

Mental Health
Commission
of Canada

Commission de
la santé mentale
du Canada

Opening Minds

News Media


Romie Christie, Manager - Opening Minds

Background: Opening Minds

- ❖ Mental Health Commission of Canada created in 2007
- ❖ Anti-stigma initiative of the MHCC launched 2009
- ❖ Four key target groups:
 - Healthcare providers
 - Youth
 - Workforce
 - News media**

An organic process: How our news media work began

Encourage change in the ways we support people with mental health problems and in the words we use to describe them.



STIGMA

Mental illness, Misconceptions and Stereotypes
Stigma is the biggest barrier preventing people from seeking help or treatment. It happens everywhere: at home, at school, at work, in the media.

Thursday, March 19, 2009

12 noon - 2:00 pm **Mental Illness and Stigma in the Media**
2:15 pm - 4:30 pm **Stigma - Mental Illness and Stereotypes in Society**

Mount Royal College
Roderick Mah Centre for
Continuous Learning, Ross Glen Hall




Free (No cost)

Both forums open to all students/professionals; of special interest to those in communication, nursing, criminal justice, social work, child studies, disability studies, education, psychology, film studies, policy studies

Distinguished Presenters:

- **Otto Wahl**, International Expert on Stigma in Media and Pop Culture
- **Andre Picard**, Award-winning Journalist at The Globe and Mail
- **Amanda Tetraault**, Photojournalist, daughter of a parent with schizophrenia
- **Patrick Baillie**, Forensic Psychologist, Alberta Health Services - Peter Lougheed Centre
- **Young adults experiencing mental illness**

For more information: mentalhealthcommission.ca 403.255.5808

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... Which lead us to Canadian research

- In 2009, there was a lack of research on the Canadian media
- International research showed media coverage of mental illness tended to be negatively-framed
 - Negative news adversely influences public opinion, public policy
 - Negative news also increases stigma experienced by people living with mental health issues
- MHCC created and funded a national research project in 2010 to gain data on state of journalism in Canada

The Media Monitoring Research Study in Canada

- GOAL: to systematically and longitudinally assess tone and content of articles about mental illness and people with mental illness in the media
- Funded Jan 2010- April 2018 (with retrospective analysis to 2005)
- Involves systematically collecting, reading and coding news stories about mental illness:
 - Newspapers (<20 of the most popular in Canada)
 - TV clips (CBC Toronto)

Primary Coding Questions for each story:

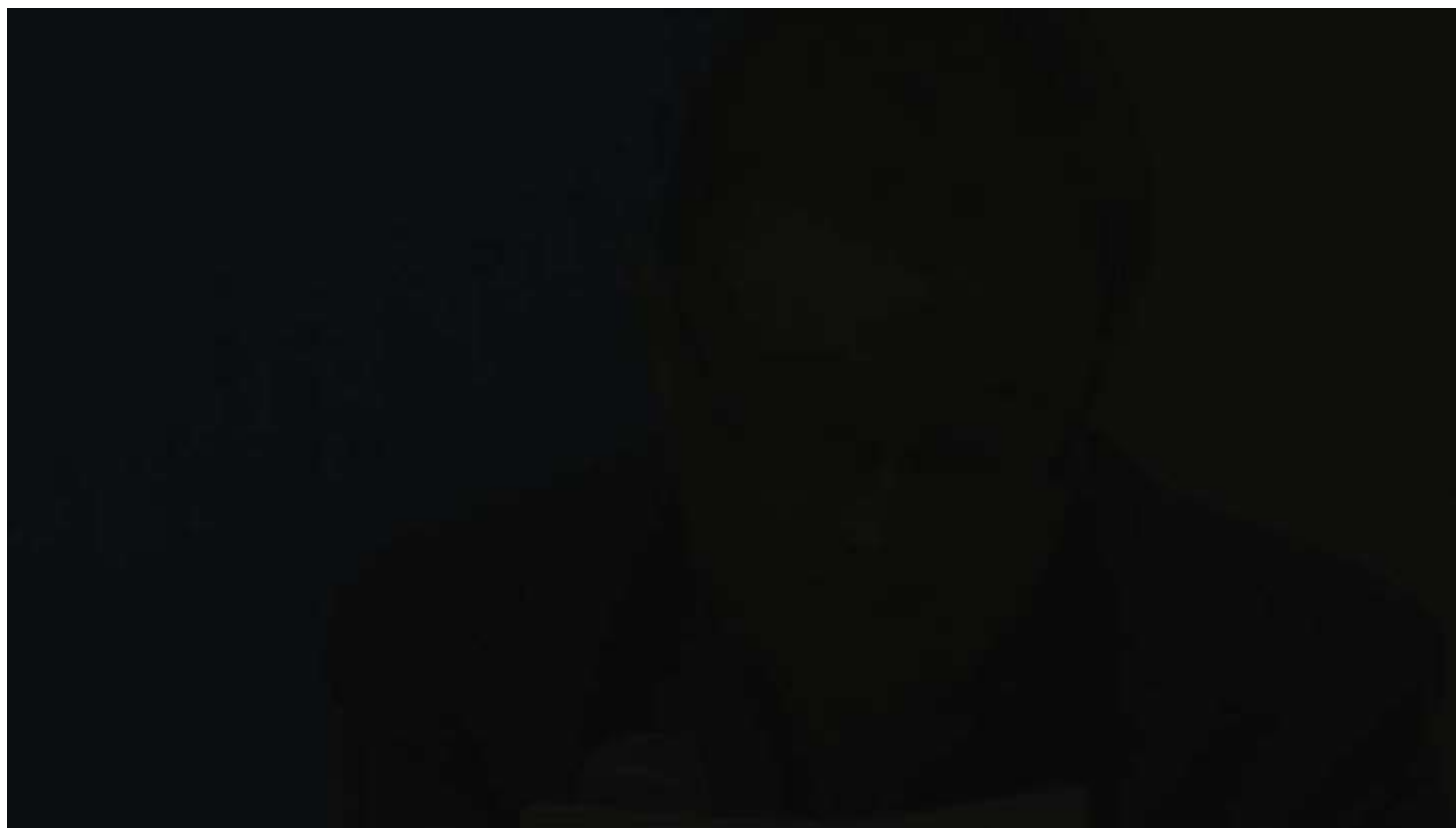
- Is the **overall tone** optimistic/positive about mental health?
- Is **recovery/rehabilitation** a significant theme?
- Is the story **stigmatizing** in tone and/or content?
- Is **danger, violence or criminality** linked negatively to mental illness?
- Is shortage of **resources** or **poor quality of care** a theme?
- Are **people with mental illness quoted** in the text either directly or paraphrased?
- Are **mental health experts quoted** in the text, either directly or paraphrased?

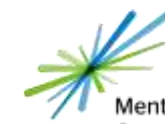


Other MHCC activities for News Media 2010 – present:

- Additional Journalism School Symposia:
 - **Includes a Canadian Media Researcher**
 - Well respected national journalist
 - AND People with Lived experience – “Contact-based Education”
- This is now an online interactive program for journalism students

Michael Kimber: journalism student, PWLE





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Outreach to Working Journalists



MINDSET Reporting on Mental Health

Home

- How To Use This Website
- Why is SIGNS relevant for journalists?
- Towards Best Practice
- Treatment and Recovery
- Legal Issues and Mental Health
- Education and Public Issues
- Covering Suicide
- Journalist Self-Care
- Recent Events
- Resources and Training
- Contact Us

For the English language press

For the Spanish language press

Download our 2022 **REPORTING ON MENTAL HEALTH** GUIDE

What's New

- **Revisé partenariat avec l'Université de Moncton** - 18 October 2024, for submission on "Mental Health and Media" - [View Article](#)
- **Journalistes, l'actualité de santé mentale en Canada** - [View Article](#)
- **Journalistes, l'actualité de santé mentale en Canada** - [View Article](#)
- **Journalistes, l'actualité de santé mentale en Canada** - [View Article](#)
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Reviews

"MINDSET is an indispensable guide to reporting and writing about mental health. It should be within easy reach to all newsmen." - [Candace Lee](#)

"A new standard will be reporting on mental health." - [Candace Lee](#)

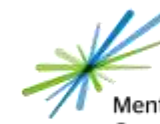
"They [journalists] can benefit from the MHC's excellent content. When it comes to reporting on mental health, and suicide, there's often some standardised language." - [Candace Lee](#)

Video

Urban Dialogue

Although journalists are still criticised for their "sensationalist" approach to stories involving mental illness - especially the less than ideal headline headlines - there has been a growing amount of excellent Canadian journalism in the past several years. Across all media.

It's not that journalists are not interested in mental health coverage, but there is a lack of consistent mental health coverage. It's not that journalists are not interested in mental health coverage, but there is a lack of consistent mental health coverage. It's not that journalists are not interested in mental health coverage, but there is a lack of consistent mental health coverage.



Mindset: Indigenous Populations

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CHAPTER 8

MENTAL ILLNESS AMONG INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF CANADA

Indigenous communities often have quite different collective experiences to the ones that are commonly portrayed in media.

By and large, mental illness affects Indigenous Peoples in Canada disproportionately. Suicide is a leading indicator of mental illness, and First Nations, Métis and Inuit are, on average, twice as likely to kill themselves as the rest of Canadians. Among young Inuit living in their traditional homelands, the suicide rate is as much as 30 times the national figure.

But these shocking statistics hide an important truth. The crisis is not universal. There are indigenous communities in Canada in which suicide is almost unknown, indicating extraordinarily high levels of mental health and wellbeing.

Journalists covering indigenous people and mental health must recognize this reality to avoid framing their work in ways that increase prejudice and reinforce unhelpful myths. The stereotype of the "drunken Indian", for example, belies the fact that abstinence from alcohol is higher among First Nations people than the rest of the Canadian population.

We all, often subconsciously, make assumptions based on stereotypes. It may surprise you to learn that there can be significant differences in the collective experience of communities we often lump together. Taking time to understand the particular experience of the community in which you are working will help you produce better journalism. But the guiding

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"Many Canadians know Aboriginal people only as noble environmentalists, angry warriors or pitiful victims."

Royal Commission on
Aboriginal Peoples (1996)

principles should be familiar enough: Don't generalize; don't stigmatize; look for systemic and underlying issues that provide illuminating context for the story; and don't let preconceived story frames make you overlook facts that don't fit.


Good journalism means going beyond the story you are telling and looking at the bigger picture and system that created it. If you are covering a rash of local suicides, provide context about the devastation that comes from detaching generation after generation from their roots. If other local communities are not similarly affected, ask why.

Appreciate the function of cultural identity as a promoter of mental wellbeing. Its loss can have devastating effects over successive generations. Its maintenance or restoration can generate extraordinary resilience.

Mindset Distribution

THE CANADIAN PRESS 

 Toronto Star

 FÉDÉRATION
PROFESSIONNELLE
DES JOURNALISTES
DU QUÉBEC

CBCnews 

 NEWS

THE GLOBE AND MAIL 

 The Canadian Association of Journalists
L'Association Canadienne des Journalistes

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Media Monitoring Study

After reviewing 25,000 newspaper articles:



- 46.7 % tie violence and danger to mental illness
- 73.5 % did not quote a mental health expert
- 80.6 % did not quote a PWLE
- 19.7 % of articles were positive in tone
- 15.5% had recovery as a theme
- 27.4 % discussed shortage of resources
- 77.3% did NOT discuss treatment
- 28.5 % stigmatizing in tone

Newspaper

Comparison of newspaper measurements before and after the launch of MHCC

MHCC	Total (N)	Positive tone (%)	Recovery as a theme (%)	Stigmatizing in content (%)	Danger linked to mental illness (%)	Shortage of resource as a theme (%)	Expert quoted (%)	PWMI quote d (%)	Intervention discussed (%)
Before	3374	17.1	14.0	34.0	35.1	15.8	23.2	17.0	16.7
After	21196	21.5	15.2	27.0	48.9	32.0	26.9	20.1	21.2
<i>P</i>	--	<0.001	0.116	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001

MHCC = Mental Health Commission of Canada; PWMI = People with mental illness

Conclusion

- Media coverage of mental illness has improved significantly since 2005
- Research article suggests this could be due – at least in part – to the activities of the MHCC

Results are promising:

- NEWS MEDIA PI is hopeful we may have turned a corner
- He has published many articles
- Of note: news stories after Robyn Williams suicide show a change in the tone and an improvement in the kind of coverage
- Good model for any country to follow, to evaluate news coverage

Questions? Comments?



Thank you

Contact us: openingminds@mentalhealthcommission.ca

Visit: www.mentalhealthcommission.ca