

THE PORTRAYAL OF MENTAL ILLNESS ON PRIME-TIME TELEVISION

Donald L. Diefenbach

University of North Carolina at Asheville

In this content analysis of television, the portrayal of persons with mental disorders was highly correlated with the portrayal of violent crime. The mentally ill were found to be nearly 10 times more violent than the general population of television characters, and 10 to 20 times more violent (during a two week sample) than the mentally ill in the U.S. population (over the course of an entire year). The mentally ill on television were also judged to have a negative impact on society and a negative quality of life. © 1997 John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

INTRODUCTION

Studies reveal that the mass media are a primary source of public information about mental illness (Daniel Yanklovich Group, 1990; U.S. President's Commission on Mental Health, 1978), and that media portrayals of mental illness are false and negative (Berlin & Malin, 1991; Gerbner, 1980; Nunnally, 1957; Wahl & Harman, 1989). Experiments have shown a link between media portrayals and negative attitudes toward mental illness (Domino, 1983; Thornton & Wahl, 1996; Wahl & Lefkowitz, 1989).

The body of literature examining media portrayals of mental illness is small. The present research updates our understanding of contemporary television portrayals and adds new methodological elements. It is the first analysis of television content since 1985, and the first study in this research track to break down portrayals into specific diagnostic categories, as suggested by Wahl (1992). Mental disorders are operationalized according to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 1994), and violent crime is operationalized according to the U.S. Department of Justice (USDJ, 1994) to allow comparisons of television reality to social reality.

Requests for reprints should be sent to Donald L. Diefenbach, Department of Mass Communication, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, NC 28804.

MENTAL ILLNESS AND TELEVISION CONTENT

The systematic, scientific investigation of portrayals of mental illness in the media began in the late 1950s (Gerbner, 1959; Taylor, 1957). Nunnally (1957) compared the views of mental health experts, the general public, and the mass media. The study found that the view of mental illness expressed by the mass media was even further removed from health professionals than that of the lay public.

Goldstein (1979) examined prime-time police and detective dramas and found a greater number of negative labels were attributed to mentally disturbed deviants than to deviants whose wrongdoings were attributable to causes other than mental disorders, and that mentally ill criminals were presented as more dangerous than those not labeled as mentally ill. Wahl and Roth (1982) examined prime-time television content and found that "not only did mental illness appear to be a common theme in both news and entertainment media, but the depiction of the mentally ill in these media was found to be decidedly negative" (p. 600). Fruth and Padderud (1985) concluded, "daytime serials perpetuate a negative image of mental illness . . ." (p. 387).

Signorielli (1989) used a data set of 17 week-long program samples collected from 1969–1985, but the operationalization of mental illness was narrow—"Mental illness is only coded when it is specifically mentioned in the story line" (p. 326). Signorielli found that 72.1% of prime-time dramatic adult characters portrayed as mentally ill hurt or killed others, and that 75.7% of all mentally ill characters were victims of violence. Only 2.7% of the mentally ill were portrayed in light or comic roles, while 83.5% were portrayed in serious roles. The mentally ill also were the characters most likely to be rated as a "bad" character type and the least likely to be rated as a "good" character type. The literature of television research, and of print media research (Day & Page, 1986; Matas, Guebaly, Harper, Green, & Peterkin, 1986; Shain & Phillips, 1991) indicates that the mass media portray a false, negative, and violent image of mental illness.

PUBLIC INFORMATION AND PUBLIC ATTITUDES

In the report on chronic mental illness conducted by the Daniel Yanklovich Group, Inc. (1990) seven of every eight survey respondents (87%) cited television and news programs as a source of information about mental illness. Newspapers were cited by 76%; radio news, 75%; magazines, 74%; while family and friends were cited by only 51% of the respondents.

Lopez (1991) surveyed adolescents (age 14–18) because "they will soon be the adults exerting a force in determining public policy . . ." (p. 271). Adolescents reported their sources of information about mental illness used to base their attitudes. General reading not related to instruction or school (including books, magazines, newspapers) and television were ranked first or second by 54.1% of the subjects.

The U.S. President's Commission on Mental Health (1978) concluded that attitudes toward mental illness are significantly influenced by mass media sources. Wahl and Harman (1989) surveyed members of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill about their experience with the stigma of mental illness. The respondents consistently cited media sources as the perpetrators of mental illness stereotypes and stigma.

Thornton & Wahl (1996) found that subjects exposed to an article portraying a mental patient as a violent criminal demonstrated attitudes significantly more negative toward the mentally ill than did control subjects. Domino (1983) administered attitude questionnaires to subjects prior to the release of the film, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

After the film was released the questionnaire was readministered. Attitudes toward mental illness changed substantially in a negative direction for subjects who viewed the film. Wahl and Lefkowitz (1989) exposed subjects to a made-for-television movie entitled, *Murder by Reason of Insanity*. After viewing the film, subjects were administered a standardized questionnaire (Taylor & Dear, 1981) measuring attitudes toward mental illness. The experimental groups exposed to the target film showed more negative attitudes than the control group. Subjects who watched the control film scored similarly to random subjects in the community.

MENTAL ILLNESS AND VIOLENT CRIME

Determining the real world association between mental illness and violent crime is a difficult task which requires extrapolation from limited data. The body of literature paints a complicated portrait, but one which allows the formation of an appropriate comparison statistic for the present research.

Teplin (1985) analyzed over 1,000 police-citizen encounters. She found "persons exhibiting signs of serious mental disorder were not suspected of serious crimes at a rate disproportionate to their numbers in the population. The patterns of crime for mentally disordered persons and for non-mentally disordered persons were substantially similar. These data help dispel the myth that the mentally ill constitute a dangerous group prone to violent crime" (p. 593).

Cocozza, Melick, and Steadman (1978) specifically examined the relationship between violent crime and mental illness through the study of two samples of patients released from New York State Psychiatric Centers in 1968 and 1974–75. They found that the absolute arrest rates for violent crime (including murder, manslaughter, and assault) were quite low: 0.9% of the 1968 sample, and 1.7% of the 1974–75 sample in the year-and-a-half following release. "These absolute numbers are important to counteract the attitudes and beliefs developed from the media which would suggest that the vast majority of mental patients are dangerous" (p. 321). The rate of arrest for violent crime in patients with no prior arrests was less than that of the general population. Cocozza et al. found that former hospitalization was not a predictor of future arrest. The former patients subsequently arrested for violent crime were found to possess the same demographic characteristics which are associated with future arrest in the general population, for example, socioeconomic status and prior arrest history.

The present research uses the highest estimates in the ranges of violent crime rates predicted for ex-mental patients for each offense reported by Cocozza et al. to form an artificially high expected frequency of mentally ill violent criminals. The present assumption for hypothesis testing is that the overall risk of the mentally ill committing a violent crime (murder, rape, robbery, or non-simple assault), based on relative frequency of offenses, is 2.43 times as high as the general population. The present research uses this factor and compares a two-week violent crime rate on television to a fifty-two-week violent crime rate in the real world, without weighting, to make support of the hypothesis more difficult. This conservative approach helps insure that significance is a result of true difference between the real world and television portrayals and not an artifact of variation in sampling methodologies between the U.S. Department of Justice and the present study. If this study can provide evidence that the mentally ill on television (in just a two-week sample) are portrayed as significantly more violent than the mentally ill in the real world (over the course of an entire year) even when making the most violent as-

sumptions about the mentally ill in the real world, then television faces a notable criticism indeed.

Estimated totals of personal victimizations, not merely reported offenses, were used to assess the real-world offender rate for rape, robbery, and assault (USDJ, 1994, p. 252), and an estimated number of offenses known to police was used to assess the rate of murder and non-negligent manslaughter (USDJ, 1994, p. 353). If a zero rate of repeat offenders is assumed for an artificially inflated per capita offender rate, then the rate of Americans who commit a violent crime is about 1.5% per year. Therefore, the expected frequency of mentally ill violent criminals on television for testing Hypothesis One is $1.5\% \times 2.43$ (factor) = 3.65% rate of violent crime.

HYPOTHESES

This study was based on four hypotheses:

Hypothesis One: Mentally ill characters on television are more likely to be violent criminals than are the mentally ill in the U.S. population.

Hypothesis Two: In the world of television, mentally ill characters are more likely to be violent criminals than the general population of characters.

Hypothesis Three: In the world of television, mentally ill characters will have a quality of personal life which is negative in value compared to an assumed population mean of neutral.

Hypothesis Four: In the world of television, mentally ill characters will have an impact/effect on society which is negative in value compared to an assumed population mean of neutral.

To establish that television portrays the mentally ill as more violent than they are in reality only addresses part of the issue. Hypothesis Two compares the crime rate of the mentally ill in the world of television to the crime rate of the general population of television characters within the same sample. This test only includes speaking characters so that violent crime offender rates for mentally ill characters and all characters can be established.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample universe includes all network, prime-time (8–11 PM) programming broadcast between September 1 and November 30, 1994. From this universe, a stratified random sampling method was applied to select the equivalent of two weeks of prime-time programming from four major broadcast network affiliates: ABC, CBS, FOX, and NBC in the Syracuse, New York market. The first-level sampling unit was the month to be videotaped. September was randomly chosen. September captures a time of transition when the summer season is ending and the new fall season is beginning. It is a time of specials, reruns, and made-for-television-movies, as well as new fall shows. September, therefore, gives a broad representation of television fare around the calendar, but it is less representative of the new fall season than October or November. To reduce the sample to the equivalent of two weeks of programming, uninterrupted blocks of programming

from 8–11 PM for each of the networks were drawn so each network was represented by two programming blocks for each night of the calendar week. Therefore, CBS has two Sunday evenings represented in the sample, two Mondays, and so on. The sample for analysis contained 168 hours of television programming—184 programs. The four major broadcast networks constitute approximately a 71% share of all prime-time viewers during this time frame (Nielson Media Research, 1994).

Procedure

Four coders were recruited to code the sample of programming. To promote uniform judgment among the coders, all coders were given training in the classification of mental disorders according to the American Psychiatric Association (1994). The attribution of clinical labels, colloquial labels, and character behavior portrayed or described within a television program were all considered in the assessment of mental illness. Coders were trained in the identification of violent crime according to the U.S. Department of Justice (1994) for murder, rape, robbery, and non-simple assault, and the New York State penal code for other violent offenses including involuntary manslaughter, abuse, kidnapping, unlawful imprisonment, reckless endangerment, extortion, and intimidation. The sample of programming was randomly distributed across the four coders. Ten percent of the sampling block was given to multiple coders for reliability checks. Intercoder reliability was .76 for mental illness classification; .81 for violent criminal classification; and .84 for victim classification using Krippendorff's alpha (1980).

Global Assessment

The same four coders made two global assessments for each character portrayed as mentally ill, a violent crime victim, or a violent criminal. Coders were directed to rate the overall portrayal of the character's *quality of personal life* based on socioeconomic status, happiness, strength of interpersonal relationships, balance of family and career, work and play. Coders also judged the overall portrayal of the character's *impact/effect on society* based on pro-social and anti-social behavior, altruism and fraud, employment status, and nature of employment. Coders used a five-point scale to make these judgments: 1 = very negative; 2 = somewhat negative; 3 = neutral (or not enough information); 4 = somewhat positive; 5 = very positive. Coders were instructed that the neutral-point on the global assessment scale (3.0 on a five-point scale) represents the assumed population mean of all characters. Intercoder reliability for global assessments was .82 using Krippendorff's alpha (1980).

FINDINGS

Coders identified 96 of 4362 speaking characters to be portrayed as mentally ill (2.2%). In total, 127 characters were identified to be portrayed as mentally ill (speaking and non-speaking). Of these 127 characters, 43 (33.9%) were portrayed as perpetrators of a murder, rape, robbery, and/or non-simple assault. When only speaking mentally ill characters are considered, the offense rate was 29 of 96 (30.2%).

Adding involuntary manslaughter, abuse, kidnapping, unlawful imprisonment, reckless endangerment, extortion, and intimidation within the definition of violent crime, the number of mentally ill characters portrayed committing one or more violent offenses

TABLE 1. *Dominant Disorders of Characters Portrayed as Mentally Ill—Random Sample of Prime-Time Television (September 1994)*

<i>Diagnosis</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
Not definable	15	11.8
Psychosis	15	11.8
Paraphilia	12	9.4
Drug abuse	10	7.9
Alcohol abuse	9	7.1
Mental retardation	9	7.1
Depressive disorder	8	6.3
Obsessive compulsive disorder/personality	6	4.7
Attention deficit disorder/hyperactivity	5	3.9
Intermittent explosive disorder	5	3.9
Personality disorder (undifferentiated)	4	3.1
Phobia	4	3.1
Alzheimer's	3	2.4
Anxiety disorder	3	2.4
Conduct disorder	2	1.6
Dependent personality disorder	2	1.6
Narcissistic personality disorder	2	1.6
Adjustment disorder	1	.8
Amnesia	1	.8
Antisocial personality disorder	1	.8
Dissociative disorder	1	.8
Elective mutism	1	.8
Factitious disorder	1	.8
Hypochondria	1	.8
Kleptomania	1	.8
Multiple personality disorder	1	.8
Paranoia	1	.8
Schizophrenia	1	.8
Total	127	100

is 56 of 127 (44.1%). When only speaking mentally ill characters are considered, the offense rate was 37 of 96 (38.5%).

Psychosis was the most frequently portrayed definable disorder on television. Table 1 provides the distribution of mental disorders portrayed on television.

Of the 184 programs in the sample, 58 programs (32%) contained at least one mentally ill character. Genre does affect the frequency and tone of portrayals of mental illness. In crime dramas, reality-based shows, news magazines and movies, the mentally ill violent offender rate is over 50% in each category. In other dramas, the violent offender rate is only 11.8% for the mentally ill, and in situation comedies none of the characters identified as mentally ill were portrayed as violent criminals (Table 2).

Hypothesis One is supported by the data. A one-way chi-square "goodness of fit" test found a significant difference between the violent crime offender rate among the mentally ill in the United States (<1.5% – 3.65% per year) and the mentally ill on television (33.9% in a two-week sample) (Table 3).

Hypothesis Two is supported by the data. The offender rate for the general population of speaking characters on television for murder, rape, robbery, and assault is 3.2%.

TABLE 2. Mentally Ill Violent Criminals by Genre—Random Sample of Prime-Time Television (September 1994)

<i>Genre (Hours)</i>	<i>Mentally ill characters</i>	<i>Mentally ill criminals n</i>	<i>%</i>
Crime drama 26 (15.5%)	25	16	(64%)
Realty-based 2.5 (7.4%)	9	5	(55.6%)
Other drama 29 (17.3%)	17	2	(11.8%)
Sitcom 37 (22.0%)	21	0	(0.0%)
News magazine 4.5 (8.6%)	40	22	(55.0%)
Movies 34 (20.2%)	15	11	(73.3%)
Sports 8 (4.8%)	0	0	(0.0%)
Special event 7 (4.2%)	0	0	(0.0%)
Total 168 (100%)	127	56	(44.1%)

TABLE 3. One-Way Chi-Square to Compare Sample and Estimated U.S. Population Frequency of Mentally Ill Violent Criminals (Murder, Rape, Robbery, and Assault)—Random Sample of Prime-Time Television (September 1994)

	<i>Television observed frequency</i>	<i>Expected frequency^a</i>
Violent criminal (Murder, rape, robbery, assault)	43 (33.9%)	5 (3.9%)
Not a violent criminal (Murder, rape, robbery, assault)	84 (66.1%)	122 (96.1%)
Total	127 (100%)	127 (100%)

Note. Violent crime offender rate for U.S. general population is <1.5% annually. Mentally ill characters identified in study: $n = 127$. $df = 1$. Chi-square = 300.6. Probability < .0001.

^aExpected frequencies are based on U.S. Department of Justice rates of violent crime (USDJ, 1994) multiplied by a factor extrapolated from Coccozza et al. (1978) to make support of the hypothesis more difficult.

TABLE 4. One-Way Chi-Square to Compare Sample and Expected Frequency of Speaking Mentally Ill TV Characters by Violent Criminal Activity (Murder, Rape, Robbery, and Assault)—Random Sample of Prime-Time Television (September 1994)

	<i>Observed frequency of mentally ill on TV</i>	<i>Expected frequency of mentally ill on TV^a</i>
Violent criminal (Murder, rape, robbery, assault)	29 (30.2%)	7 (7.3%)
Not a violent criminal (Murder, rape, robbery, assault)	67 (69.8%)	89 (92.7%)
Total	96 (100%)	96 (100%)

Note. Violent crime offenders, general population of speaking television characters = 3.2%. Speaking mentally ill characters identified in study: $n = 96$. $df = 1$. Chi-square = 74.5. Probability = <.0001.

^aExpected frequencies are based on observed offenders rates for all television characters (3.2%) multiplied by a factor extrapolated from Coccozza et al. (1978) to make support of the hypothesis more difficult.

The observed offender rate on television for the speaking mentally ill characters was 30.2%, nearly ten times higher than the 3.2% offender rate of the general population of television characters (Table 4).

Available data also permit the calculation of a television offender rate for *all* violent offenses and the testing of Hypothesis Two based on murder, rape, robbery, nonsimple assault, involuntary manslaughter, abuse, kidnapping, unlawful imprisonment, reckless endangerment, extortion, and intimidation. The offender rate increases on television for both the general population of speaking characters and the speaking mentally ill characters. The dramatic spread between them remains, however, with the overall television offender rate increasing to 3.8% and the offender rate for the mentally ill increasing to 38.5%, remaining approximately ten times higher than the general population of television characters (Table 5).

The present study found 24.4% of the mentally ill on television were female and 70.1% were male (5.5% were characters whose gender could not be determined). Part of the explanation for the under-representation of females as mentally ill on television might be attributed to the fact that mental illness is highly correlated with violent crime on television, and it is men who are portrayed on television as responsible for the greatest share of violent crime. Men account for 87.5% of violent crimes in the U.S. and women account for 12.5% (USDJ, 1994). This is very close to the ratio portrayed on television with men responsible for 82% of violent crime, women responsible for 12.6%, and 5.4% of violent crime portrayed was attributed to criminals whose gender could not be determined.

The number of characters portrayed as mentally ill, as a violent criminal, or as a victim of violent crime was 524. These characters were divided into seven exhaustive and exclusive categories for a rank-order comparison (Table 6).

Mentally ill characters, whatever their status, are at the bottom of the list ranking

TABLE 5. One-Way Chi-Square to Compare Sample and Expected Frequency of Speaking Mentally Ill TV Characters by Violent Criminal Activity (All Violent Offenses)—Random Sample of Prime-Time Television (September 1994)

	<i>Observed frequency of mentally ill on TV</i>	<i>Expected frequency of mentally ill on TV^a</i>
Violent criminal (all offenses)	37 (38.5%)	8 (8.3%)
Not a violent criminal (all offenses)	59 (61.5%)	88 (91.7%)
Total	96 (100%)	96 (100%)

Note. Violent crime offenders, General Population of speaking television characters = 3.8% (All violent offenses). Speaking mentally ill characters identified in study: $n = 96$, $df = 1$. Chi-square = 114.5. Probability = $<.0001$.

^aExpected frequencies are based on observed offender rates for all television characters (3.8%) multiplied by a factor extrapolated from Coccozza et al. (1978) to make support of the hypothesis more difficult.

TABLE 6. Rank-Order of Quality of Personal Life Assessments—Random Sample of Prime-Time Television (September 1994)

<i>Category</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>SD</i>
Criminals who are also victims of crime	1	3.11	18	0.67
Victims of crime	2	3.05	214	0.81
Violent criminals	3	2.57	165	0.81
Mentally ill criminals	4	2.52	50	0.93
Mentally ill	5	2.46	65	0.79
Mentally ill victims of crime	6	2.33	6	1.21
Mentally ill criminals also victims of crime	7	1.66	6	1.21

Rank-Order of Impact/Effect on Society Assessments—Random Sample of Prime-Time Television (September 1994)

<i>Category</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>SD</i>
Victims of crime	1	3.09	214	0.74
Mentally ill	2	2.75	65	0.77
Mentally ill victims of crime	3 (Tie)	2.16	6	0.98
Criminals who are also victims of crime	3 (Tie)	2.16	18	1.09
Mentally ill criminals also victims of crime	5	1.66	6	1.03
Violent criminals	6	1.61	165	0.89
Mentally ill criminals	7	1.30	50	0.64

TABLE 7. T-Tests to Compare Mentally Ill Television Characters with a Population Mean of All Television Characters—Random Sample of Prime-Time Television (September 1994)

Variables	Sample Mean (SD)	Population Mean	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Significance
Quality of life	2.44 (0.89)	3.00	-9.65	126	<0.01
Impact on society	2.13 (1.01)	3.00	-7.02	126	<0.01

Note. Rated on a five-point scale. 1 = "Very Negative" . . . 5 = "Very Positive." Population mean is assumed to be neutral, or 3.0. The population variance is unknown. The *T-test for an assumed population mean (variance unknown)* is in Kanji (1993).

quality of personal life. According to television, it is better to be a victim of violent crime, or a violent criminal than mentally ill if one is to have a better quality of life. T-tests comparing all mentally ill characters with an assumed population mean of neutral support Hypothesis Three and Hypothesis Four (Table 7).

The mentally ill are portrayed on television as victims of violent crime much less frequently than as perpetrators. This is contrary to the findings of Signorielli (1989) who used longitudinal data, a narrower operationalization of mental illness, and a broader operationalization of violence. Signorielli found mentally ill characters were portrayed slightly more often as victims than as perpetrators (75.7% and 72.1% respectively). The victimization rate in the present study is 9.5% for all mentally ill characters and 10.4% when considering only speaking mentally ill characters. The victimization rate for the general population of speaking characters in the present study is 4.1%. Therefore, the mentally ill are victimized at a rate more than twice that of the general population on television (Table 8). In addition, the present data indicate that the mentally ill are portrayed as criminals four times more often than they are portrayed as victims. The Alliance for the Mentally Ill of New York State (1989) reports that, "In fact, people with a mental illness are much more likely to be victims of violence than its cause" (p. 5, emphasis in original).

The preceding analysis includes all disorders portrayed on television classified in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Wahl (1992) recommends, however, that "mental retardation, substance abuse, and organic disorders associated with aging be treated separately from other psychiatric disorders in examining media portrayals; these exclusions would yield a less contaminated picture of the kinds of conditions most mental health professionals and advocates are thinking about when they express concerns about public views of mental illness. Better still, would be a breakdown of portrayals into more specific diagnostic categories" (p. 350).

Table 9 presents a complete breakdown of diagnostic categories with correlation to violent crime on television to allow researchers to construct various classification parameters. Chi-square tests excluding drug and alcohol abuse portrayals also support Hypothesis One ($p < .0001$) and Hypothesis Two ($p < .0001$) in the present study. Since no characters with mental retardation or organic disorders associated with aging were portrayed as violent criminals, exclusion of these classifications only strengthen the hypotheses.

TABLE 8. Crime Victimization Across Mental Disorders—Random Sample of Prime-Time Television (September 1994)

<i>Diagnosis</i>	<i>Total frequency</i>	<i>Frequency of crime victims</i>	<i>Victims per disorder</i>
Not definable	15	1 (8.3%)	6.7%
Psychosis	15	1 (8.3%)	6.7%
Paraphilia	12	2 (16.6%)	16.6%
Drug abuse	10	1 (8.3%)	10.0%
Depressive disorder	8	1 (8.3%)	12.5%
Obsessive compulsive disorder/personality	6	1 (8.3%)	16.6%
Phobia	4	1 (8.3%)	25.0%
Adjustment disorder	1	1 (8.3%)	100.0%
Amnesia	1	1 (8.3%)	100.0%
Antisocial personality disorder	1	1 (8.3%)	100.0%
Anxiety disorder	3	1 (8.3%)	33.3%
All other disorders portrayed	58	0 (0.0%)	0.0%
Total	127	12 (100%)	

TABLE 9. Violent Criminal Activity Across Mental Disorders—Random Sample of Prime-Time Television (September 1994)

<i>Diagnosis</i>	<i>Total frequency</i>	<i>Frequency of violent criminals</i>	<i>Violent criminals per disorder</i>
Not definable	15	8 (14.2%)	5.3%
Psychosis	15	13 (23.2%)	86.7%
Paraphilia	12	12 (21.4%)	100.0%
Drug abuse	10	5 (8.9%)	50.0%
Alcohol abuse	9	2 (3.6%)	22.2%
Obsessive compulsive disorder/personality	6	3 (5.4%)	50.0%
Intermittent explosive disorder	5	5 (8.9%)	100.0%
Personality disorder (undifferentiated)	4	1 (1.8%)	25.0%
Conduct disorder	2	2 (3.6%)	100.0%
Dependent personality disorder	2	1 (1.8%)	50.0%
Posttraumatic stress disorder	2	1 (1.8%)	50.0%
Adjustment disorder	1	1 (1.8%)	100.0%
Antisocial personality disorder	1	1 (1.8%)	100.0%
Anxiety disorder	3	1 (1.8%)	33.3%
All other disorders portrayed	40	0 (0.0%)	0.0%
Total	127	56 (100%)	

CONCLUSIONS

Television portrays the mentally ill as significantly more violent than other television characters and significantly more violent than the mentally ill in the real world. In addition, prime-time television portrays the mentally ill as having a quality of personal life which is negative in value and an impact/effect on society which is negative. In fact, the mentally ill are portrayed on television as having a quality of personal life which is more negative than violent criminals.

Each program and each network were weighted equally in the present study. This was done to present the demographics of network prime-time television as a self-contained society. Social effects of television, however, come principally from viewers watching programs, and the variation in viewership between networks and individual programs must be considered in the social effects argument. Future research should not only seek to replicate the trend of the present findings, but match content analysis data with viewer survey data to allow correlation of viewer exposure to content categories and portrayals with viewer attitudes toward mental illness.

For future research, a segment of programming capturing some or all of October is recommended as a purposive sampling frame to represent the fall season. During September the season is yet in transition, and November is confounded by sensational programming during ratings "sweeps."

Given the above findings, the author recommends a three-tiered policy approach which seeks: (1) long-term, (2) intermediate-term, and (3) immediate movement toward achieving more accurate media portrayals of mental illness. For the long-term, a national conference on the subject of mental illness and the media, is needed to provide an information exchange between mental health professionals, scholars, and mass media practitioners to heighten awareness of the issues and to formulate practical remedies. Intermediate-term results may be facilitated by educators. Academic units in psychology, journalism, and mass communication can sensitize future practitioners in mental health care, news reporting, and fiction writing to the realities of mental illness, and the media's inaccurate, and widely disseminated, version. This will allow psychologists to better communicate with the media, and allow tomorrow's media practitioners to better understand the larger implications of their portrayals.

The immediate step toward accurate portrayals, however, depends on the action of current media practitioners. Relentlessly portraying the mentally ill as violent criminals, and vice versa, not only has negative social implications, but it reflects poorly on the artists perpetuating these portrays. Real creativity is expressed by transcending stereotypes to capture an audience. The author challenges current media practitioners to demonstrate their creativity, and fairness.

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