles, each reviewed by two coders. Once the initial sample had a minimum of 75 percent agreement among the coders, the rest of the articles were coded. To ensure ongoing reliability, the intercoder scores were compared periodically to maintain at least 75 percent agreement.

Spanish-Language Articles

The Hispanic Communications Network, one of the partners on the TEAM Up Project, did the analysis of the Spanish-language articles. For the content analysis, news articles from Spanish-language newspapers and online sites were collected from the past two years (2010, 2011, January and February 2012) with the majority of the relevant articles coming from September 2011, November 2011, and January 2012. The six terms researched were: “*enfermedad mental* (mental illness),” “*enfermo mental* (mentally ill),” “*esquizofrenia* (schizophrenia),”

“*esquizofrénico (schizophrenic)*,” “*salud mental (mental health)*,” and “*ansiedad (anxiety)*.” The terms were selected to mirror the terms used in the English-language scan.

The largest newspapers, by circulation, in the top nine Hispanic California markets were then selected for review: *El Popular* (Bakersfield), *Noticiero Semanal* (Fresno), *La Opinión* (Los Angeles), *El Aviso* (Los Angeles), *Impacto U.S.A.* (Los Angeles), *La Prensa* (Riverside), *El Mensajero* (San Francisco/Oakland/San Jose), *El Latino* (San Diego), *La Prensa* (San Diego), *Adelante Valle* (Yuma), *Bajo El Sol* (Yuma), and *La Ganga* (San Francisco/Oakland/San Jose).

Results from the Spanish-language scan yielded 1,631 articles containing at least one of the search terms. Two coders scanned 10 percent of the collection to assess the level of agreement between coders. The agreement between coders was high; intercoder reliability on each term ranged from 90 percent to 100 percent. A random sample of the remaining articles was then coded, based on the prevalence of the term within the group. The 862 articles coded represent a 53 percent sample rate. A total of 114 articles met the criteria for further coding, in terms of type of news item and word length.

IV. English-Language Media Results

The following are the results for the analysis of the English-language articles.

Table 4.1. Article results by newspaper (N=178)

Newspaper	Number of Articles	Percentage of Total
Los Angeles Times	34	19.1
San Francisco Chronicle	34	19.1
San Jose Mercury News	20	11.2
Oakland Tribune	18	10.1
Bakersfield Californian	12	6.7
Contra Costa Times	11	6.1
Press-Enterprise (Riverside)	9	5.1
Appeal-Democrat (Sutter and Yuba counties)	7	3.9
Inland Valley Daily Bulletin (Ontario)	6	3.4
Long Beach Press-Telegram	5	2.8
Record (Stockton)	5	2.8
Los Angeles Daily News	4	2.2
Monterey County Herald	3	1.7
Gilroy Dispatch	2	1.1
Ventura County Star	2	1.1
Barstow Desert Dispatch	1	.6
Colusa County Sun Herald	1	.6
El Chicano Weekly	1	.6
San Gabriel Valley Tribune	1	.6
San Diego Union-Tribune	1	.6
Whittier Daily News	1	.6

Table 4.1 provides the source newspapers for all articles, including the ones later dismissed based on relevancy. The *Los Angeles Times* and the *San Francisco Chronicle* claimed the largest share of articles at 19.1 percent each, followed by the *San Jose Mercury News* at 11.2 percent and the *Oakland Tribune* at 10.1 percent.

Table 4.2. The type of articles in which search terms appeared (N=178)

	Number of Articles	Percentage of Total
General news	119	66.9
Column	19	10.7
Commentary/criticism	13	7.3
Feature	12	6.7
Letter to the editor	6	3.4
Advice column	2	1.1
Editorial	2	1.1
Blog post	1	0.5
Local event announcement	1	0.5
Opinion	1	0.5
Unknown	2	1.1

Table 4.2 breaks down coded stories by the type of section in which they appeared. General news was the most frequent (66.9%), followed by columns (10.7%), commentary/criticism (7.3%), and features (6.7%).

Table 4.3. Months when the articles were published (N=178)

Month	Number of Articles	Percentage of Total
January 2011	14	7.9
February 2011	11	6.1
March 2011	7	3.9
April 2011	8	4.5
May 2011	8	4.5
June 2011	15	8.4
July 2011	6	3.4
August 2011	16	9
September 2011	15	8.4
October 2011	16	9
November 2011	22	12.4
December 2011	30	16.9
January 2012	10	5.6

Table 4.3 represents the dates during which all relevant articles were published. Articles with highest frequency of discussing mental health are published from October to December, with the least frequency occurring in July. The winter holidays are therefore the most likely time that stories with a mental health angle are published.

Table 4.4. Positive portrayal (N=178)

	Number of Articles	Percentage of Total
Yes	41	23
No	137	76.9

Table 4.4 shows the number and percentage of stories in which people with a mental illness were shown in a positive light. Twenty-three percent of stories included positive portrayals through facts such as that someone is in recovery, getting treatment, doing well, or living successfully with their condition.

Table 4.5. Negative portrayal (N=178)

	Number of Articles	Percentage of Total
Yes	66	37.1
No	112	62.9

Table 4.5 shows that 37.1 percent of the English language stories portrayed people with a mental illness in a negative light. The number of neutral portrayals was 34.8 percent.

Table 4.6. Use of negative language describing those with mental illness (N=178)

	Number of Articles	Percentage of Total
Dangerous or unpredictable	79	44.4
Negative emotional state	66	37.1
Incompetent	23	12.9
Popular derogatory	21	11.8

Table 4.6 displays the type of negative language used when describing someone with a mental illness. Of all negative language used, the descriptions of dangerousness or unpredictability were most common, found in nearly one-third of all relevant articles that were coded. Coders were able to select one or more categories.

Table 4.7. Examples of negative language used in news articles to describe mental illnesses and those who live with them (N=178)

	Language used
Dangerous or unpredictable	Behaviors of concern; appears to be threatening either to the student or others; his behavior was becoming increasingly unusual, family members told police after the shooting; holding hammer, acting erratically; she tried to set the house on fire in an attempt to kill her sister; walking down the street dragging an ax
Negative emotional state	Disheveled, confused, and pale appearance; intense mental illness; insanity; aggressive and paranoid behavior related to dementia; irritability and outbursts; childlike; unable to focus; frustrated; severe anger problems and nightmares; anxiety obsession and rumination; rapid mental decline
Incompetent	Doesn't understand condition well enough to manage own care; functions at the mental level of a child and cannot tell time or remember his birthday; unable to make some basic decisions/do basic things; often suffers from large disconnect with reality; not aware of acting abnormally
Popular derogatory	Bizarre behavior; own psychotic world; pure madness; tweaker; just crazy; crazed; narcissist; wild man; whacked

Compiled from all 178 relevant articles, Table 4.7 indicates some of the negative words and phrases used to describe those with a mental illness. Note that these variables do not assess whether the description is accurate or not, but are intended to ascertain the impression that readers would come away with in articles that have a mental health angle.

Table 4.8. Frequency of story theme appearance within articles (N=178)

	Number of articles	Percentage of all relevant articles	Prevalence of subtheme within the category
Any mention of dangerousness (N=110)	110	61.8	
Violent crime against others	73	41	66.4
Suicide/suicidal, violence to oneself	31	17.4	28.2
Accused of crime and competence to stand trial is in question	30	16.9	27.3
Harmed or killed by others	16	9	14.5
Nonviolent crime against others	11	6.2	10
Substance abuse related to mental illness and violence	7	3.9	6.4

Any cause of mental illness mentioned (N=61)	61	34.3	
Biological cause	36	20.2	59
Environmental cause (e.g., war)	33	18.5	54.1
Parental failure	7	3.9	11.5
Personal weakness	2	1.1	3.3

Table 4.8 continued

Any mention of services or treatment (N= 91)	91	51.1	
Therapy or sessions with a psychologist, psychiatrist, marriage or family counselor, licensed social worker, or behaviorist	35	19.7	38.5
Integrated service delivery	32	18	35.2
Recovery is considered or discussed as a reasonable outcome	32	18	35.2
Report on new research	27	15.2	29.7
Biological treatments including medications or electric shock therapy	27	15.2	29.7
Person in recovery from mental illness is described as an active part of his/her treatment approach	15	8.4	16.5
Treatment mentioned but not offered to subject/s	14	7.9	15.4

Any advocacy concerns or actions (N=109)	109	61.2	
Shortage of resources	45	25.3	41.3
Poor quality or abusive treatment (when they are provided)	22	12.4	20.2
Stigma or discrimination reduction	20	11.2	18.3
Homelessness or housing issues	15	8.4	13.8
Use of seclusion, restraint, involuntary commitment	11	6.2	10.1
Availability of a new funding source or resource	9	5.1	8.3
Proposition 63	5	2.8	4.6
Insurance parity	2	1.1	1.8
California Mental Health Services Authority	0	0	0
Other	63	35.4	57.8

Table 4.8 continued

Any effort to prevent mental illnesses (N=103)	103	57.9	
Reducing the potentially devastating consequences of mental illness	89	50	86.4
Any effort to educate about or promote better mental health	67	37.6	65
Importance of early interventions to address mental illness	48	27	46.6
A person living a meaningful and productive life even with symptoms	21	11.8	20.4
A person who is in recovery	17	9.6	16.5
A person having achieved full recovery, a meaningful life without major symptoms of illness	10	5.6	9.7

Table 4.8 tracks the themes used when discussing a person or people with mental illness, such as the characterization of “dangerous,” along with any mentions of a cause of the mental illness, treatment of mental illness, advocacy concerns, and efforts to prevent mental illnesses. Services or treatment were discussed in 51.1 percent of the articles, advocacy concerns were mentioned in 61.2 percent, and any effort to prevent mental illness was referenced 57.9 percent of the time.

The theme of dangerousness—specifically violent crime against others—was the most common message, seen in 62 percent of all relevant articles. Within the subtheme of “dangerous,” violent crime against others was mentioned in 66.4 percent of articles. Among articles mentioning a cause of mental illness, biological sources were cited most often, at 58.1 percent, closely followed by environmental causes, at 53.2 percent. Options such as integrated service delivery were mentioned in 35.2 percent of all articles referencing services and treatment, while biological treatments and reporting of new findings were both discussed in 29.7 percent of the articles.

Of the articles related to advocacy, a shortage of resources was most commonly mentioned, at 41.3 percent. Following that, the poor quality or abusive treatment some receive had the highest prevalence, appearing in 20.2 percent of all articles within the subtheme. The 57.8 percent of “other” articles related to advocacy contained suggestions about improving police treatment of the mentally ill, the Americans with Disabilities Act, immigration, bullying, the effects of war, and eating disorders.

Articles concerning the subtheme of preventing mental illnesses showed that the reduction of the potentially devastating consequences of mental illness was mentioned 86.4 percent of the time. Coders were able to select one or more categories.

Table 4.9. Breakdown of articles that mention some type of help available (N=178)

	Number of Articles	Percentage of all relevant articles	Prevalence of subtheme
All mentions of help	81	54.5	
Programs and policy solutions	54	30.3	66.7
Specific places or sources for help	22	12.4	27.2
Actions reader can take	12	6.7	14.8
Self-help	8	4.5	9.9
Information about upcoming event	3	1.7	3.7
Other	9	5.1	11.1

Table 4.9 reflects that 54.5 percent of all coded articles provided guidance or mentioned help for those with mental illness. Of those, programs and policy solutions were the most frequently mentioned, at 66.7 percent of the time within the subtheme, followed by naming a specific source of help, at 27.2 percent. Coders were able to select one or more categories.

Table 4.10. Specific symptoms and diagnoses mentioned (N=178)

	Number of Articles	Percentage of Total
Any mention of a diagnosis or symptoms	175	98.3
Mentally ill, mental health problems	141	79.2
Schizophrenia	37	20.8
Depression	37	20.8
Suicidal	28	15.7
Bipolar	27	15.2
Anxiety	27	15.2
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder	14	7.9
Paranoid	12	6.7
Psychotic	10	5.6
Other	49	27.4

Symptoms and diagnoses of mental illness are reported in Table 4.10. Nearly all articles mention a specific diagnosis or symptom. Of those, the terms “mentally ill” or “mental health problems” (79.2%), “schizophrenia” (20.8%), and “depression” (20.8%) were the most common. The category “other” contained isolated diagnoses such as: trichotillomania, grooming disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder, Tourette’s syndrome, eating disorders, sleep disorders, and autism. Coders were able to select one or more categories.

Table 4.11. Sources for the diagnosis mentioned in article (N=178)

	Number of Articles	Percentage of Total
Medical expert	57	32
Attorney	30	16.9
Neighbor, friend, or family member	27	15.2
Police	10	5.6
Other	7	3.9

When journalists are reporting on individuals with mental illness, sources of information are important. Table 4.11 reflects that reporters refer to medical experts in one-third of all articles, with attorneys (16.3%) and a neighbor, friend, or family member (15.2%) also being primary sources. The sources in the “other” category included a judge, a university spokesman, a veteran advocate, and another individual with a mental illness.

Table 4.12. Framing (N=178)

	Number of Articles	Percentage of Total
Personal/episodic	70	39.3
Thematic/systemic	63	35.4
Both	39	21.9

Table 4.12 shows how stories are framed. A personal/episodic story is based on a specific event or a particular case. A thematic/systemic story presents collective or general evidence. The scanned articles were split among different framing tenets, with 39.3 percent being personal/episodic in nature, 35.4 percent being thematic/systemic, and 21.9 percent being a combination of both.

V. Spanish-Language Media Results

The following are the results for the analysis of Spanish-language newspaper articles. Note that the analysis and reporting are slightly different than the English-language analysis due to the data being coded and analyzed by separate organizations in two languages.

Table 5.1. Article results by newspaper (N=114)

Newspaper	Number of Articles	Percentage of Total
El Mensajero	51	44.7
Impacto U.S.A.	13	11.4
Adelante Valle	11	9.6
La Opinion	11	9.6
El Latino (San Diego)	11	9.6
La Prensa (San Diego)	6	5.3
El Popular	4	3.5
Bajo El Sol	3	2.6
La Prensa (Riverside)	2	1.8
Noticiero Semanal	2	1.8
El Aviso	0	0
La Ganga	0	0

Table 5.1 lists the source newspapers for all articles, including those that were scanned for relevant articles and where none were found. The majority of the relevant articles appeared in *El Mensajero* (44.7%) and in *Impacto U.S.A.* (11.4%).

Table 5.2. The type of articles in which search terms appeared (N=114)

	Number of Articles	Percentage of Total
Local/State/Regional	46	40.4
Health	25	21.9
Editorial	11	9.6
Entertainment	6	5.3
National	5	4.4
Front page	3	2.6
Life	2	1.8
Stories	1	0.9
Unknown	11	9.6

Table 5.2 lists the number of stories that appeared in each section of the newspaper. Stories most frequently appeared in the local news section (40.4%), followed by the health section (21.9%), with stories appearing in the editorial section 9.6 percent of the time.

5.3. Positive portrayal (N=114)

	Number of Articles	Percentage of Total
Yes	28	24.6
No	86	75.4

Table 5.3 shows the number and percentage of stories in which people with a mental illness were shown in a positive light. One quarter (24.6%) of the stories included positive portrayals through facts such as that someone is in recovery, getting treatment, doing well, or living successfully with their condition.

Table 5.4. Any negative language used (N=114)

	Number of Articles	Percentage of Total
Any negative language	80	70.2
Negative emotional state	59	51.8
Dangerous or unpredictable	48	42.1
Incompetent	27	23.7
Popular derogatory	24	21.1

Table 5.4 provides information on the frequency of descriptive language used in news stories when describing persons suffering from mental illness. A large majority—70.2 percent—of all news stories described a person(s) with mental illness using negative descriptive language. Most often, individuals were described as being in a negative emotional state (51.8%), with 42.1% of the articles including language related to dangerousness or unpredictability. Language describing someone as incompetent appeared in 23.7 percent of the articles, with 21.1 percent using popular derogatory language.

This table is slightly different from its English language equivalent in that the overall negative portrayal variable. This analysis specifically looks at whether any negative language is used in the Spanish articles, as opposed to Table 4.5, which looks at whether any negative portrayal exists in the English language articles.

Table 5.5. Frequency of story theme appearance within articles (N=114)

	Number of articles	Percentage of all relevant articles	Prevalence of subtheme within the category
Any mention of dangerousness (N=37)	37	32.5	
Violent crime against others	17	14.9	45.9
Suicide/suicidal, violence to oneself	8	7	21.6
Nonviolent crime against others	5	4.4	13.5
Accused of crime and competence to stand trial is in question	3	2.6	8.1
Abuse to someone suffering from mental illness	1	.9	2.7
Other	4	3.5	10.8

Any cause of mental illness mentioned (N=24)	61	21.1	
Environmental cause (e.g., war)	17	14.9	27.9
Biological cause	11	9.6	18
Personal weakness	0	0	0
Parental failure	0	0	0
Other	1	0.9	1.6

Any mention of services or treatment (N= 16)	16	14	
Therapy or sessions with a psychologist, psychiatrist, marriage or family counselor, licensed social worker, or behaviorist	13	11.4	81.3
Report on new research	1	0.9	6.3
Person in recovery from mental illness is described as an active part of his/her treatment approach	1	0.9	6.3
Recovery is considered or discussed as a reasonable outcome	1	0.9	6.3
Biological treatments including medications or electric shock therapy	0	0	0
Integrated service delivery	0	0	0
Other	1	0.9	6.3

Table 5.5 continued

Any advocacy concerns or actions (N=41)	41	36	
Poor quality or abusive treatment (when they are provided)	21	18.4	51.2
Shortage of resources	9	7.9	22
Stigma or discrimination reduction	8	7.0	19.5
Insurance parity	2	1.8	4.9
Use of seclusion, restraint, involuntary commitment	2	1.8	4.9
Homelessness or housing issues	1	0.9	2.4
Proposition 63	0	0	0
Availability of a new funding source or resource	0	0	0
California Mental Health Services Authority	0	0	0
Other	1	0.9	2.4

Any effort to prevent mental illnesses (N=30)	30	26.3	
Reducing the potentially devastating consequences of mental illness	19	16.7	63.3
A person who is in recovery	6	5.3	20
A person living a meaningful and productive life even with symptoms	5	4.4	16.7
Importance of early interventions to address mental illness	5	4.4	16.7
A person having achieved full recovery, a meaningful life without major symptoms of illness	0	0	0
Other	2	1.8	6.7

Table 5.5 shows the prevalence of story themes mentioned in the coded articles. The most prevalent story theme was any advocacy concerns or actions (36%), followed by any mention of dangerousness (32.5%), prevention (26.3%), cause of mental illness (21.1%) and any mention of services or treatment (14%).

Within the theme of “dangerousness,” the subtheme of “violent crimes against others” appeared 45.9 percent of the time and was the most prevalent subtheme in this category. Within the theme of “cause for mental illness” the “environmental” subtheme was most prevalent at 27.9 percent. In the stories about treatment, the subtheme of “therapy” was the most common (81.3%) while

“reducing the potentially devastating consequences of mental illness” was the most prominent subtheme (63.3%) within stories about prevention.

Table 5.6. Specific symptoms and diagnoses mentioned (N=114)

	Number of Articles	Percentage of Total
Any mention of a diagnosis or symptoms	14	12.3
Schizophrenia	4	3.5
Dementia, including Alzheimer’s	4	3.5
Bipolar	3	2.6
Substance abuse or dependence	1	0.9
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder	1	0.9
Attention Deficit Disorder	1	0.9
Depression	0	0
Panic disorder	0	0
Borderline personality disorder	0	0
Anxiety	0	0
Other	2	1.8

Table 5.6 shows that symptoms and diagnoses were not a major focal point in these Spanish-language articles. Only 12.3 percent of articles had any mention of a diagnosis or symptom. Schizophrenia and dementia were the mental illness conditions mentioned most frequently as part of a diagnosis.

VI. Conclusions

The information gleaned from this review of California news media provides important guidance as the TEAM Up Project and CalMHSA continue their work in fostering a better social environment for Californians with mental illnesses. These data create a statistical baseline from which to understand how the news media report on the issue of mental health and the critical role they have in shaping public perception of the subject. In addition, the results of this analysis may be useful for any organization interested in working with the media to address the influence it has on the public's attitudes toward mental health and people living with mental illness.

English-language journalists referred to individuals with mental illnesses in a negative light in 37 percent of their articles, compared with 23 percent of articles containing positive portrayals. In contrast with the negative associations, journalists also mentioned services or treatment available for individuals in over half of their articles (51.1%), with information on advocacy concerns (61.2%) and prevention (57.9%) in a large majority of articles.

In Spanish-language newspapers, a vast majority (70.2%) of articles discussed mental illness in a negative or derogatory manner, as opposed to about 25 percent positive portrayals. The most common theme found in the articles (36%) was advocacy, most often related to the lack of resources provided to Hispanics around mental health care. In contrast to the English-language articles, there were far fewer mentions of services and treatment (14%) and prevention (26.3%).

In both types of newspapers, one of the most common themes is that of dangerousness (English – 61.8%; Spanish - 32.5%), particularly in terms of violent crime against others. This finding is consistent with other studies of this type.

The mention of a specific diagnosis or symptoms was vastly different among the English and Spanish language newspapers, with the English articles much more likely to name a particular condition. The source of that diagnosis varied, with only about a third being medical experts; the balance of the sources was not likely to have the expertise to provide a definitive diagnosis and was likely just conjecture.

Of course, there will periodically be incidents that are newsworthy that involve people with a mental illness engaging in violent or unusual behavior. This analysis is not intended to suggest that news outlets should not cover these stories or should not report information that is relevant to the story. However, when a greater percentage of stories about people with a mental illness contain negative portrayals than positive ones, the public is likely to get a skewed picture of what individuals living with mental illness are like. For this reason, these results suggest that when identifying a person in a news story as having a mental illness, it is critical that the information is relevant to the story and from a reliable source. Finding opportunities to cover stories with a positive angle of hope and recovery is another important way of balancing out the overwhelming negative coverage and providing an alternate perspective on people living with mental illness.

VII. Recommendations

To reduce the likelihood that news stories will contribute to stigmatizing attitudes about people living with a mental illness, the following recommendations are offered to news organizations and the journalists who work for them as best practices.

When covering a story with a mental health-related angle, consider these three key questions:

- 1. Is mental illness relevant to the story?** If it is not meaningfully linked to the story at hand, there is no need to mention it.
- 2. What is your source for the mental illness diagnosis?** Don't rely on hearsay. If someone's mental condition is relevant, make sure your source knows with certainty the person's diagnosis.
- 3. What is the most accurate language to use?** Avoid using derogatory words, and be as specific as possible when describing someone's condition. Consider how the language you use may impact people living with a mental illness who are reading it or the public's perceptions of mental illness.

In addition, journalists should take into account the following best practices when reporting on mental health-related stories:

- Don't assume the cause of irrational behavior or violence is mental illness unless you have confirmation from a reliable source who has access to that information.
- "Mental illness" covers a wide range of conditions. Be specific in the diagnosis when possible and don't imply that all mental illnesses are the same.
- Avoid referring to someone with a mental illness as a victim or "suffering" from a mental illness.
- Use "people-first" language—say "a person with schizophrenia," rather than "a schizophrenic."
- Avoid derogatory slang words in any context—"he's psychotic," "gone nuts," "acting deranged."
- Be cautious in reporting on suicide—extensive and detailed coverage can lead to copycat suicides. For research-based recommendations on how to safely cover suicides, see ReportingonSuicide.org.
- Provide balance—include positive stories of hope and recovery, new treatments and new research.
- Keep in mind that the individual experience of and response to mental illness varies among different cultural and ethnic communities. Don't assume that symptoms, diagnosis and treatment for a particular condition are uniform across the wide spectrum, and many faces, of mental health issues.
- Be sensitive when using photos with stories involving mental illness and avoid perpetuating stereotypes with pictures of people looking disheveled or threatening.
- Include information about local mental health resources and helplines.

In addition, Spanish-language journalists—as well as those working in the mainstream press—need to carefully frame their communications with the Hispanic community and ensure cultural competency when discussing mental health issues: Journalists and health care providers alike have a responsibility to better understand the cultural nuances and generational differences that are part of the fabric of the Hispanic community in order to better approach serving them.

This report reinforces the findings of previous research that indicate concerns remain in the reporting of mental illness. What appears as news is ultimately the end product of a journalistic process, resulting from a complex set of criteria to evaluate newsworthiness of a story (Stark et al., 2004). But there is some evidence that giving reporters appropriate background materials can improve the accuracy of reporting. The media can be a potent vehicle for challenging stereotypes and disseminating accurate, positive messages about mental illness (Stuart 2003).

To this end, the Entertainment Industries Council’s TEAM (Tools for Entertainment And Media) Up Project has created a Mental Health Reporting Style Guide as a companion piece to the Associated Press Stylebook for journalists. Ongoing events and assistance are available to journalists and members of the entertainment industry to assist in the accurate depiction of mental health issues in the media.

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