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Stigmatization of psychosis: a 10-year study of Flemish newspapers

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Learning Goal:

This study aims to elucidate the stigmatization of psychosis, as expressed in public media. It proves to be blatant and it increases over time. As stigma is a source of suffering, injustice and suboptimal treatment, it urgently needs to be addressed with the media.

Abstract Text:

Psychosis is one of the most stigmatized psychiatric conditions. To assess stigma in the media, we compared the coverage of "autism" and "schizophrenia" in the Flemish newspapers regarding stigma over a 10-year period (2008-2017), by scoring all articles containing these terms published in all seven Flemish newspapers for their stigmatizing content. In the 8.357 collected articles, the coverage of autism was mostly positive and the coverage of schizophrenia was predominantly negative. The contrast is very substantial ($p < 0.0001$) and the negative coverage of both disorders increased over time. For the last five years, we added the search term "psychosis". The aim was to see if the fatally stigmatized term "schizophrenia" could be replaced by "psychosis". The results are ambiguous: in the newspapers, the term "psychosis" is much more often used in a positive context than the term "schizophrenia", but at the same time as often used in a negative context as "schizophrenia". The newspapers differ only marginally in their stigmatizing use of the term "schizophrenia", while the term "psychosis" is used more positively by broadsheet than by tabloid newspapers. The observation that a somewhat similar condition such as autism is covered in a clearly more favorable way indicates that a more positive image of psychosis is not only desirable but also possible.

**ON THE HEALING POWER
OF HUMAN RECONNECTION**