Mental Illness and Violence in the Media. An Illicit Association?
Enfermedad Mental y Violencia en los Medios de Comunicación. ¿Una asociación ilícita?

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Abstract

In this article we hope to respond to the various questions that arise when one considers the way in which the media presents mental illness associated with violence. To do so, a literature review was undertaken, including 81 original studies or previous reviews, in an attempt to understand what are the meanings that the media attributes to mental illness and why the researchers consider these meanings to be inadequate and stigmatizing. At the same time, what the research says with respect to the existence, or non-existence, of this association outside of the media was also analyzed. And, finally, different studies were examined that explain the strategies used by the media to construct this association.

The review allows us to conclude that the meanings attributed by the media, even if they contradict the opinions of professionals and experts, are effective and functional for commercial criteria...

Keywords: **Social Mental Illness; Media; Violence; Stigma**

Resumen

En este trabajo se pretende responder a diversos interrogantes que surgen cuando se considera la manera como la enfermedad mental se presenta en los medios de comunicación asociada a la violencia. Para ello, se realizó una revisión de la literatura, incluyendo 81 investigaciones originales o revisiones previas, intentando comprender cuáles son las significaciones que los medios atribuyen a la enfermedad mental y porqué los/as investigadores/as consideran que estas significaciones son inadecuadas y estigmatizantes. A su vez, se analizó qué dicen las investigaciones respecto a la existencia o no de esta asociación fuera de los medios de comunicación. Y, finalmente, se examinaron diversos trabajos que explican las estrategias desplegadas por los medios para construir esta asociación.

La revisión permite concluir que las significaciones atribuidas desde los medios, aunque contradicen las opiniones de profesionales y expertos, son efectivas y funcionales para los criterios comerciales.

Palabras clave: **Enfermedad Mental**; **Medios de Comunicación**; **Violencia**; **Estigma**.

More than half a century has passed since Jum Nunnally published the first research criticizing the media for its inadequate representation of mental illness (Nunnally, 1957; Nunnally, 1962). In these studies, the author argued that the descriptions of the causes, symptoms, treatments, prognostics and socials effects of these disorders put forth by the media were very different from the experts in the field. Nunnally also pointed out that there was a tendency in the media to emphasize the most bizarre symptoms of these illnesses.

These first observations gave way to the gradual development of diverse research branches interested in this subject matter. Over the years, published work has remarked that mental illness is inadequately and unfavorably represented in the media, fundamentally for its association with violence. To reach this conclusion, the authors analyzed different types of media (press, television and film), following different methodological procedures.

The Press

One of the most studied variables has been the evolution of this representation in the press. To do so, three procedures were followed: a sample extraction in a brief period of time and its comparison with data obtained in previous studies (Day & Page, 1986; Coverdale, Nairn & Claasen, 2002; Nairn & Coverdale, 2005), the sampling of pertinent data during different time periods for a comparative analysis (Matas et al. 1986; Wahl, Wood & Richard, 2002), and longitudinal studies that include all of the pertinent data during an extended period of time (Wahl & Licoln, 1992; Wahl, Borostovik & Rieppi, 1995; Wahl, 1996; Corrigan et al., 2005; Clement & Foster, 2007). In all of the studies, no changes were observed in many of the elements being compared. Therefore, although there were stylistic improvements, especially with regard to introducing psychiatric diagnostic terminology, in terms of content the authors noted a continuous repetition of erroneous topics; for example, the association between mental illness and violence or the confusion between schizophrenia and multiple personality disorder. Moreover, over the years, dangerousness continued to be the most common subject.

Now, although the general trends found were similar in the aforementioned studies, differences were noted in the connotations the press from different countries gave to mental illness. For example, Beatrice Huang & Stefan Prieb (2003) noted that the coverage the British press gave mental illness was significantly more negative than its counterparts in the United States and Australia, even when the quantity of articles dedicated to the subject were similar and the general tone was always negative. This trend was found especially in the frequency in which mental illness was associated with crimes and violence.

This research was undertaken originally in English-speaking countries (the USA, Great Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand). Along with the language, these countries share a similar tradition of psychiatric practice that has been shaping their meanings about mental illness. More recently, new studies have been undertaken in other parts of the world, taking into consideration different cultural contexts. The majority of this research generated data that is consistent with previous studies. For example, Matthias Angermeyer & Beate Schulze (2001) found that in Germany more than half of the news coverage that spoke about mental illness focused on crime, and highlighted the mental illness of the accused as an explanatory variable of the events. This negative trend was also found in the Czech Republic (Nawkova, Adamkova, Vondrakova & Nawka, 2007).

This link was also found, inversely, when news of violence and crime were studied. For example, Bernardo Carpiniello, Roberta Girau & María Orrù (2007) noted that the Italian press tended to link homicide, suicide and the totality of violent crime to a psychopathological condition of the accused, even when there was not an official diagnostic to justify it. And in Spain, Manuel Muñoz, Eloísa Pérez, María Crespo & Ana Guillén (2009) observed that a high percentage of news programs that dealt with violent crime alluded to the presence, or absence of, mental illness in the person who committed the crime. Meaning that when describing a violent act the existence or non-existence of a mental disorder took center stage compared to any other characteristic.

On the other hand, some more recent studies, undertaken in new cultural contexts, have come to very different conclusions. Both in

Ireland (Meagher, Newman, Fee & Casey, 1995), and in Latvia (Kamerade, 2004), it was found that press articles that talked about psychiatric subjects and cases mostly offered positive or neutral information and evaluation with regards to mental illness (70% and 75%, respectively), a link with violence, danger or vulnerability being scarce. In a similar manner, studying the use of the word schizophrenia and its derivatives in the Argentinean press, Carlos Silva, Paula Chávez & Laura Thiemer (2006) noted that it was infrequent to find this word in the police section or associated with violence and unpredictability. Also, Omer Boke, Servet Aker, Arzu Aker, Gokhan Sarisoy & Ahmet Sahin (2007) found an interesting use of the word schizophrenia in the Turkish press, which depended on the religious slant, Islamic or secular, of the newspaper. According to the authors, when the term was used to talk about the illness or the people that suffered from the illness in the Islamic press, the representations were less negative, although the metaphoric use of these words always entailed stigmatized connotations. In short, it seems that cultural context can affect the connotations attributed to mental illness by the press.

Television

After Nunally's (1957, 1962) pioneer studies cited above, almost two decades had to pass before any systematic studies on the representation of mental illness in television were undertaken again. Since then, different types of television programs have been analyzed in the United States. For example, Benjamin Goldstein (1979) analyzed police and detective series, and he found that if a character was labelled as having a mental illness, they were presented as much more dangerous and violent than "sane" criminals. At the same time, Otto Wahl & Rachel Roth (1982) noted that when a television character was catalogued as being mentally ill, they were identified and defined from the point of view of this variable only, presenting them as dangerous and frightening. In a similar way, Laurel Fruth & Allan Padderud (1985) pointed out that in daytime serials the mentally ill characters were usually "wicked" people. Nancy Signorelli (1989) observed that, although in television dramas the characters with mental illnesses represented a small percentage of

the total cast, there was a high probability that they appeared as perpetrators of crime and violence, or being victimized by others. Donald Diefenbach (1997) also noted that there existed a high correlation between mental illness and violent crime on television. According to the author, characters categorized in this way were ten times more violent than the other characters, and twenty times more violent than the population diagnosed with mental illness in the United States.

Of course, it is not only in the United States that the representation of mental illness on television has been studied. Both in Great Britain (Rose, 1998) and in New Zealand (Wilson, Nairn, Coverdale & Panapa, 1998), it has been found that dangerousness was, in different prime-time programs, the most common signification attributed to these people. However, other connotations also appeared with relative frequency: vulnerability and the incapacity to take care of oneself, for example. Moreover, levels of explicit violence were lower and, in Great Britain, a new actor appeared to which the responsibilities were attributed: the public health system.

Similarly, in Australia, Jane Pirkis et al. (2001) analyzed this representation in the news, and they found that the third most frequent item was police news and crimes. In these cases, violence tended to dominate, without specifying if they were isolated or rare cases. Moreover, Catherine Francis, Jane Pirkis, Warwick Blood, Philip Burguess & David Dunt (2003) found that for this type of news the association varied in function of the specific type of mental illness. So, this association significantly rose in the case of schizophrenia or substance abuse, but was completely absent in eating disorders, dementia or stress.

It is important to point out here that some of this more recent research has yielded different conclusions. In this light, Pirkis et al. (2004) and Connie Henson, Simon Chapman, Lachlan McLeod, Natalie Johnson, Kevin McGeechan & Ian Hickie (2009) observed that since the implementation of public anti-stigma programs in Australia the quality of the news had significantly improved, diminishing the frequency in the association of mental illness with violence, as it was more common that both patients and professionals

in the mental health services could express their own evaluations.

On the other hand, in Spain, Manuel Muñoz, Eloísa Pérez, María Crespo & Ana Guillén (2009) analyzed the news and current events programs, and they concluded that the stereotypes of dangerousness and unpredictability were more frequent in televised news, even when news programs concerning this subject were scarce in this form of media. Moreover, the stereotype of responsibility (which accused the person with a mental disorder of their illness) was only found in television news programs, never appearing in radio or press.

Finally, other research can be found concerning the representation of mental illness in television programs aimed at children (Wilson, Nairn, Coverdale & Panapa, 2000; Wahl, Hanrahan, Karl & Lasher, 2007). In these studies, it was observed that in almost half the programs that made reference to mental illness, derogatory terms were used. The characters presented as being mentally ill were characterized as frightening and bad, or made fun of, and their exclusion or disrespect was justified. According to these authors, children are being socialized with stigmatizing conceptions of mental illness.

Film

Research dedicated to the representation of mental illness in film are scarce, and tend to be based on a reduced number of examples, focusing on the type or quality of the representations. Due to the lack of extensive studies, which would allow us a more complete view of the conclusions with respect to film, there are big differences in the observations and evaluations of the researchers.

On one hand, we can find studies that criticize the way in which mental illness is represented in film. For example, according to Steven Hyler, Glen Gabbard & Irving Schneider (1991), this form of media constructs mentally ill characters as "different", using diverse technical resources, such as discordant music, lighting, etc., therefore perpetuating social stereotypes like dangerousness. Also, Peter Byrne (2000), who analyzed the movie, "Me, Myself and Irene", pointed out various inadequate meanings, such as the confusion

between schizophrenia and multiple personality disorder, or their association with violence and obscenity. At the same time, outside of Hollywood, Chillal Prasad, Girish Babu, Prabha Chandra & Santosh Chaturvedi (2009) noted that the movies produced in the Indian state of Karnataka mostly presented mental disorders from a stigmatized point of view.

The research that studied Walt Disney and films for children also came to negative conclusions. According to Allan Beveridge (1996) and Andrea Lawson & Gregory Fouts (2004) in the Disney industry, violence and irrational conduct were displayed as manifestations of mental illness, and therefore these characters, very frequent in these films, appeared as objects to fear or to mock, being undesirable and despised. At the same time, Otto Wahl, Amy Wood, Parin Zaveri, Amy Drapalski & Brittany Mann (2003) noted that in the Hollywood films aimed at young audiences, the characters labelled as mentally ill tended to be represented as violent or frightening, and were treated disrespectfully. However, they were not mocked or rejected, but rather they needed to be protected and, they even, at times, committed heroic acts. Meaning, outside of the Disney industry, representations of mental illness in films aimed at a young audience are more positive.

Likewise, according to a variety of studies, the mental health services professionals also appear in a stereotypical and stigmatized manner in Hollywood, with a marked tendency towards gender discrimination (Bischoff & Reiter, 1999; Gabbard & Gabbard, 1999; Gabbard, 2001).

However, there is another series of research that positively evaluates film for its representation of mental illness. These are studies that take into consideration that there is a significant amount of movies that are reasonably precise, or even models, in their depiction of disorders. For example, Steven Hyler (1988) pointed out that only with schizophrenia and psychosis was it frequent to find inadequate representations in Hollywood. This evaluation was also undertaken in the film industry in Oceania (Rosen, Walter, Politis & Shortland, 1997; Tam, 2002), and the conclusion was that the representations are more and more precise in terms of causes, treatments and recuperation possibilities, which will, in turn, help to reduce the stigma.

There are even studies that propose cinema be a pedagogical resource for mental health professionals, both Hollywood productions (Robinson, 2005; Datta, 2009; Akram, O'brien, O'neill & Latham, 2009), Malayalam (Menon & Ranjith, 2009) and Tamil ones (Mangala & Thara, 2009). In all of these cases, it is considered that even though movies repeat stereotypes and are stigmatizing, many can be used to stimulate students to reflect about these subjects.

Does an association exist, outside of the media, between mental illness and violence?

Reviewing the literature, we find that one of the most common conclusions that supports the representation of mental illness in the media is inadequate and stigmatizing, for associating it with a tendency towards violence and crime. Moreover, the cases which come to more positive conclusions, precisely do so by evaluating that the analyzed media does not present this association. Meaning that the studies assume that this association, in reality, does not exist. However, this is an assumption without consensus. Not all of the scientific publications are in agreement with regards to the existence, or non-existence, of this link, or about its causes and meaning. This question, however, is fundamental in evaluating the work of the media. We will now look at different answers to this question.

There is not an association.

Firstly, we encounter some studies that negate that mental illness leads to a tendency towards violence and crime. Both in Switzerland (Modestin, 1995) and in Great Britain (Taylor & Gunn, 1999), longitudinal studies were undertaken to evaluate if this tendency, present in the media, were reflected in police and judicial statistics. In both cases it was concluded that alcoholism and drug abuse significantly contributed to criminal conduct, independent of demographic factors, but mental disorders, like schizophrenia and affective disorders, did not contribute to this conduct. Moreover, it was observed that the deinstitutionalization process, which increased the proportion of people with mental

illness into society, had not affected the rates of criminality in a negative way.

It even came to be asserted that the levels of violence and criminal values attributed to mentally ill people did not depend on the behavior of this collective, but rather to the slant and/or commercial objective of the media. For example, Richard Barnes & Steven Earnshaw (1993) and Arun Chopra & Gillian Doody (2007) noted that in the British press the degree to which this association varied depended on if it was a broadsheet or a tabloid. These newspapers are distinguishable from each other not only in their format, but also in their degree of "seriousness" or sensationalism in the choosing and presentation of news articles.

There is an association.

There is a lot more research that reached contrary conclusions, affirming that mental illness is in fact a variable that affects the prevalence of violence and crime. In the last two decades various compilations of this type of literature have been published (Monahan, 1992; Mulvey, 1994; Walsh, Buchanan & Fahy, 2000; Arbach & Pueyo, 2007). According to these authors, research consistently showed that mental illness is a risk factor, although moderate, in violent acts. Therefore, John Monahan (1992) ironically affirmed that in our present society there are only two groups of people that negate this association: those that defend the rights of the users of mental health services and some psychosocial researchers.

It is important to point out here that the majority of this research has important methodological limitations: the samples were normally extracted from people that had committed crimes and offenses or from patients that are, or have been, institutionalized in psychiatric hospitals. Which, obviously does not represent the mentally ill as a whole, or even a majority. There are a few exceptions to this rule, like the research undertaken by Jeffrey Swanson, Charles Holzer, Vijay Ganju & Robert Jono (1990) based on a representative sampling of the general population of the United States, compiling, simultaneously, demographic data, self-reports of violent behavior and diagnostic indicators according to DSM III criteria. According to this study, the

main predictor of violent behavior would be a diagnostic of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Disorder, not schizophrenia or psychotic illnesses, although the sum of diagnosed pathologies would increase the probabilities of behaving in a violent manner.

However, despite this majority consensus, within these publications major variations have been noted in many of the evaluated parameters. For example, although some studies have affirmed that the association between mental illness and violence continues to be significant, even after taking into consideration demographic variables (Mulvey, 1998), other publications conclude that gender, substance abuse, ethnicity and age are more significant than psychopathological conditions (Wessely, 1998). Likewise, in Sweden (Fazel & Grann, 2006) it was noted that, contrary to what appears in the media and other research, the majority of psychiatric patients and ex-patients who committed crimes were not young men, but rather adult and elderly women. At the same time, in Germany (Graz, Etschel, Schoech & Soyka, 2008) they found that both the specific type of disorder and marital status had an influence in the prevalence of subsequent violence. In short, it seems necessary to consider the roles that other social and cultural factors play, beyond merely the psychopathological condition.

There is a complex association

An association between two factors should not be confused with causality. In many cases, it is possible to not know the way in which a factor affects another or if the co-variation is due to the intervention of unspecified third party factors. In this way, we find a series of studies that are in agreement about the existence of a relation between these variables, but reversing the direction of this link. In these studies, they assert that people with mental illnesses are more likely to be objects of violence than a perpetrators of it, emphasizing the victimization of people that suffer disorders. Some examples of this work are the longitudinal studies presented by Virginia Hiday, Jeffrey Swanson, Marvin Swartz, Randy Borum & Ryan Wagner (2001) and Brent Teasdale (2009). More examples can be found in the literature revision by

Jeanne Choe, Linda Teplin & Karen Abram (2008).

In all of these cases, the authors point out that, although there is a slight increase in the violence rate among these people, the victimization rates are considerably higher than the rest of the population. The measurements vary, but they quote that between 20% and 34% of people with mental illnesses are victimized. However, this research stresses that mental illness is not a sufficient condition to explain this situation, but rather that various contextual determinants converge (precarious living conditions, alcoholism, drug addiction, etc.) and some demographic variables (victim's age, ethnic origin, etc.). Moreover, as Hiday, Swanson, Swartz, Borum & Wagner (2001) pointed out, keeping in mind that a record of victimization increases the probabilities of acting in a violent way, this variable could perhaps explain the higher rates of violence amongst people with a mental illness. In this way, Heather Stuart (2003) stressed that not paying attention to the contextual behavioral determinants leads to the error of converting an acquired behavior by some people, due to the conditions of their life, into a quality of the illness.

There are various recent studies that support these ideas. For example, Seena Fazel, Niklas Långström, Anders Hjern, Martin Grann & Paul Lichtenstein, (2009) analyzed, in Sweden, potential demographic confusion factors (age, gender, income, marriage and immigration status), mediators (comorbidity of substance abuse) and factors of family confusion. The authors found that, without substance abuse comorbidity, the evolutions were relatively similar in siblings that were not affected by schizophrenia, suggesting that, because of genetics or early family environment, family could be a significant confusion factor for the association between schizophrenia and violence.

Eric Elbogen & Sally Johnson (2009) came to the same conclusion when they conducted a longitudinal study in the population of the United States. According to the authors, although the incidence of violence is greater amongst people with mental illness, this only occurs because within this population subgroup other clinical factors (alcohol and substance abuse) and historic-contextual factors (victimization, unemployment, precarious liv-

ing conditions, etc.) converge with greater frequency. Meaning that the association between mental illness and violent behavior is, in reality, a covariation due to the intervention of other factors that affect, with greater frequency, the life of these people.

Of course, this moderated association, with slightly higher percentages than the general population's average, does not correspond with the image that is constructed in the media, which presents this association as almost a defining element of some mental disorders, like schizophrenia.

How can the association between mental illness and violence be justified in the media, and with which strategies is it done?

In light of this situation, various studies have questioned the motives and/or causes that would cause the media to act in this way. The first hypotheses analyzed considered that it could be due to a lack of information or a problem of attitude. Thus, studies were undertaken based on the application of questionnaires and ranges of attitudes, including only journalists (Wahl & Axelson, 1985) or also psychiatrists and patients in the samples (Matas, el-Guebaly, Peterkin, Green & Harper, 1985). In both cases, it was concluded that it was not an attitude problem or lack of information, since the journalists' conceptions were similar to the ones expressed by the professionals, and, moreover, they were conscious of the negative representations that the media was spreading. On the contrary, the arguments given were, fundamentally, that it was a commercial factor: "sensationalism sells".

According to this conclusion the problem does not lie in not understanding the subject matter, as supported by later studies. For example, Raymond Nairn (1999) observed that using psychiatric professionals as sources of information did not guarantee that the news article or information about mental illness were less negative. According to the author, even though an expert status were awarded to the professionals, their words were distorted when integrating them into interpretative repertories, which changed them into traditional stereotypes of insanity, or because they

were considered spokespeople of mental health services and thus could not be neutral in their position.

Moreover, various studies that analyzed the press, rejected explanations based on sensationalism (Allen & Nairn, 1997; Nairn, Coverdale & Claasen, 2001; Blood & Holland, 2004), given that this way of representing mental illness was also reproduced when the news article was presented as factual and objective. In this way, they pointed out that that which is "newsworthy" is usually constructed without distorting the news content, and, often, without a sensationalist style. Rather, they tried to offer the reader the possibility of understanding the stories using their own common sense. A strategy of intertextuality in which new professional terms are assimilated to metaphors, figures of speech and narrative fragments that have accumulated in our common sense over centuries. Therefore, in the construction of news articles considered significant or newsworthy, mental illness is grouped into dominant interpretive frameworks, stereotype reproducers.

Simon Cross (2004), came to the same conclusion upon analyzing the way in which mental illness, especially schizophrenia, was presented in television documentaries. These, by definition, are presented as works of nonfiction and their validity depends, largely, on appearing to be objective and realistic. Again, although these documentaries used current psychiatric concepts, they were based on historic concepts of madness. Moreover, the author observed an "anthropomorphism of the illness", which has its origins in pictorial art, updated in a new format. The reproduction of these visual stereotypes would be an attempt to "visualize the unobservable", making it so difference could be recognized with images.

Likewise, it has been observed that the representation of mental illness, as well as being effective for the media, is also functional for the audience. Both Cross (2004) and Emma Van Hoecke (2008) concluded that by labelling the mentally ill as "otherness", their stigmatization and segregation, functions as a way of defining the sources of danger. The authors discuss an "anticipatory safety": if the difference is visible we can detect it before it's within our reach and can hurt us.

This process converts them, according to Van Hoecke, into "icons of madness and badness".

To understand the specific discursive strategies and the technical resources used in the construction of these meanings, different types of media and programs were studied. For example, Riley Olstead (2002) analyzed the textual strategies used by the press to associate mental illness with violence and crime. According to the author, various semantic and syntactic resources are combined. Amongst them: the "us-them" discriminatory narrative structure; the constructions of meaning in which people appear, simultaneously, as both rational and irrational; the syntactic manipulations of the degrees of agency, affecting the attributions of responsibility and blame, converting mental illness into a personal problem; the use of stereotypes to categorize, simplify and represent actions and homogenize people; and definitions created based solely on negative characteristics.

At the same time, Claire Wilson, Raymond Nairn, John Coverdale & Aroha Panapa (1999) analyzed the use of technical, semiotic and discursive resources in a television drama to present a mentally ill person as dangerous. The authors pointed out nine devices used to generate this effect: appearance, music and sound effects, lighting, language, intercutting, jump cutting, point of view shots, horror conventions and intertextuality. A non-fiction program was also studied, the reality show Cops. In this study, Phillip Shon & Bruce Arrigo (2006) focused on the intertextual construction of the meanings attributed to mental illness. Their conclusion was that the program was a "ceremony of degradation", carried out using the grammar of fear and laugh, through which the phenomenon of mental illness was transformed, linguistically and symbolically, into a quality worthy of punishment.

With the majority of these observations in mind, Martin Anderson (2003) maintained that the media played the present day role of myths. Not only does it fulfill a role of leisure and entertainment, but it also communicates social values via symbolism. In this way, although the media programs present themselves opposites, in fiction or reality, they all operate in similar ways, focusing on the individual, dramatizing their stories, supporting their arguments with explanatory frameworks of common sense, and offering moral rather than political solutions.

In summary, these prior studies highlight that the way the majority of media presents mental illness, inadequate and stigmatizing, is not due to an error, it is not produced due to a lack (of training and attitudes) of social communicators. On the contrary, it is a construction that is chosen, even though it contradicts research findings, given that it is effective and functional for commercial criteria. And, moreover, these meanings do not need to be forced or imposed on the audience, since they weave themselves into traditional concepts of madness, rooted in our common sense.

Discussion

In this literature review we have been able to confirm that there are many descriptive studies interested in understanding how mental illness is represented in the media. Moreover, even though in general terms it is concluded that this representation tends to be negative and stigmatizing, we have also observed major differences, which depend on cultural variables. This warns us of the need to update and contextualize the conclusions extracted from these studies. In this way, by analyzing the media, numerous studies have highlighted that the meanings attributed to mental illness are not, by any means, descriptive, rather, on the contrary, there are effectively and consistently positioned to respond to the interests of those that construct the discourses.

On the other hand, we have seen that there is no consensus in the current research with regards to the question of whether or not there is a relationship between mental illness and violent tendencies. Variables which, in the media, usually appear associated. However, when the methodological designs are multivariable, solutions cannot be given in a simple and dichotomous way, with "yes" or "no" answers. In these multivariable studies, violence and mental illness appear as terms that vary in function of other historic and contextual factors. Unfortunately, there are very few studies in this style. In any case, the level and strength of the association presented by the media does not correspond to the moderate increases observed in scientific studies.

Finally, we revised the few studies that have taken into account the specific strategies and semantic, syntactic and/or technical resources used by the media to construct this association, presenting mentally ill people as dangerous and/or vulnerable, requiring exterior intervention to regulate their lives. No studies have been found that compare the differences in the use of these strategies and resources in function of the cultural context or slant of the analyzed media, which could be a question for future research.

It is important to highlight here that this article is not an exhaustive one in terms of all of the published literature concerning the subject matter at hand. Moreover, only articles published in English and Spanish have been included, giving priority to empirical studies, which generated their own data, ruling out many essays and theories. However, although recognizing its non-exhaustive nature, this works does hope to be representative of the main research branches, helping to bring to light general tendencies over the last decades.

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