

National Survey on Mental Illness and the Media

Summary of Findings

Mental Illness in the News Media

ABOUT THREE-QUARTERS OF AMERICANS SAY THEY HAVE HEARD OR SEEN SOMETHING ON THE NEWS ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS DURING THE PAST 6 MONTHS.

Have you seen, read or heard any stories in the news in the last 6 months about mental illnesses such as depression, schizophrenia, or anxiety disorders?

(Base = 1,022)

Yes	72%
No	26%
DK	1%

FOUR OUT OF FIVE AMERICANS SAY THEY HAVE HEARD OR SEEN SOMETHING SPECIFICALLY ABOUT DEPRESSION, THE MOST FREQUENTLY MENTIONED AMONG A LIST OF MENTAL ILLNESSES.

EATING DISORDERS AND ADD WERE MENTIONED BY ABOUT TWO-THIRDS, FOLLOWED CLOSELY BY MENTIONS OF ANXIETY OR PANIC DISORDERS. ABOUT HALF HAVE SEEN SOMETHING ABOUT EACH OF THE OTHER FOUR ILLNESSES LISTED.

How about the following illnesses? Which of the following specific illnesses have you seen, read or heard about in the news?

(Base = 1,022)

79%	Depression
71%	Eating Disorders such as Anorexia or Bulimia
68%	Attention Deficit Disorder
62%	Anxiety or Panic Disorder
52%	Bipolar Disorder, often called manic-depression
51%	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
51%	Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder
47%	Schizophrenia

THREE-FOURTHS SAY THEY SEE NEWS STORIES ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESSES EITHER OFTEN OR SOMETIMES, INCLUDING MORE THAN ONE-THIRD WHO SAID THEY SEE THEM OFTEN. ONLY ONE FOURTH SEE THEM RARELY OR NEVER.

How often would you say you see stories about mental illnesses in the news?

(Base = 1,022)

- 35% Often
- 41% Sometimes
- 22% Rarely
- 3% Never

THE KEY SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS FOR MOST PEOPLE ARE TV NEWS SHOWS LIKE DATELINE AND 60 MINUTES, NEWSPAPERS AND TV NEWS, EACH CITED BY MORE THAN HALF.

ABOUT ONE-THIRD MENTIONED NEWSMAGAZINES LIKE TIME AND NEWSWEEK AND TALK SHOWS ON TV AS KEY SOURCES. ONE FOURTH POINTED TO RADIO NEWS, MAGAZINES OTHER THAN GENERAL NEWS AND WOMENS MAGAZINES, NONFICTION BOOKS AND THE INTERNET.

I'm going to read you a list of news sources. For each one, please tell me whether it is one of your top information sources or whether it is a less important source for information about mental illnesses. [Read list]

(Base = 1,022)

- 70% TV news shows such as Dateline or 60 Minutes
- 58% Newspapers
- 51% TV News
- 34% Newsmagazines such as Time or Newsweek
- 31% Talk shows on TV
- 26% Radio News
- 26% Other magazines
- 25% Internet [If yes, ask Q. 4a]
- 25% Non-Fiction Books
- 18% Talk shows on Radio

18% Women's magazines - Woman's Day, Redbook, Mademoiselle

SIMILARLY, THE SOURCES SEEN AS MOST CREDIBLE WITH RESPECT TO MENTAL ILLNESS WERE TV SHOWS LIKE DATELINE AND 60 MINUTES, AND NEWSPAPERS. HOWEVER, NEWSMAGAZINES, ALTHOUGH RELIED ON LESS OFTEN, ARE SEEN AS VERY CREDIBLE, MORE SO THAN TV NEWS.

NON-FICTION BOOKS WERE MENTIONED AS CREDIBLE BY FOUR OUT OF TEN, AND RADIO NEWS AND THE INTERNET BY ABOUT ONE-THIRD. TV AND RADIO TALK SHOWS WERE SEEN AS CREDIBLE BY LESS THAN ONE-FOURTH.

Which news sources provide you with the most accurate and credible information about mental illness? For each news source I read, please tell me whether it is among the most accurate sources or whether it is a less accurate source of information about mental illnesses? [Read list.]

(Base=1,022)

75% TV news shows such as Dateline or 60 Minutes

60% Newspapers

59% Newsmagazines such as Time or Newsweek

50% TV News

i) 41% Non-Fiction Books

36% Radio News

31% Internet

29% Women's magazines such as Woman's Day, Family Circle or Mademoiselle

29% Other magazines

23% Talk shows TV

21% Talk shows on Radio

AMONG THOSE WHO MENTIONED THE INTERNET AS EITHER A TOP OR MINOR SOURCE OF INFORMATION ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS (64% OF THE TOTAL), 44% SAID WEBSITES WERE THEIR BEST SOURCES, AND 10% SAID NEWSGROUPS. MOST OF THE REMAINDER COULD NOT BE SPECIFIC.

[Ask only of people who use the Internet to get mental health info (Q. 4j)]

4a) Where do you get the most information about mental illnesses on the Internet? [Read list]

(Base = 661)

- 44% Web sites
- 10% Newsgroups
- 4% Discussion boards or bulletin boards
- 3% Chat rooms
- 2% Listservs

MORE THAN HALF OF THOSE WHO MENTIONED THE INTERNET AS EITHER A TOP OR MINOR SOURCE OF INFORMATION ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS (64% OF THE TOTAL), SAID THEIR BIGGEST CONCERNS ABOUT USING THE INTERNET FOR THIS INFORMATION WERE THE ACCURACY AND RELIABILITY OF THE INFORMATION AS WELL AS PRIVACY CONCERNS. MORE THAN HALF SAID EACH OF THESE WAS A VERY SERIOUS CONCERN.

[Ask only of people who use the Internet to get mental health info (Q. 4j)]

4b) I'm going to read a list of possible concerns people may have about getting information on mental illnesses over the Internet. For each item I mention, please tell me whether it is a very serious concern, somewhat of a concern or not really a concern about getting mental health information from the Internet?

(Base = 661)

% Very serious

- 56% Privacy, or someone being able to trace you or contact you on the Internet
- 55% Not knowing the accuracy of information, or whether the information is correct
- 56% Not knowing whether the source of the information is reliable
- 40% Not knowing whether the information is old or outdated
- 31% Not being able to find the information easily on the Internet or problems with navigating through web sites
- 22% Information on the Internet is not always easy to understand

MORE THAN FOUR IN TEN SAID THAT STORIES IN THE NEWS ABOUT PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS GENERALLY PORTRAY THEM IN A NEGATIVE LIGHT. THIS WAS THREE TIMES AS MANY AS THOSE WHO SAID STORIES WERE GENERALLY POSITIVE. THE REMAINDER SAID COVERAGE WAS NEUTRAL.

AMONG THOSE WHO SAY THEY HAVE SEEN STORIES AT LEAST OCCASIONALLY (94% OF THE TOTAL) IN THE NEWS ABOUT MEDICATIONS FOR MENTAL ILLNESS, MOST BELIEVE THE MEDICATIONS ARE PORTRAYED EITHER POSITIVELY OR NEUTRALLY. ONLY 16% SAID MEDICATIONS WERE DEPICTED IN A NEGATIVE WAY.

[Ask only of people who have heard of/seen stories on medication (Q, 7f)]

Thinking about the news stories you have seen, read or heard about mental health medication, would you say the information about these medicines is mostly positive, mostly negative, or neutral?

(Base = 948)

37% Positive

16% Negative

43% Neutral

4% Don't know

MOST OF THOSE WHO HAVE SEEN NEWS STORIES ABOUT MEDICATION FOR MENTAL ILLNESSES HAVE HEARD BOTH POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE STATEMENTS MADE. AMONG THE POSITIVE STATEMENTS ARE THAT MEDICINES CAN HELP PEOPLE RECOVER, THEY CAN SAVE LIVES AND ENABLE PEOPLE TO STAY OUT OF MENTAL HOSPITALS.

HOWEVER, A MAJORITY HAVE ALSO HEARD THAT THEY CAN HAVE SERIOUS SIDE EFFECTS, ARE PRESCRIBED TOO READILY BY PHYSICIANS AND DO NOT PROVIDE CURES. ALMOST HALF HAVE ALSO HEARD THAT THEY CAN BE ADDICTIVE AND THAT PEOPLE RELY ON MEDICATIONS TOO MUCH.

[Ask only of people who have heard of/seen stories on medication (Q, 7f)]

I'm going to read a few statements. For each, please tell me whether you have heard these statements in the news.

(Base = 948)

70% Medicines designed to treat mental illnesses can help people recover

70% Medicines designed to treat mental illnesses have serious side effects

62% Physicians prescribe medications to treat mental illnesses too frequently

- 15% Herbal remedies used to help people with mental illness
- 15% Famous people or celebrities with mental illnesses
- 14% People with mental illness who have gotten better through treatment
- 11% People faking mental illness

IN GENERAL, THE PUBLIC THINKS THAT NEWS PORTRAYALS OF PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS ARE SOMEWHAT ACCURATE. ONLY 7% SAY THEY THINK THESE DEPICTIONS ARE VERY ACCURATE, AND 16% THINK THEY ARE MOSTLY INACCURATE.

In general, how correct or accurate would you say these news portrayals of mentally ill people in news programs are?
(Base = 1,022)

- 7% Very accurate
- 73% Somewhat accurate
- 12% Not very accurate
- 4% Not accurate at all

Thinking about stories in the news about people with mental illnesses, do you think these people are usually shown in a mostly positive, mostly negative or neutral way?

(Base = 1,022)

- 14% Positive
- 43% Negative
- 37% Neutral

THE MENTAL ILLNESS RELATED STORIES THAT PEOPLE SEE MOST FREQUENTLY DEAL WITH PRESCRIPTION MEDICATIONS LIKE PROZAC AND ZOLOFT, PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS WHO HAVE COMMITTED VIOLENT ACTS, CHILDREN WITH EMOTIONAL DISORDERS SUCH AS HYPERACTIVITY AND ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER AND THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF TRAUMA. ALMOST HALF SAID THEY SAW STORIES ABOUT THESE TOPICS OFTEN. STORIES ABOUT OVERMEDICATION OF CHILDREN WERE SEEN OFTEN BY ABOUT ONE-THIRD.

OTHER STORIES, INCLUDING THOSE ABOUT PEOPLE SUCCESSFULLY BEING TREATED, WERE SEEN RATHER INFREQUENTLY.

I'm going to read you a list of different stories that might be reported in the news. Please tell me whether you see, read or hear this type of news story often, sometimes, rarely or never. [Please rotate answer choices]

(Base = 1,022)

- 48% Prescription medication for people with mental illnesses, such as Prozac or Zoloft
- 47% People with mental illness who have committed violent acts
- 47% Children with emotional or mental disorders, such as hyperactivity or attention deficit disorder
- 42% Psychological impact of trauma or abuse
- 33% Over-medication of children
- 27% People with mental illness who have been the victims of violent acts
- 25% Counseling or therapy for people with mental illness
- 21% Health care or health insurance issues faced by people with a mental disorder and their families
- 19% The every day difficulties faced by people with a mental illness and their families

- 61% Medicines designed to treat mental illnesses can save lives
- 60% Using medicine to treat mental illnesses allows people to stay out of mental hospitals
- 58% Medicines designed to treat mental illnesses do not cure the illness
- 47% Medicines designed to treat mental illnesses are highly addictive
- 46% People with mental illnesses rely too much on prescription medication and don't try to solve their problems in other ways
- 35% Medicines designed to treat mental illnesses cause people to be violent

MOST PEOPLE (54%) BELIEVE THAT NEWS COVERAGE OF MENTAL ILLNESS IN THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS HAS IMPROVED THE PUBLIC'S UNDERSTANDING OF THESE ILLNESSES. ONLY 7% BELIEVE THEY HAVE MADE THE PUBLIC'S UNDERSTANDING OF THESE PROBLEMS WORSE.

Do you think the news coverage of mental illnesses in the last several years has made the public's understanding of these illnesses better, worse or has it not changed?

(Base = 1,022)

- 54% Better
- 7% Worse
- 36% Has not changed public's understanding of mental illnesses
- 3% Don't know

CONSISTENT WITH THIS VIEW, A LARGE MAJORITY (74%) SAID THAT THE INFORMATION THEY HAVE SEEN ON THE NEWS ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS WOULD MAKE THEM MORE LIKELY TO ENCOURAGE SOMEONE WITH A MENTAL ILLNESS TO SEEK TREATMENT. ONE-THIRD SAID IT MADE THEM MUCH MORE LIKELY TO RECOMMEND TREATMENT.

If you knew someone who had a mental illness, does the type of information you've seen in the news make you more likely or less likely to recommend treatment to them? Is that much more/less likely or just somewhat more/less likely?

(Base = 1,022)

32% Much more likely

42% Somewhat more likely

13% Somewhat less likely

d) 7% Much less likely

Mental Illness in Entertainment Media

WHILE THE VAST MAJORITY HAVE SEEN STORIES ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS ON THE NEWS, A SMALLER MAJORITY ALSO SAY THEY HAVE SEEN SOMEONE WITH A MENTAL ILLNESS PORTRAYED IN THE ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA, EITHER ON TV, IN MOVIES OR BOOKS.

Now, instead of the news, I'd like you to think about entertainment television shows and movies you've seen or fiction books you've read. Can you think of any that have shown a person with a mental illness?

(Base = 1,022)

57% Yes [Ask Q. 13 a and 13 b]

40% No [Skip to Q. 14]

[Ask only of respondents who can think of movies, TV shows or books that have portrayed people who are mentally ill (Q. 13)]
13a) Thinking specifically about television programs you have seen, which TV show or shows have shown or portrayed people with mental illness most accurately?

[Ask only of respondents who can think of movies, TV shows or books that have portrayed people who are mentally ill (Q. 13)]
13b) And which TV show or shows that you have seen have shown or portrayed people with mental illness the least accurately?

ABOUT HALF OF THOSE WHO HAVE SEEN PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESSES PORTRAYED IN THE ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA SAY THEY OFTEN HAVE SEE THEM DEPICTED AS DRUG OR ALCOHOL ADDICTS OR AS CRIMINALS. SLIGHTLY FEWER THAN THAT OFTEN SEE PEOPLE

WITH MENTAL ILLNESS PORTRAYED AS VIOLENT, VICTIMS OF CRIME OR VIOLENCE, SCARY OR DANGEROUS OR SAD AND LONELY PEOPLE.

ABOUT ONE-THIRD SAID THEY OFTEN SEE PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS PORTRAYED OUT- OF CONTROL, HOMELESS OR WEAK AND UNABLE TO COPE WITH DAILY LIFE.

RELATIVELY FEW SAID THEY HAVE SEEN PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS PORTRAYED AS PEOPLE WHO CAN COPE SUCCESSFULLY (18%) OR AS HAVING SUCCESSFULLY OVERCOME THEIR PROBLEMS (7%).

I'm going to read you a list of different ways that people with mental illness can be shown in TV shows, movies or books. Please tell me whether you see or read about these types of people with mental illness often, sometimes, rarely or never in TV, movies or books. Mentally ill people who are: [Please rotate answer choices]
(Base = 1,022)

% WHO SEE THIS OFTEN

- 51% Drug or alcohol addicts
- 47% Criminals
- 43% Violent
- 43% Sad or lonely
- 39% Victims of violence and crime
- 37% Scary or dangerous
- 34% Out-of-control
- 33% Homeless
- 29% Weak people who can't cope with everyday stresses
- 26% Ordinary people
- 19% People in mental hospitals
- 18% People who are able to function in society (for example, hold jobs or hold solid relationships with their family and friends)
- 7% People who have overcome their mental illnesses successfully

CONSISTENT WITH THE ABOVE, A MAJORITY (51%) SAID THAT IN GENERAL, PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESSES ARE PORTRAYED NEGATIVELY IN MOVIES, TV SHOWS AND BOOKS. ONLY ABOUT ONE IN TEN SAY PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESSES ARE GENERALLY DEPICTED POSITIVELY.

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In general, how do you think people with mental illnesses are shown in TV shows, movies or books? Are they shown in a mostly positive, mostly negative or neutral way?
(Base = 1,022)

12% Positive
51% Negative
33% Neutral

THE PUBLIC BELIEVES THAT MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS ARE OFTEN SHOWN AS BEING EXPERT, SMART AND CARING INDIVIDUALS.

HOWEVER, WHILE HALF ALSO SAY THEY ARE SHOWN AS TRUSTWORTHY, HALF ALSO SAY THEY ARE SHOWN AS MANIPULATIVE, HAVING AS MANY PROBLEMS AS THEIR PATIENTS AND BEING PRIMARILY INTERESTED IN POWER AND MONEY. MORE THAN ONE-THIRD ALSO SAID THEY ARE SHOWN AS QUACKS AND AS UNABLE TO HELP THEIR PATIENTS.

And how do you think psychiatrists and other mental health professionals are usually shown in television, movies or books? Are they generally shown as being: [Mark each item that is answered as a 'yes']

(Base = 1,022)

67% Knowledgeable or expert
66% Smart
65% Caring and helpful
52% Trustworthy
50% Manipulative
48% Having as many problems as their patients
47% In it for the money or power
37% Unable to help their patients
36% Quacks
24% Silly

DESPITE SOME OF THESE NEGATIVE IMAGES THAT THE PUBLIC OBSERVES IN THE ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA, MOST (62%) SAY THAT WHAT THEY HAVE SEEN HAS MADE THEM AT LEAST SOMEWHAT MORE LIKELY TO RECOMMEND TREATMENT TO SOMEONE WITH A MENTAL ILLNESS.

If you knew someone who had a mental illness, does the type of information you've seen in entertainment television, movies and books make you more likely or less likely to recommend treatment

to them? Is that much more/less likely or just somewhat more/less likely?

(Base = 1,022)

- 21% Much more likely
- 40% Somewhat more likely
- 21% Somewhat less likely
- 12% Much less likely

BASED ON BOTH WHAT PEOPLE HAVE SEEN ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS IN THE NEWS AND THE ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA, PEOPLE TEND (42%) TO CONCLUDE THAT ROUGHLY HALF OF THOSE WHO SEEK TREATMENT CAN BECOME BETTER.

ABOUT ONE-THIRD BELIEVE THAT MOST OR ALMOST ALL PEOPLE WHO SEEK TREATMENT CAN BE HELPED, AND ONE FOURTH BELIEVE IT IS RELATIVELY FEW OR ALMOST NONE THAT ARE HELPED.

Based on what you've seen in the news and in entertainment, such as television, movies and books, what proportion of people with mental illnesses can be treated and get better?

(Base = 1,022)

- | | |
|--------|----------------|
| a) 10% | Almost all |
| b) 22% | Most |
| c) 42% | Roughly half |
| d) 19% | Relatively few |
| e) 4% | Almost none |

OVERALL, MOST PEOPLE SAY THAT WHAT THEY HAVE SEEN IN THE NEWS AND IN THE ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA HAS NOT CHANGED THEIR IMPRESSIONS ABOUT PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS.

ONLY ONE IN TEN SAID IT HAS MADE THEIR IMPRESSION OF PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS MORE NEGATIVE.

Do you think that what you have seen in the news and in entertainment has given you a more positive or more negative impression of mentally ill people, or has it not changed your impression of these people?

(Base = 1,022)