CAUGHT BETWEEN PREJUDICE AND IGNORANCE:

The representation of mental health in the Romanian media in 2025



CENTRUL PENTRU JURNALISM INDEPENDENT

unicef
pentru fiecare copil

Caught between prejudice and ignorance: The representation of mental health in the Romanian media in 2025

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The research was conducted by the Center for Independent Journalism (CIJ) as part of the Media Education for Mental Health project, with the support of UNICEF in Romania.

The opinions expressed in this report belong to the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of UNICEF in Romania.

Run by the **Center for Independent Journalism** with the support of **UNICEF** in Romania, the project ***"Media Education for Mental Health"*** aims to improve the Romanian public's knowledge of issues related to the mental health and emotional well-being of children and young people. Through dedicated research, "Caught between prejudice and lack of knowledge: The representation of mental health in the Romanian press in 2025," the project analyzes how the Romanian press currently addresses mental health issues, identifying trends, needs, and possible solutions for more responsible and empathetic communication.

The initiative also aims to increase the skills of journalists, future journalists, and communicators in dealing with sensitive mental health topics through training programs, workshops, mentoring, and scholarships. As part of the project, four journalists or teams of journalists received scholarships and support from an experienced editor to document and publish journalistic materials relevant to their communities. More about the project at cji.ro.

UNICEF is present in Romania and 190 other countries and territories to promote the survival and development of children from early childhood to adolescence. In Romania, UNICEF works with key actors such as the government, parliament, local authorities, civil society, the private sector, national and international partners, and the media to ensure that all children have access to quality early childhood education and school, to protect adolescents and monitor children's rights, for social protection and for mobilizing resources for the benefit of children.

UNICEF is constantly developing resources dedicated to supporting the mental and emotional health of children and young people, helping to reduce the gap between their real needs and their limited access to specialized services and information.

Together with its partners, UNICEF is implementing the initiative "Creating a functional model of intervention for mental health and psychosocial support for children and adolescents" (2023–2025). By testing a local intersectoral model for promoting adolescent mental health, the initiative facilitates access to psychosocial services for adolescents in Bucharest. The model includes studies on the needs of adolescents, risk identification tools, educational resources, support sessions for parents, and training programs for professionals in the fields of education and public health.
All resources developed within the model can be accessed at: https://www.unicef.org/romania/ro/rom%C3%A2nia-pentru-fiecare-copil-echilibru-emo%C8%9Bional

For more information about UNICEF and its work, visit www.unicef.org/romania/ro.

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INTRODUCTION



„He's autistic, poor guy! ”

said a presidential candidate about his opponent in the spring of 2025[1].

„No lunatics in Parliament!”

wrote a politician in a post on social media[2].

„People who want to become members of Parliament should first be evaluated by a psychiatrist”

politicians have proposed over time[3].

„Those people are mentally disturbed, I don't want to say more than that, they were producing press materials”

said a moderator about a journalist.[4]

These outbursts by politicians and journalists lead to mental health being treated with prejudice, insults, and abuse.

They convey the message that a neurodivergent person is inferior, that a person with a diagnosis is dangerous, problematic, and unable to work. All of these things amount to stigmatization. And stigmatization brings with it alienation, shame, and fear.

Shame, fear, and alienation are what make mental health a topic that is rarely discussed in families, at work, or in public discourse. They also make people reluctant to access mental health services.

Officially, the prevalence of mental health conditions in Romania is the lowest among European Union countries. According to available data, approximately



13 %

of the population suffers from mental disorders, the most prevalent being anxiety disorders and depressive disorders.

However, the proportion of adults who say they are at risk of depression is much higher, at

60 %

in 2022, which is higher than the EU average of [5].

55 %

[1] *Andreea Ofițeru, George Simion, on ProTV: "You support a poor autistic candidate!" The "Autism Romania" Association: It is abusive and derogatory, Europa Liberă, 15 May 2025, tinyurl.com/rc3mhkej*

[2] *Medeea Stan, Cristian Andrei, The REPER party is not giving up on the bill that wants psychiatric testing for parliamentary candidates. Psychiatrist: "Politicians use medical terms they don't understand." , Libertatea, 29 June 2023, tinyurl.com/mnz4fz7z*

[3] *Newsroom, Bacalbașa reoffends, Bulai proposes psychological testing upon entering parliament, Revista22, 19 February 2020, tinyurl.com/5fxesjvb*

[4] *Newsroom, How Romania TV presented the death of journalist Iulia Marin: "They used her and let her die. Ms. Marin's pen is a weapon. When used maliciously, it can destroy lives.", Libertatea, 20 April 2023, tinyurl.com/3ftkmt5x*

[5] *European Commission, Health in the EU: Romania, 2023 Country Profile on Health, 2023, Bruxelles, pg. 21-22*

Despite having one of the lowest prevalence rates in the EU, mental health problems may be more common than reported in Romania due to underdiagnosis, stigma, and other barriers to accessing mental health care[6],

the European Commission noted in its 2023 report on the state of health in Romania. The Commission's observation is best seen in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, which seems to have affected the whole of Europe, except Romania, at least on paper.

While at the European level, one in two people (compared to one in six before the pandemic) experienced emotional or psychosocial problems, such as feelings of depression or anxiety after the COVID-19 pandemic, in Romania, the COVID-19 pandemic did not change the risk of depression among Romanians, which has remained stable since 2020[7].

In this context, the way the media addresses the issue of mental health is extremely important. And not only how it addresses it, but also how frequently and diversely it does so. For this reason, this research aims to look at how mental health is written about, who sets the agenda and in what way, what the relevant topics are, but also the prejudices associated with mental health.

Why is the way the media addresses mental health important? The media can put issues ignored by politicians on the public agenda, it can put pressure for change, it can expose abuses, it can give a voice. But the media has another role. It can isolate the issue of mental health if it chooses to ignore it. At the same time, it can lead to stigma and prejudice if it treats it superficially. But a balanced, responsible approach can foster empathy and healing.

But what happens when even the press does not understand the importance of mental health? In what direction do the reports go? What kind of content fills the void left by this possible lack of understanding?

When it comes to mental health, Romania has arrived rather late to the table. While the European Commission is discussing a comprehensive approach to mental health, Romania does not have a national strategy on this issue.

It has a National Mental Health Plan for 2024-2029 with no allocated budget and no monitoring strategy

The Communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health, a document drafted by the European Commission, promotes an integrated, multi-stakeholder approach focused on prevention. Mental health is closely linked to several areas, such as employment, education, research, digitalization, urban planning, culture, the environment, and climate.

This approach emphasizes prevention, early intervention, rapid access to mental health services, mental health challenges in the workplace, the mental health of those working in agriculture, and providing support to vulnerable groups.

An important chapter is the mental health of children and young people, given that Europe is witnessing a deterioration in the mental health of younger generations[8]. Among the factors that have led to this deterioration are the pandemic, anxiety, fear, self-harm, eating disorders, and bullying.

To protect the mental health of children and adolescents, the EC document emphasizes the need for a safe digital space for children.

[6] *European Commission, Health in the EU: Romania, 2023 Country Profile on Health, Bruxelles, 2023, pg. 3*

[7] *Council of the European Union, Mental Health, tinyurl.com/ykd65psm*

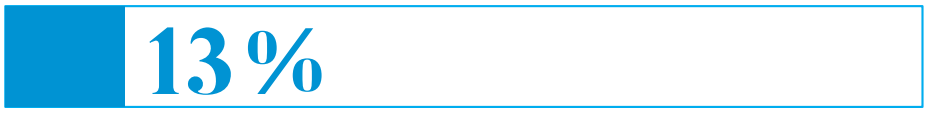
[8] *European Commission, Communication from the European Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions on a comprehensive approach to mental health, Bruxelles, 2023, pg. 9*

This involves protecting them from inappropriate content, intrusive information gathering, and aggressive promotion of beauty standards. It also involves "prudent use of social media, addressing online child sexual abuse, safeguards against cyberbullying, hate speech, and digital image editing"[9].

In Romania, according to the study "Mental Health of Children and Adolescents in Romania" conducted by UNICEF in 2022,



of adolescents say they have felt sad several times a week, "compared to an average of



in the 45 countries included in a World Health Organization study"[10].

UNICEF in Romania also shows that



live with a diagnosis of mental illness, but the actual number is likely higher due to underdiagnosis. The specialists contacted in this research highlighted that the stigma surrounding mental health prevents parents from seeking support.

In the same study on the mental health of children and adolescents in Romania, UNICEF identified several categories of children and young people who are at higher risk of developing mental disorders:

- **children who are victims of violence**
- **children who give birth to children (the phenomenon of underage mothers). Romania ranks first in terms of underage mothers under the age of 15**
- **children facing extreme poverty. Almost half of Romania's children live in rural areas and many of them face extreme poverty**
- **refugee children**
- **children with disabilities for whom there are no real rehabilitation services**
- **children in the state protection system**
- **children with parents working abroad**[11]

It is important to have this overview in order to see whether European and national issues and concerns regarding mental health are reflected in any way in the Romanian press, whether we are talking about adults or adolescents. The press is the one that exposes, explains, dismantles prejudices, makes connections, even brings people from different fields to the same table, confronts authorities, and gives voice. It is the mix that brings an issue, a phenomenon, to the attention of the public, into public discourse, and onto the political agenda.

If the above-mentioned topics are not included in public discourse or on the political agenda, then things cannot improve. You cannot change something that apparently does not exist.

[9] *Idem*

[10] *Mihai Copăceanu, Irina Costache, Mental health of children and adolescents in Romania, UNICEF România, 2022, pg. 3*

[11] *Mihai Copăceanu, Irina Costache, Mental health of children and adolescents in Romania, UNICEF România, 2022, pg.. 7-14*

METHODOLOGY

III



This research was conducted as part of the Media Education for Mental Health project initiated by the Center for Independent Journalism with the support of UNICEF in Romania.

As part of the same project, the CIJ and UNICEF are organizing training sessions for journalists on mental health. For journalists, the CIJ and UNICEF also awarded four scholarships to provide support and guidance in producing four press materials on mental health focused on solutions.

The project also targeted university professors, for whom the CIJ and UNICEF in Romania organized workshops and developed working materials for students on the topic of mental health..

This research aims to answer several questions: How does the Romanian press write about mental health? What topics appear most frequently in the media? What is completely missing? And, above all, how can such an important topic as mental health be better addressed?

The research, which is not exhaustive (nor does it aim to be), was conducted on the basis of quantitative and qualitative analyses.

The quantitative analysis involved monitoring 12 publications/websites from the national and local press for two months, from February to March 2025. The selection was based on the need for the most complete geographical representation possible, but also on the importance of the publications/websites at the national and local level, importance given primarily by the number of visits/readers.

At the central level, the monitored websites were: HotNews, Digi24.ro, Ştirile ProTV, Libertatea, and Adevărul. These are the most accessed generalist and news media platforms, some of them with an important local component, such as Adevărul and Digi24.

At the local level, the publications monitored were: Ziarul de Iași, Viața Liberă from Galați, Vremea Nouă from Vaslui, Ziua de Constanța, Gazeta de Sud with coverage in Dolj, Gorj, Mehedinți, Olt, and Vâlcea counties, and, last but not least, Bihoreanul and Timiș Online (Tion).

The monitoring was carried out using specialized AI software based on a set of terms, specifically 30 from the field of mental health, whether we are talking about conditions, disorders, services, or stigmatizing terms such as insane, mental, retarded, or crazy. In this way, articles that do not address the topic of mental health but borrow from the associated prejudices precisely to discredit and offend were also identified.

In order to see when the press writes about mental health, several key aspects were taken into account: whether the article is original content or paid content, whether the article focuses on prevention or was written after an event took place.

In terms of content, what mattered was the angle of approach and the type of reporting, but also the topics associated with mental health, the tone and language used by journalists in articles about mental health, as well as the headlines chosen.

Another aspect examined in the analysis of the articles concerns the people journalists choose to write about when addressing the topic of mental health—their age and gender, for example. Or the situations they are presented in and how this affects the narrative. Who talks about the people in the articles on mental health (family, colleagues) and who provides expertise when the topic is addressed?

These are the variables taken into account in order to understand where the press stands when it comes to mental health and how much of this position is due to prejudice and/or lack of knowledge and understanding.

The qualitative part of the research includes interviews with journalists from the monitored publications, but also from the independent press. Some of them have extensive experience in the field of health, others in editorial coordination. Specialists also played an important role in the qualitative analysis. A balanced approach to mental health cannot be achieved without them.

The interviews with those who coordinate editorial offices focused on how mental health topics make it into the editorial offices' summaries, but also on how much attention the editorial offices pay to the mental health of journalists. In this regard, interviews were conducted with Adrian Criș, deputy editor-in-chief of Bihoreanul, and Zoltán Sipos, founder and editor-in-chief of Átlátszó Erdély, an investigative platform focusing on the Hungarian community in Romania.

The qualitative analysis had a dual purpose: to provide a history of how mental health has been addressed in the press, the challenges that journalists have had to overcome, and the shortcomings, but also to see what can be done in the future for balanced reporting and newsrooms that care about the mental health of their employees.

Alexandra Nistoroiu, a journalist at the new independent media platform Snoop.ro, is coordinating an extensive press dossier that examines Romania's mental health system, "exploring the failures, challenges, and solutions needed for real and effective reform." The dossier, entitled A System in Therapy, was launched in April 2025. Alexandra Nistoroiu is also an experienced journalist covering mental health issues.

Alina Neagu has been working in the media for 20 years, writing for HotNews for 17 years, and for the past seven years her articles have been dedicated to the field of health. Carla Tănasie, a journalist at Digi24, also writes about health. She produces the program "Pacient în România" (Patient in Romania), in which she exposes the situation of the Romanian healthcare system. Carla Tănasie was a frontline reporter during the pandemic in 2020.

Given the concern of the younger generation of journalists about mental health, the qualitative analysis also included the position of journalist Ancuța Popa from Ziarul de Iași. She has been writing about health and mental health issues for a year and a half.

Ziarul de Iași is more than just a local publication included in the list of those monitored. In 2008-2009, it published a series of 12 articles and reports on mental health. This was a first not only for the local press, but for the press in general.

The author of the articles, Emilia Chiscop, was one of the first winners in Romania of the Rosalynn Carter Fellowship for journalism on mental health issues. The interview with former journalist Emilia Chiscop is an account of how the press first approached mental health, but also an opportunity to reflect on the changes that have taken place over the last 15 years.

The specialist area was covered by activist Georgiana Pascu and psychiatrists Florina Rad and Vlad Stroescu.

An analysis of how the press reflects mental health could not omit the issue of institutionalized persons in Romania. Georgiana Pascu, program manager at the Legal Resource Center, has been fighting for over 20 years to promote access to responsibility and recognition of human rights for institutionalized children and adults with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities. For this work, she was awarded a prize in 2025 by the US State Department.

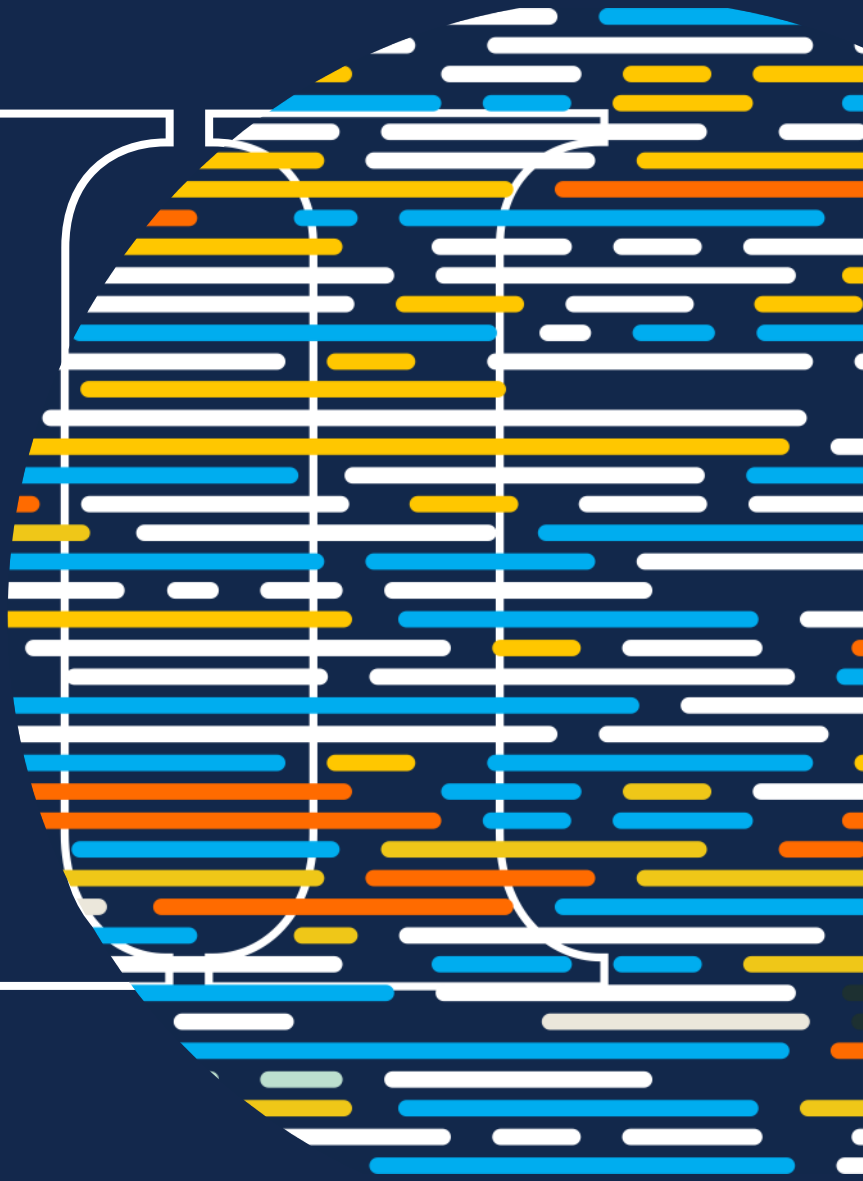
How do psychiatrists view the way the press reports on mental health? What is missing? How much has the profession contributed to perpetuating prejudices that have even reached the press? How can the profession contribute to balanced reporting? Florina Rad, associate professor, primary pediatric psychiatrist, head of the Pediatric Psychiatry Department at Obregia Hospital, and Vlad Stroescu, psychiatrist with experience in ADHD and addictions, including in adults, discussed all these issues.

The specialists also discussed their relationship with the press and how important it is to have balanced reporting, as well as situations in which specialists leave their offices and enter the public sphere to make science more accessible and explain that mental health is not something we should be afraid of.

Dr. Florina Rad also emphasized mental health in children and adolescents.

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

III



When the press does not write about mental health

Monitoring 12 local and national publications over a two-month period yielded 365 press articles. Of these, 113 did not address the topic of mental health, but borrowed terms from it, either giving them a different meaning or using them to insult and label people. They were kept in the research because they tell the story of how terms are used incorrectly, thus perpetuating a series of prejudices. This reveals two categories.

The first category concerns the term crazy used as a synonym for unreal, unusual, chaos, congestion/agitation, or to express a burning desire.

> It won't be long until the season opens on our coast, but it won't be a big boom. It will be like every year, 50%-60% because on May 1, for example, not all hotels open and it won't be madness."

Adevărul, Travel agencies: People don't have money anymore. Holidays are getting more expensive, but by a small amount, not like in 2021-2023

> "(...) this spring I took up gardening. I'm crazy about it. I raked and leveled the ground

Libertatea, Raluka faced an unpleasant incident after her parents moved to a country house: "It was a first in my life." What happened to the artist

In the three examples above, it is not the authors of the articles who use the terms madness and crazy, but the people they quoted.

> I think Georgescu, whom I criticized for his strange ideas and behavior... but if you look at him, you realize that he is not cunning or false. Even if he says crazy things, he believes in them.

HotNews, Becali claims that George Simion apologized after their dispute: "I forgave him, but we're not going to be friends anymore!"

> How was it possible, for example, for a city completely destroyed from the face of the earth by a huge explosion, as in the case of Hiroshima, to be rebuilt in just 6 (six!) years (...)? Obviously, it seems crazy

Ziarul de Iași, A new chance to stay the same...

> As in other countries, Turkish TV series broadcast on streaming platforms have a mad success among Russian viewers.
>
> *Gazeta de Sud, Russian Veterans' Organization Calls for Ban on Turkish Soap Operas Portraying Ideal Men*

> A fun guy is entertaining and interesting, and girls will be crazy about him.
>
> *Viața Liberă, The coolest and funniest pick-up lines. How to charm her with words*



Daniel Conțescu
daniel.contescu@adevarul.ro

Nebuni după „ieșeală“

Blocarea site-ului care vinde bilete de intrare la meciul FCSB - Lyon are legătură cu dorința disperată a oamenilor de a merge pe stadioane pentru a vedea fotbal „pe viu“ și de a socializa

FCSB, campioana la fotbal a României, întâlnește formația franceză Olympique Lyonnais în optimile de finală ale Europa League la fotbal, iar interesul în jurul partidei-tur este unul imens. Atât de mare încât site-ul bilete-fcsb.ro, care comercializează tichete online pentru meciul din Europa, s-a blocat în prima zi din cauza numărului mare de cereri, dar și a unui atac cibernetic.

SITE LUAT CU ASALT

„Vă mulțumim pentru așteptare și răbdarea de care dați dovadă în încercarea de a cumpăra bilete online pentru partida cu Olympique Lyon. Din păcate, site-ul este, în acest moment, supus unui atac cibernetic de tip DDoS (Distributed Denial of Service). Este un tip de atac în care un număr mare de dispozitive compromise («botnet») sunt folosite pentru a supraîncărca un server, o rețea sau un serviciu online, făcându-l

FOTO: PROFIMEDIA

FOTO: SPORTPICTURES.EU

În campionat, FCSB și Rapid au cei mai mulți fani când joacă în deplasare, dar Dinamo are cei mai mulți spectatori la meciurile de acasă

în 7 ani beneficiază de acces gratuit pe stadion, cu condi-

rea biletelor se va face pe baza ordinii cronologice a soli-

un anunț major privind situația biletelor. Omul de afa-

te 40.000 de bilete, așadar, Arena Națională va fi, din

mai dau la nimeni gratis“, a avertizat Gigi Becali.

ARENE LUATE CU ASALT

Emulația în jurul meciului campioanei, programat să înceapă la ora 19.45, se subscrie unui fenomen mai larg, cel al arenelor luate cu asalt de suporteri. Fie că sunt meciuri din Superligă, fie că vorbim despre jocuri ale naționalei, se observă o afluență sporită pe stadioane. Toate au culminat cu oceanul de „dragoste galbenă“ care s-a „revărsat“ peste prima reprezentativă pe durata EURO 2024, la turneul final din Germania, cu fani veniți de peste mări și țări ca să-i susțină pe tricolori. La stadion vin, aduși de părinți, și copii care la ora meciului ar fi trebuit să doarmă, în condițiile în care anumite partide se încheie la miezul nopții. În plus, meciurile sunt transmise la TV și ar fi mult mai comodă vizionarea lor din fotoliu.

Specialiștii consultați au explicat fenomenul apărut

Photo: Adevărul, 4.03.2025



Vremea nouă

ȘTIRI · SPORT · MEDIA · TOATE · ANUNȚURI DELGAZ GRID

Meci nebun în Liga 5! Mânjeștiul și-a redescoperit Gloria

DESCHIDERE SPORT 25 martie 2025 | **Updated:** 25 martie 2025

By **Vremea Nouă**

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- Advertisement -

SURPRIZĂ... Gloria Mânjești a reușit o răsturnare fabuloasă de scor pe terenul singurei echipe neînvinse din Seria Vaslui, Phoenix Team Tanacu.

SPECTACULOS... Phoenix Team Tanacu a suferit prima înfrângere în campionatul Ligii 5, fiind

S.C. COMPANIA DE UTILITĂȚI PUBLICE SA

ANUNȚ

STIMAȚI CĂLĂTORI!

Pentru a sprijini **eficientizarea și modernizarea transportului public local**, vă încurajăm să alegeți, cu prioritate, plata călătoriei prin mijloace moderne.

1) Biletul de călătorie poate fi achitat direct cu **cardul bancar**, la validatoarele destinate plății cu cardul bancar, instalate în toate mijloacele de transport, **la mijlocul acestora**. Validatoarele au fața de **culoare neagră**, având simbolul contactless, încadrată într-o carcasă **de culoare galbenă**.

2) Rămâne valabilă achiziția călătoriei tranzitând **SMS la nr. 7444 cu traseul dorit**, conform instrucțiunilor de pe anșele amplasate în stațiile de autobuz/microbuz.

3) De asemenea se pot achiziționa **bilete de călătorie pe hârtie termică** de la cele 3 automate de bilete din zona Gări, CEC și MALL, plata făcându-se doar cu cardul bancar. Biletele se vor **valida obligatoriu**, la urcarea în mijloacele de transport, în validatoarele amplasate imediat la urcarea de la șofer, **în spatele scaunului acestuia**. Aceste validatoare au fața de **culoare verde neon** încadrată într-o **carcasă neagră**.

4) Mai puteți achiziționa abonamente tip card de 30, 44 respectiv 60 călătorii, tarifate. Acestea se vor **valida obligatoriu** la urcarea în mijloacele de transport, la validatoarele amplasate imediat la urcarea de la șofer, **în spatele scaunului acestuia**. Aceste validatoare au fața de **culoare verde neon** încadrată într-o **carcasă neagră**.

Vă mulțumim, ca ne ajutați să facem transportul public mai rapid, mai sigur și mai accesibil pentru toți.

S.C. COMPANIA DE UTILITĂȚI PUBLICE SA

ANUNȚ DE INTERES PUBLIC

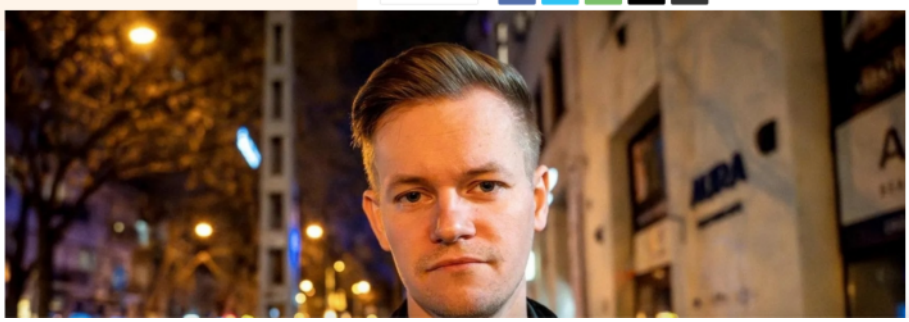
GAZETA de SUD

Ştiri de ultima oră › Actualitate › Nebunie în Turcia: Un jurnalist străin, arestat pentru 'terorism şi insultarea' lui Erdogan

Nebunie în Turcia: Un jurnalist străin, arestat pentru ‘terori și insultarea’ lui Erdogan

De **Valentin TUDOR** → 30 martie 2025

Acțiune



ULTIMELE STIRI

EVENIMENT

Accident mortal la Târgu-Neamț: 20 de ani a murit, alți trei adolesc răniți

Mariana BUTNARIU · acum 30 de minute

ACTUALITATE

(VIDEO) Spania stăpânește incend Madrid care a umplut orașul cu u

Mariana BUTNARIU · acum o oră

ACTUALITATE

Ceremonie militară și religioasă c Aviației Române și a Forțelor Aeri

Mariana BUTNARIU · acum 2 ore

Other borrowed terms are suicide, anxiety, self-harm.

> If the Merz government were to start talking about its own nuclear weapons now, it might make sense from a geostrategic point of view. But it would probably be political suicide at home.

Digi24, Putin may attack a NATO country after a peace agreement with Ukraine, warns a German military expert. "We must be prepared."

> Through a clear, logical approach focused on the needs of each student, this model could significantly contribute to reducing math anxiety and improving long-term academic performance.

HotNews, The largest global network of math centers opens its doors in Bucharest

> The European Commission aims to take €10 billion from citizens' savings to invest in defense. It's economic suicide.

Adevărul, Fake news on social media: Does the EU want to "steal" the population's savings?

> During a protest outside parliament on Thursday morning, Liv Eren, a youth ambassador for the organization End Child Poverty, who grew up in poverty, said the government's cuts were 'an act of self-harm.'

Adevărul, Millions of children live in poverty in "the sixth richest country in the world"

Among the 113 articles in which the authors or people quoted use mental health terms, there are also those in which the term is used to insult/label. Otherwise, the materials do not address the topic of mental health at all.

> "These people are either crazy or suicidal," Lavrov added.
>
> *Digi24, Russia has asked the US to put pressure on Europe to restart the Nord Stream 1 and 2 gas pipelines*

> On that occasion, it was the first time he saw Ceaușescu in person. And he saw how crazy, paranoid, and criminal he was.
>
> *Viața Liberă - Documentary that also aired in Galați, after its premiere on TVR*

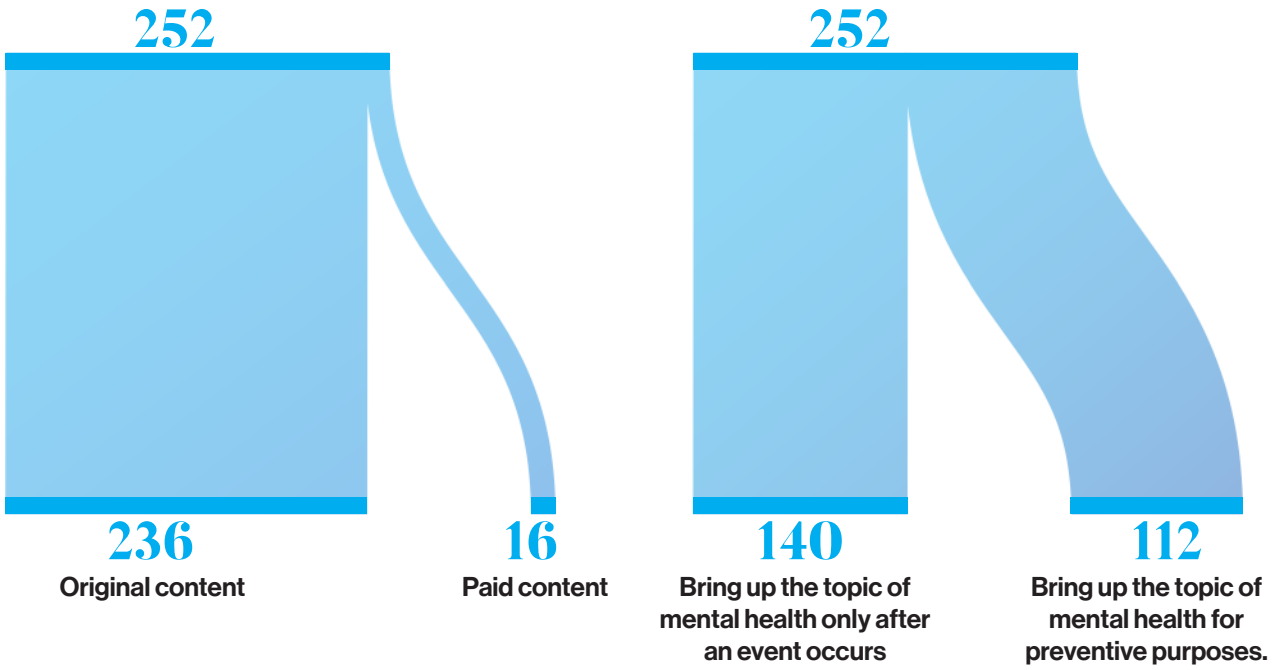


All these examples highlight the many contexts in which stigmatizing terms are used incorrectly. They also show how deeply rooted certain prejudices related to mental health are. Of the 365 articles identified as being about mental health, 113 do not actually address the subject. Instead, they merely borrow terminology, trivializing the subject.

When and where does the press cover mental health?

This leaves 252 articles on mental health analyzed from the perspective of the variables presented in the Methodology section.

The first ones focus on when the press writes about mental health, but also who generates the content. Of the 252 articles, 236 have original content or reporting and only 16 have paid content, in most cases from private hospitals and clinics that want to promote their various services.



55.5% (140) of the articles analyzed bring up the topic of mental health after a specific event, whether it is a possible suicide or the release of a documentary about teenagers. In less than half of the articles (112), the goal is prevention. Here, a few clarifications are needed.

Articles in the area of prevention most often refer to journalistic materials included in what we call the Health category/section. Depending on the website/platform, it is called: Lifestyle, Health, Mind and Body, Health and Relationships. It covers topics such as: how sugar consumption affects sleep, how bacteria affects mental health, or how daylight saving time affects us. Sometimes these topics are mixed with daily health news. That is, news about infections in hospitals, doctors' statements on various current issues, the lack of vaccines or doctors in rural areas.

Other topics involving mental health: recipes for happiness, foods that help reduce stress, digital detox, the importance of magnesium, the happiest country in the world, happiness hormones, sex hormones, the effects of menopause, or what menstrual poverty is and how it affects women.

In many of these articles, the authors do not mention the studies they refer to and do not cite the names of the researchers they invoke. Another situation observed during monitoring is the frequency with which anxiety is invoked and the diversity of foods that would help reduce anxiety, such as parsnips.

When journalists write in a preventative way, mental health is a quick mention, rarely a topic explored in depth.

A few examples:

- **Omega-3 can improve some psychiatric symptoms, such as depression, anxiety, and lack of concentration.**
- **People who took this average number of steps had a 25% lower risk of dementia compared to those who were less active.**
- **The pleasant aroma of vanilla has a relaxing effect on the brain and is frequently used in aromatherapy to reduce stress and mental fatigue.**

In the case of articles on mental health published after an event has taken place, **14% of them cover topics such as screen time among teenagers**, their presence on social media and the dangers they may be exposed to, the relationship between parents and teenagers, and how individuals accused of human trafficking have become role models for teenagers.

All of these topics appeared in the press after Netflix released the series Adolescence about a teenager who kills a classmate. The series had a significant impact in most countries where it was broadcast, exposing many mental health challenges among teenagers.

Another 10% of the articles published after an event took place concern the protester Cezar Avrămuță, known in the public sphere as "The Dacian Flag Bearer". Over the course of several days, he climbed various buildings and machinery in protest, threatening to jump from some of them.

In some of these articles, the authors resort to irony in their reporting of events. Moreover, very few of them provide context, and although they mention that the man was admitted to a psychiatric ward and then discharged, no author speaks to a psychiatrist about the situation. These mentions basically take us into the important area of quantitative analysis, namely the content of press materials on mental health.

The reporting angle

In the case of the reporting point of view, we took into account four types of data:

- whether the journalistic material presents a sensational individual story or takes an integrated approach

- whether the journalistic material takes a personal (opinion) approach or a Breaking News (BN) approach

Some explanations are needed here to clarify what exactly BN news means.

In television, when a Breaking News event occurs, the sequence of events is as follows: The first images/basic information appear on television without much context. At this point, it is important for TV newsrooms to be the first to break the news. This would be the BN news. Throughout the day, the news is supplemented with reactions, statements from those involved, context, explanations from experts, and possibly even statistics about the phenomenon. Basically, the news becomes more complete every hour. The final version appears in one of the evening news programs.

We rarely see in the print or online media the evolution that exists on television. Thus, many of the events that fall within the area of mental health remain at the level of Breaking News, which lacks context.

What does this situation look like on news platforms? There are frequent cases where, instead of updating the original article, journalists choose to write a new article, separate from the initial one, which also lacks context. Three or four news items about the same event, each bringing new information to the table, without context, are mixed in with other topics on the website. Such approaches are influenced by dependence on views and consumer habits, say the journalists we spoke to. People are more inclined to click on a new link than to go to the original news story to follow the evolution of an event on a daily basis.

In terms of approach, the data looks like this:

112 articles fall into the BN news category

97 of them have an integrated approach

25 of them have a sensational individual approach

18 have a personal (opinion) approach

The way journalists write about mental health is also extremely important—from the terms in their reporting to the tone they use and the headlines they choose. The way they write can trivialize the subject, bring even more stigma, or contribute to a better understanding of mental health.

The analysis looked at whether the existence of a diagnosis or the presentation of a mental health situation is used by journalists to create a narrative that blames the person, whether journalists ignore the existence/importance of mental health disorders, or whether they minimize them.

.

In 83% of articles, the reporting is unbiased. However, unbiased reporting is not synonymous with balanced reporting.

The good percentage in the reporting area is related to the large number of BN-type news items, which limit the possibility of error. When the news item is only a few paragraphs long, there is no room for the journalist to be biased. There is also no room for blame in news items about the benefits of sleep and exercise for mental health.

In 9% of articles, the author ignores the existence/ importance of mental health disorders.

In 8% of articles, mental health disorders are used to blame and exclude. This happens in articles about crime, for example.



Imagini de la priveghiul Sidoniei, femeia decapită de propriul fiu. Unul dintre pastorii Bisericii Maranata, prelegere în fața casei

LOCAL [redacted] 21 martie 2025 | Updated: 21 martie 2025

By Vremea Nouă

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S.C. COMPANIA

ANUNȚ

In the article published in Vremea Nouă, journalists suggest that the attacker may have mental health issues. They provide no evidence to support this claim, do not consult any psychiatrists, and merely rely on comments made by individuals on social media. For the authors, the attacker was either under the influence of illegal substances or suffering from a serious mental illness.

Such approaches contribute to perpetuating the prejudice that mental health is only related to those who resort to extreme forms of violence.

In terms of tone, 80% of the articles are neutral. In 94% of the articles, the language is balanced, while in 90% of them, the title does not contain stereotypes.

Related topics

365 news items/articles on mental health in 12 publications over a two-month period is not a lot. The 12 platforms/sites publish daily, not weekly or monthly. An example from a publication that generally writes about mental health: Between March 24 and 26, Adevărul published 10 news items/articles in the celebrities section. In those three days, there were no news items/articles on mental health.

Because the press writes little about mental health, it is very important to see what topics bring mental health into discussion, what kind of topics are associated with it.

Monitoring the 12 publications for two months revealed the following data:

21% of articles, the associated topic is a balanced, healthy lifestyle

13% of articles, the associated topic is screen/social media/drug/gambling use/addiction

9% of articles, the associated topic is violence

6% of articles, the associated topic is a crisis situation, i.e., war, the pandemic

Other associated themes, but with extremely low frequency: motherhood, mental health services/access to them, school dropout, parent-child relationship, poverty/standard of living.

In 23% of articles, we have no associated theme.

A balanced life/healthy lifestyle includes all materials about all kinds of foods whose consumption can have effects on health by reducing anxiety, for example. This also includes materials about sleep or exercise. In these articles/news items, mental health is not the main topic, but a consequence of a certain lifestyle.

Some examples:

- **Sports supplements: strength or just promises?**
- **Chewing gum increases concentration and productivity**
- **How bacteria can influence your mood**

In the case of these materials, if they are not written in a balanced way, with references to sources and concrete data, there is a risk that mental health will be trivialized. In the absence of credible sources, the press risks reducing mental disorders to conditions that could be treated by consuming a certain food. This delays access to mental health services. Incorrect or incomplete information can cause people to make the wrong decisions about treatment, prevention, or diagnosis, which can aggravate health problems. It can cause people to resort to self-medication.

Articles that emphasize a healthy lifestyle are important, but how they are written is equally important. At the same time, Romania faces many other problems that affect the mental health of the population: lack of services, workplace abuse, school dropouts, young people who are constantly under enormous pressure simply because of their presence on social media.

We need articles that talk about how to organize ourselves to live healthily, but we also need articles about the causes of underdiagnosis in mental health, about the small number of psychiatrists specializing in the mental health of children and adolescents, about self-harm, which has become a widespread phenomenon among adolescents, and how schools deal with such situations, about the lack of clear regulations in the workplace in cases of burnout or depression to protect employees. And the latter are lacking. This reality, revealed by the monitoring, shows where the press places the topic of mental health. In such situations, it is no longer just a matter of prejudice, but also of a lack of knowledge.

The discussion about mental health in newsrooms is a novelty in Romania. And not only about addressing mental health issues, but about the mental health of journalists themselves. We still have generations of journalists used to working to the point of exhaustion or ignoring how covering sensitive topics has affected them. A generation for whom mental health is an indulgence or a weakness.

Returning to articles dealing with mental health, there are still situations where journalists choose topics other than just healthy lifestyles.

For example, postpartum depression. The material includes data, information about postpartum conditions, and an applied discussion with a psychotherapist and a specialist doctor. The material is paid content. In general, articles paid for by hospitals or clinics to promote their services are fairly balanced. They clearly present a problem and show what solutions they offer. Although they currently represent a small percentage, they show that private actors can bring up the topic of mental health in a balanced way.

Another topic about motherhood, published by Adevărul, is this:



Mom shaming în România: între ruşinarea publică şi trauma maternă nevăzută

1

Maria-Alexandra Mortu

Publicat: 29.03.2025 13:57

Comentariile din online lasă urme adânci: în mintea unei mame, în relația cu propriul copil, cu propriul corp sau adâncesc rănile nevindecate dintre generații. Rușinarea nu mai e doar un gest, o critică, ci un mecanism care rănește în lanț.

These were among the few articles on maternity published in the two month period of our monitoring. Other topics that touched on mental health were workplace challenges and education.

Numărul zilelor de concediu medical din cauza depresiei, în creștere cu 50% în rândul angajaților germani

STIRI EXTERNE 24-03-2025 | 22:48



Numărul zilelor de concediu medical acordate angajaților din Germania din cauza depresiei au crescut cu circa 50% anul trecut, potrivit datelor unei companii din domeniul asigurărilor medicale, informează DPA.

ProTV, 24 martie 2025

The relationship with work, employee rights, and employer abuse are important topics when considering suicides due to burnout, cases of burnout in the workplace, or how mothers returning from maternity leave are reintegrated into the workplace.

However, the article makes no reference to what the practices are in Romania, what options are available to those suffering from depression and/or burnout in Romania.

Luni, 2 Iunie 2025 **adevărul.ro**

Home Știri interne Știri locale Știri externe Politică Economie Sport Stil de viață Showbiz Opinii Video

Home → Știri Interne → Societate → Cum își amintesc românii orele de Religie: „Aveam atacuri de panică, după ce profesorul ne-a vorbit despre Apocal...

Cum își amintesc românii orele de Religie: „Aveam atacuri de panică, după ce profesorul ne-a vorbit despre Apocalipsă”

Daniel Guță

Publicat: 23.03.2025 22:12

Dilema unui părinte, nehotărât dacă să accepte ca fiul său să participe la orele de Religie de la școală, i-a provocat pe români să relateze experiențele prin care au trecut la aceste cursuri. Numeroși români au rămas încântați de ele, însă alții spun că s-au ales cu traume.

The above article addresses a topic that has been virtually absent from the press. Over the years, there has been much debate about whether religion classes should be compulsory, but the content of these classes and how they can affect children's mental health has not been a topic of discussion, even though **70% of students (data from 2022) attend religion classes.**

What the article lacks, however, is a complete account. It is a mixture of experiences taken from social networks and forums without explanations from teachers, even religion teachers, without reactions from the Ministry of Education, without testimonies from parents, without the opinion of specialists.

Who are the subjects?

188 Articles	31 Articles	11 Articles	22 Articles
The subject of the material is	**The subject is a teenager**	**The subject is a child**	**these categories are mixed**

In almost half of the articles (48%), gender is irrelevant in the sense that no distinction is made between genders, while 36% feature a male character and 15% a female character.

The analysis also looked at how journalists present the people they write about. This is an important component of balanced reporting. In 64 cases, the authors do not use possible disorders/illnesses or a diagnosis to define the people they write about. This is a neutral situation in which the subjects are teenagers, artists, activists.

In 54 cases, the situation is that of a consumer. This is due to the many articles about the consumption of sugar, supplements, coffee, drugs, and gambling.

The victim role is found in 45 press materials.

In 38 articles and news items, the portrayal is that of a person with behavioral disorders/mental health problems.

Other depictions for the main characters are that of: patient - 19 articles, aggressor - 13 articles, suffering from depression - 7 articles.

The portrayal, in addition to the type of approach (BN news) and the moment when the press writes about mental health (prevention), makes the percentage of unbiased news high (83). In over 100 articles, the contexts are neutral or related to consumers of products and food, areas where it is more difficult to use prejudices, especially in the area of prevention. The purpose of lifestyle articles is to promote various foods, the idea of an adequate sleep schedule, or a balance between personal and professional life. In such articles, there is rarely room for mental health biases.

Monitoring shows that biases tend to occur when a tragic or extremely violent event takes place. This does not mean that they cannot occur in other situations where the press reports on mental health after the event. But as long as the reports remain at the level of breaking news, it is difficult to observe possible prejudices.

At first glance, 83% of news reports with an unbiased approach is a good result, but this figure must be put into context.

And the context also refers to who is talking about mental health, i.e., what expertise journalists access when writing about mental health. These are variables that must be taken into account when talking about a balanced article.

Who are the voices in the articles about mental health?

In terms of expertise, it is important to note that in

42%

(106) of articles, the authors do not access any form of expertise. In those where they do, the top voices called upon to explain the facts are as follows:

in 30
of the articles, the police provide reactions/ explanations

in 26
of the articles, the expert/specialist is the one who speaks (by expert/ specialist we mean researchers, nutrition experts, sleep experts)

in 23
of the articles, the specialist doctor provides explanations (we mean cardiologists, gynecologists).

in 10
of the articles, a psychologist is consulted

in 8
of the articles, a psychiatrist provides explanations

in 3
of the articles, expertise is provided by specialized authorities/ institutions

None of the articles about the Dacian Flag Bearer's forms of protest quote a psychiatrist, although it is mentioned that he was hospitalized and discharged. Hospitalization, discharge, and then resorting to another form of protest are elements that journalists use to portray an eccentric character.

Mentioning just the hospitalization, without context, gives the reader the impression that the man clearly has "mental problems". This creates the risk that the reader will label him based on an incomplete account, sometimes accompanied by an ironic tone or headline.



Mărturisirile șocante ale tânărului din Vaslui care și-a decapitat mama. Cu cine a confundat-o

10

Narcis Ghiurca

Publicat: 15.03.2025 20:51 Ultima actualizare: 15.03.2025 21:03

Bărbatul de 25 de ani, din Vaslui, care și-a ucis mama a ajuns la sediul Poliției Vaslui, unde a relatat oamenilor legii cum a comis crima. Acesta a mărturisit că a confundat-o cu fosta iubită.

Autoritățile au fost alertate de fiul acesteia, care susține că el însuși este autorul crimei. Afirmă că a comis fapta utilizând un cuțit. La caz a fost trimisă o ambulanță B2 din substația Murgeni", a declarat purtătorul de cuvânt al SAJ Vaslui, Daniel Ungureanu, scrie Agerpres.

Cazul a fost preluat de Inspectoratul de Poliție Județean și Parchetul de pe lângă Tribunalul Vaslui.

Din primele informații furnizate de autorități, fiul femeii ar fi fost sub influența substanțelor psihotrope, acesta suferind de afecțiuni psihice.

The article published in Adevărul quotes voices from the victim's family, and the expertise is provided by the police. It is also the police who announce that the man suffered from mental illness.

The journalist from Adevărul associates the phrase "mental illness" with a link to another article about a young man in the US who decapitated his father. There is no mention of the attacker's mental health. In the same article, the author provides a history of decapitations. None of the cases he reviews mention any mental illness or diagnosis. However, the journalist reporting on the case in Romania makes this reference to other forms of extreme violence with a hyperlink to mental illness, not to the adjective "decapitated".

Although he seems to associate mental health with extreme forms of violence, the journalist does not seek the expertise of a psychiatrist. Medical practice does not allow a psychiatrist to comment on a case he is not familiar with. However, a doctor could have dismantled the journalist's association and could have dismantled the prejudice that a person suffering from a mental illness is automatically violent and capable of murder.

A psychiatrist can explain a phenomenon, provide context, and break down prejudices, including those of the press. Without this expertise, the idea that mental health only concerns those who commit extreme acts will become even more entrenched.

According to the quantitative analysis, articles in which the voices of psychiatrists and/or psychologists are present are those classified as paid content. In these contexts, psychiatrists talk about certain types of services or explain certain phenomena. Specialist expertise is also found in articles where the subjects are adolescents and children. In this case, psychiatrists or psychologists explain the results of a study concerning adolescents or the causes of a phenomenon such as bullying.

However, there are situations in which the experts called upon to talk to students about bullying and substance abuse are police officers. Two phenomena that are impossible to address without also discussing mental health end up being presented to students only by police officers, i.e., from the perspective of punishment.



Constanța

Jandarmii, printre elevii de la Liceul Teoretic „Emil Racoviță” din Techirghiol

21 Mar, 2025 09:57 Daniela MOLDOVEANU 421

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ARTICOL COMPLET GALERIE FOTO (1) VERSIUNE PRINTABILA

> “The Mobile Gendarmerie continues its series of prevention activities as part of the 'Safety In Your School' project. According to representatives of the Constanța Mobile Group, yesterday, three members of the unit returned to the Emil Racoviță Theoretical High School in Techirghiol, where they spoke to approximately 50 students about the negative influences of smoking among young people.
>
> We also reminded the students about what bullying means and how they can prevent it, about the risks and consequences of consuming prohibited substances, but also about the characteristics of prosocial vs. antisocial behavior and how they should choose how to behave," said representatives of the Constanța Mobile Gendarmerie Group,
>
> *writes Ziua de Constanța on March 21, 2025*

In such situations, the discussion about mental health goes beyond the press. It was not the author of the article who called the police to talk to the children. The journalist only reported the facts. The campaign he writes about was designed by the authorities.

One problem with reports about teenagers is that their voices are hardly ever heard, and the topics that interest them and the phenomena that influence their mental health are almost completely absent from the mainstream press. Specialists talk about teenagers. The only places where their voices are heard in any way are articles about studies/research in which the authors quote adolescents, children, or parents.


GAZETA de SUD

„Am ajuns singur, să nu mai vreau să merg la școală" – 50% dintre copii, victime ale hărțuirii online

ULTIMELE STIRI

Volei (f) | CSV Craiova U15, noua campioa Romaniei!

Cod galben de inundații pe râuri din nouă județe

Trei morți și 55 de răniți într-un incendiu provocat de un pacient la un spital din Germania

This article provides information on where children can seek help when it comes to online harassment. It is one of the few articles that does so.


Standardele impuse prin rețelele sociale determină fetele să-și piardă stima de sine. Se ajunge chiar la abandon școlar

STIRI SOCIALE

Filtrele și standardele nerealiste promovate pe rețelele de socializare fac tinerele să-și piardă încrederea în sine.

BIANCA GHIȚĂ

Potrivit unui studiu, aproape jumătate dintre ele simt presiunea de a arăta perfect, iar 6 din 10 fete au apelat la diete nesănătoase din această cauză.

Și bullying-ul din școli înclină balanța în mod negativ, fiindcă stima de sine scade și mai mult.

Acești factori afectează sănătatea psihică a adolescentelor și duc, în unele cazuri, chiar și la abandon școlar, spun specialiștii.

The article on the ProTv website quotes the experiences of teenagers and students, and a psychotherapist provides explanations alongside the director of an NGO that works with children. It is a short TV news item that includes almost all voices for a comprehensive and balanced approach.

What does "all voices" mean? Who else can speak besides those who offer expertise?

There are several people, who fall into two categories:

- **voices from the private sphere.** That is, the person in question presenting their point of view, family, friends.
- **voices from the public sphere.** Depending on the subject: co-workers/manager, teacher, school principal.

The voices from the private sphere that speak in the press about mental health are: the person themselves in 46 articles and the family in 6.

In 74% of articles, the voice from the private sphere is completely absent.

93% of articles do not contain any voices from the public sphere.

In 6 articles, the main character is discussed by coworkers or even the manager, in 4 cases by a teacher, and in 3 cases by a representative of the field in which **the subject of the article works.**

A first explanation for the absence of voices from the private and public spheres is related to the type of reporting. If the report remains at the level of a BN news item, it will never contain these voices. Obtaining them requires time and documentation, especially if the situation is sensitive. The monitoring also shows that the press covers topics related to mental health after the event. And post-event means accidents, suicide attempts, crimes, or other forms of violence.

However, voices from the private and public spheres are extremely important. First of all, they are important in documenting the subject. They help the journalist to better understand the situation, to outline the individual beyond the facts that make up the subject of the press material.

Perhaps the best example is the case of Alexandru Găzdac, who was shot by police in 2020. From all the press reports at the time, the following narrative emerged: the police shot an aggressive madman who attacked them. Two years later, two journalists from Libertatea dismantled this narrative. They were helped in this task by voices from the public and private spheres, mental health specialists, and a deeper understanding of mental health on the part of the journalists, a topic that will be developed in the qualitative analysis.

What are we left with and where are we going?

Before moving on to the qualitative analysis of the research, a few preliminary conclusions are necessary.

The press writes rarely about mental health. 365 articles in two months from 12 daily publications, of which 113 are only tangentially related to mental health, is not much. And it is insignificant if we compare this number to the challenges Romania has faced in recent times, and some it still faces—the pandemic, war at the borders, a year of election campaigning, economic crisis, and austerity measures. And all this against the backdrop of problems that have been rolling over from year to year: poverty, domestic violence, the phenomenon of teenage mothers, burnout at work, whether we are talking about doctors or people working in corporations, the lack of health services and difficult access to them.

The quantitative analysis also shows that prevention is secondary. And even when journalists write preventively, mental health is a quick mention, rarely a topic covered in depth. When we say quick mention, we mean articles about the role of sleep, coffee, vitamin deficiency, the myth of 10,000 steps. These articles contain standard phrases such as: food X or exercise Y helps reduce stress/anxiety/depression. And that's it.

Prevention-related articles in which mental health is the main topic are an exception in the mainstream press.

In articles where mental health becomes a topic after an event has occurred, the reports lack context, the expertise remains at the level of the police, and sometimes, in the absence of specialist expertise, the journalist ends up making medical assessments.

The fact that the headlines do not contain prejudices or stigmatizing expressions, that the reporting is unbiased, and that the tone is neutral in over 80% of cases does not mean that we are dealing with balanced approaches.

The publications selected are not from the tabloid press, where headlines tend to be shocking. The tone is neutral because in many cases the person is presented in a neutral light or the associated theme is a healthy lifestyle.

But the main reason there are no major excesses is that we write little about mental health, and what we do write is superficial. The lack of expertise keeps the subject at a very basic level (BN news). The lack of voices from the private and public spheres deprives the material of context.

30% of articles contain no form of expertise and no voices from the private or public spheres. Only 2% of the material includes all three. It's hard to go wrong when you stay on the surface of things.

As the monitoring shows, mental health is brought up when talking about a healthy lifestyle or when discussing situations involving crime, addiction, or war.

The relatively large number of articles about children and adolescents is due to the series Adolescence and to studies/reports/research on network/internet/ screen consumption.

February-March was also a period when schools ran a bullying prevention campaign. A campaign in which police officers went to classes to talk to teenagers about violence. And these events were reported in the press. Why is it important to mention this? Because, in reality, if there is no event with a strong emotional impact, the press does not really look at teenagers. And even less so on issues concerning their mental health.

Teenagers become newsworthy at the beginning of the school year, when all the mainstream media rush to analyze their clothing choices: too expensive, too extravagant, too inappropriate, too brand-ed.

Adolescents make headlines with their high school graduation exam gems or when there is violence among them. And if it's recorded, that is all the public will see.

Basically, with few exceptions, the mainstream media does not generally write about teenagers and mental health with the frequency found in the monitoring. We used the term mainstream because the situation is different for independent platforms that do not wait for something emotionally impactful to happen in order to write about the challenges faced by teenagers.

But before we get to the independent platforms, it is important to see how press coverage of mental health has evolved over time, what the first topics and interests were, but also what the reactions were.

There are trailblazing women journalists when it comes to mental health, journalists who have been documenting topics with a strong emotional impact for years, such as the rights of institutionalized people, journalists who are concerned with the mental health of people diagnosed with cancer, including children, or journalists from the younger generation who found it absolutely natural and normal to address mental health issues because mental health mattered to them.

They are the ones who are changing the way the press reports on mental health. Interviews with them, as well as with mental health specialists, are the subject of the qualitative analysis in this research.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS



Where did we start from?

It was spring 2008 when journalist Emilia Chiscop, from Ziarul de Iași, received an email from her editor-in-chief about a mental health workshop organized by the Center for Independent Journalism in collaboration with the Carter Center (Atlanta, USA).

Between 2007 and 2014, together with the Center for Independent Journalism, the Carter Center offered the Rosalynn Carter Fellowships for Journalism on mental health issues in Romania. These fellowships brought some of the first balanced articles, reports, photo reports, and investigations on mental health to the Romanian press. There were eight funding sessions that laid a solid journalistic foundation for the press in terms of mental health. The winners of the eight editions held in Romania were:

🖊 Alexandru Brăduț Ulmanu and Paul Radu with the launch of a course on mental health.

🖊 Emilia Chiscop and Vlad Mixich. Emilia Chiscop with a series of articles on the Romanian mental health system and the stigmatization of mental illness, and Vlad Mixich with a series of articles on the symptoms and treatment of depression, plus a guide to good practices for journalists covering suicide.

🖊 Georgiana Ilie and Răzvan Vintilescu. Georgiana Ilie investigated the psychological effects of family loss in the context of a lack of support systems; Răzvan Vintilescu critically examined the mental health care system in Romania.

🖊 Hannelore Acârnulesei–Petrovai and Clara Stănescu. Clara Stănescu wrote a series of articles on the treatment of mental illness in rural areas, while Hannelore Acarnulesei addressed the link between obesity and depression.

📷 Cristian Lupșa and Andrei Pungovschi with a project related to anxiety disorders.

🎥 Florin Negruțiu and Alina Matiș with a series of multimedia materials on post-traumatic stress in Romanian soldiers who were on mission in Iraq and Afghanistan.

🖊 Elena Stancu and Cosmin Bumbuț. The project analyzed the effects of post-traumatic shock on children who are victims of domestic violence.

Emilia Chiscop attended the workshop organized by the first scholarship recipients, after which she applied for the scholarship. She was the first journalist from the local press to win a Carter scholarship in Romania:

> The workshop totally hit the mark. It was like a revelation. Mental health was totally off my radar. I didn't realize that mental health is actually a big deal, a key part of public health that's been totally overlooked.

Emilia does not remember Ziarul de Iași, which was considered the best local publication, writing about this topic on a regular basis. In general, the only articles in the press that mentioned mental health, says the former journalist, were those related to murders, domestic violence, and suicides:

> Mental health was usually treated in the context of the intersection between the mentally ill and crime. And this simplistic approach further amplified the stigma associated with psychiatric disorders. And stigma, as we know, has a negative impact on access to mental health services, but also on public policy.

How did she find her topics in this case? Emilia knew about the role that stigmatisation can play in shaping people's attitudes, especially stigmatisation through the media, so she chose to go in this direction, but not before taking a systematic look at mental health. Emilia set out to examine the system, but also to change attitudes and perception.

To analyze the system, she spoke with psychologists and psychiatrists in Iași and Bucharest and discovered problems that she still observes in Romania today: underfunding, the fact that the hospital system continues to be the basis of the psychiatric care system, meaning that only patients in acute episodes are treated, the lack of community services, the large disparities between rural and urban areas, and the lack of medical personnel in the psychiatric field.

In terms of stigmatization, Chiscop tried to cover a wider range of topics, from schizophrenia and depression to autism.

She encountered no reluctance on the part of the editorial staff in documenting and publishing articles and reports.

> If the articles are good, newspapers will open with serious topics from any field. What is lacking are resources, journalist training, and goodwill.

What followed the publication of each article was absolutely overwhelming, Emilia recalls. People she didn't know called her to ask for advice, to thank her, colleagues from the editorial office who had different cases in their families came to her just to tell her their story. People felt heard. For the first time, some people felt that they no longer needed to keep their diagnosis a secret.

Returning to the evolution of media coverage on mental health, Emilia believes that certain things still persist. Specifically, sensationalist or superficial approaches.

Even so, she has noticed a slight change in perceptions in the field of mental health, namely a greater openness to publicly acknowledging mental health issues. In this regard, she thinks of public figures such as Andreea Raicu and Andreea Marin, who have come forward to talk about their problems: "This is important. The role of public figures who share their stories is very important in reducing stigma."

> This is important. The role of public figures who share their stories is very important in reducing stigma.

Another key moment identified by Emilia Chiscop is the case of journalist Iulia Marin, who died in April 2023.

Iulia Marin was an investigative journalist renowned in her field for her accuracy and attention to detail. She wrote frequently about her diagnosis, her attempts to find the right treatment, her hospitalizations, and everything that generally comes with a diagnosis. After she died, the RTV[12] news channel, through its presenter Victor Ciutacu, launched a smear campaign against her. Iulia had been investigating some stories for several years, which meant she was upsetting people, such as those in the real estate and gambling industries.

Iulia was not criticized for making mistakes in her investigations; Iulia was denigrated because she had a diagnosis. And because she had this diagnosis, Victor Ciutacu and his colleagues believed that she should not have been a journalist, she should not have been employed.

Emilia remembers following the story at the time. It was difficult not to, because it had even reached the attention of the international press.

> The healthcare system perpetuates stigma. There is no mental health system in Romania where hospital, community, and family health services are well integrated and interconnected. It is appalling that the concept of psychiatric hospitals still exists in Romania. In the US, hospitals have clinics in all fields, from cardiology to surgery to psychiatry. The system stigmatises. The psychiatric hospital on the outskirts of town is like the madhouses of the Middle Ages.

[12] *Newsroom, How Romania TV presented the death of journalist Iulia Marin: "They used her and let her die. Ms. Marin's pen is a weapon. When used maliciously, it can destroy lives.", Libertatea, 20 April 2023, tinyurl.com/3ftkmt5x*

She was disgusted by the journalists' approach, blaming and judging Iulia for her illness. She believes that RTV's approach once again highlights the limitations of many journalists and their lack of education when it comes to mental health..

The press, explains the former journalist, needs education in order to cover mental health issues responsibly, and not only that. However, she believes that even the most educated journalists cannot change mentalities and stigma as long as stigma exists at a structural level.

Stigmatization exists, Chiscop emphasizes, even among specialists in the field of psychiatry, and it is just as deep-rooted as it is among the general population. She believes that this must be acknowledged, even though without specialists you cannot write about mental health because, as a journalist, you are educated by them.

The case of former journalist Emilia Chiscop is unique. Although she had no connection to mental health before the Carter scholarship, it ended up completely changing her life. One of her reports won an international award. She applied for a master's program in the US, in bioethics. Her dissertation was on the ethics of research studies on human subjects—psychiatric patients.

She then pursued another master's program in international development policy at Duke University. Her master's project was about piloting a community mental health service system in Romania, a project she hopes to implement at some point. She is currently a manager for the development of new programs and initiatives at Duke University.

Although she is no longer a journalist, Emilia Chiscop has a mental health topic in mind that she would tackle if she were still working in a newsroom today:

> I would focus on mental health among adolescents and young people. The term in the US is 'disconnected youth', which includes the population aged between 18 and 23, when you finish high school, you don't go to college, but even if you do, you don't have a job, maybe you don't have money, friends or mentors. It's a very vulnerable period and the need for services is much greater.

Independent media and mental health

Since 2009, media organizations without owners have appeared in the Romanian media space, grouped under the term "independent press." Monitoring them was not the subject of quantitative analysis. At the same time, a discussion about how the press writes about mental health could not ignore these media outlets.

The newest of these is called Snoop.ro.

Officially launched in the summer of 2024, Snoop is coordinated by Iulia Roșu and Răzvan Luțac. It is mainly an investigative publication.

In April 2025, they launched the project Un sistem în terapie (A System in Therapy), coordinated by journalist Alexandra Nistoroiu.

The idea for the project came to Alexandra during the pandemic, when almost everyone around her was struggling to adapt and facing isolation. In addition, she says, she had two people very close to her who were suffering from severe depression. At the time, she was working at Libertatea. It was difficult to start such a project when what mattered was up-to-date material on the pandemic, and the entire editorial team was contributing to that.



When the Snoop.ro editorial office was established, Alexandra and Iulia Roșu knew they would finally be able to start their project. It was not the first time they had worked together on a mental health topic. In 2022, the two journalists published a series of four articles about the case of a young man shot by the police for threatening them with a nail.

> Alexandru Găzdac, 37, from Bucharest, was shot by police in April 2020 in the apartment building where he lived. Immediately, a version of his "madness" was launched with the power of the official media and it spread: the hypothesis that reached TV was that the police had shot an "aggressive madman".

, wrote the two journalists. In the same series, Nistoroiu and Roșu also published the article: "The mentally ill are not criminals," says the police manual. The intervention of officers in the case of Alexandru Găzdac, shot in Bucharest.

Alexandra Nistoroiu admits that there was something else that prompted her to start the project A System in Therapy, namely everything that happened with the death of Iulia Marin, "how her death was treated on RTV with those horrible reports and attacks that I think hurt not only her memory, but also the way mental health is generally discussed in Romania, meaning that the discourse has somehow regressed a lot".

Along with the discussion about how RTV approached Iulia's death, Alexandra reviews the prejudices that still exist about mental health.

In the case of Iulia Marin, the idea that people with mental illness cannot work has been perpetuated:

> It's a false idea, meaning there is absolutely no psychiatric diagnosis at this point, and I mean psychiatric, not neurological, that says a person cannot work, period. There is nothing that disqualifies you 100%. And any discourse that says otherwise is very dangerous.

Another problem, one that Alexandra has already exposed in her journalism, is related to how the police respond to mental health emergencies. And behind this approach, the journalist explains, there is still a prejudice. That people with mental illness are violent:

> We have objective data on this, it is much more likely that a person with mental illness will be the victim of violence, of aggression, than the aggressor. In fact, most mental illnesses do not manifest themselves through violence, explains the journalist.

The third prejudice that she finds not only in the media but also in society is that mental illness is a defect of the individual, which leads to reactions such as: "If she were more ambitious, she would overcome her depression! If she had more willpower, she would have overcome her addiction!" Nistoroiu believes that such approaches actually end up ignoring the underlying systemic problems—from economic stress and discrimination to issues related to work culture.

> Once we shift the focus to the individual, we ignore the many systemic and societal problems that actually better explain the prevalence of these diagnoses.

Another problem:

> Psychiatric or neuropsychiatric terms are still sometimes used as if they were metaphors, which is not okay in the media or anywhere else.

What the journalist points out is also one of the observations of the monitoring. Of the 365 articles identified as being about mental health, 113 only used terms from the field of mental health.

Regarding mental health topics that are not covered in the media or are not covered sufficiently, the journalist lists access to services, as well as an approach to mental health for certain vulnerable groups and minorities.

> No one really writes about the mental health of Roma people or refugees from Ukraine or Asian workers... the system is not sufficiently prepared to respond to people who are not part of the majority, so to speak. And it doesn't make it a priority either.

However, there are some positive aspects, from Alexandra Nistoroiu's perspective, if we compare it with what was happening 20 years ago. In terms of content, the journalist notes that extremely pejorative, judgmental issues have disappeared, as have headlines such as "X is crazy." She also feels that there is less stigmatization and that there are more and more attempts to consult mental health specialists.

> Journalists' understanding has increased, even if not uniformly,

Alexandra adds to the list of things that have changed when it comes to the press and mental health.

Regarding the project she coordinates, Alexandra Nistoroiu has set out to take it offline, that is, into the realm of events, conferences, and debates in which the authorities also participate. It is a way of pushing an issue onto the public agenda that goes beyond journalism and to which journalists can contribute.

Snoop.ro is not the only independent media platform that focuses on mental health issues.

Scena9 recently published the story of a journalist diagnosed with borderline personality disorder. Over time, journalists at Scena9 have written about anxiety, depression, bulimia, anorexia, the status of the mentally ill in Romanian society, and how to provide first aid in mental health.



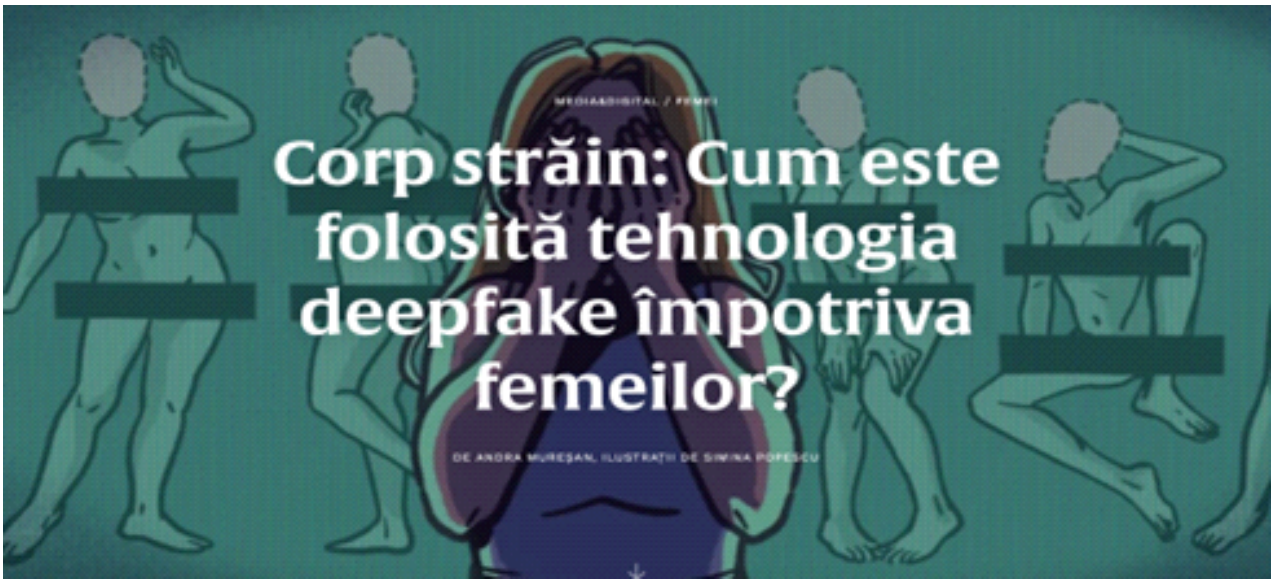
At the same time, journalist Andra Mureșan has written several articles for Scena9 about psychological violence. Andra Mureșan also addresses a number of topics that influence teenagers, such as deepfakes[13] sau ghostingan article[14]. These are topics that are relevant to teenagers but rarely appear in the mainstream press. Andra's articles always feature the voices of teenagers, teachers, and specialists who work with children.

In articles dealing with different forms of violence, Andra Mureșan concludes by listing the centers and organizations where women and teenagers can seek help and support.

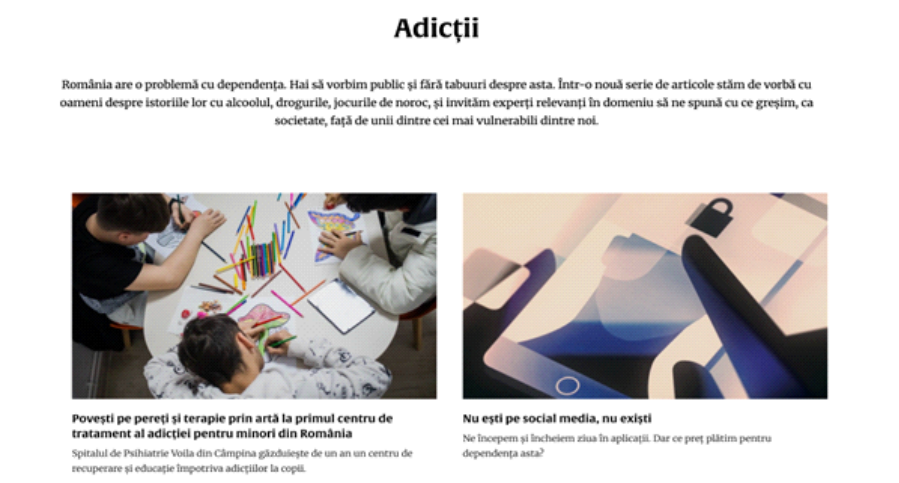


[13] *<Deepfake refers to content that has been falsified using artificial intelligence, i.e., video or audio recordings that look and sound like they are real, but in fact did not exist. Deepfake is a combination of the terms "deep learning," a feature of artificial intelligence, and "fake," and the technology is based on a concept called Generative Adversarial Network, which can be used to reproduce video images and sound that appear authentic to the human eye.> This is the explanation provided by security analyst Filip Truță for Europa Liberă.*

[14] *In 2024, Școala9 published on how ghosting works among young people. In this article, psychologist and psychotherapist Georgiana Ceoromila described ghosting as the act of suddenly and without explanation ceasing to communicate with another person with whom one had a relationship (usually romantic or friendly, but also professional).*



Scena9 also has a section dedicated to addictions.



Adicții

România are o problemă cu dependența. Hai să vorbim public și fără tabuuri despre asta. Într-o nouă serie de articole stăm de vorbă cu oameni despre istoriile lor cu alcoolul, drogurile, jocurile de noroc, și invităm experți relevanți în domeniu să ne spună cu ce greșim, ca societate, față de unii dintre cei mai vulnerabili dintre noi.

Povești pe pereți și terapie prin artă la primul centru de tratament al adicției pentru minori din România

Spitalul de Psihiatrie Voila din Câmpina găzduiește de un an un centru de recuperare și educație împotriva adicțiilor la copii.

Nu ești pe social media, nu exiști

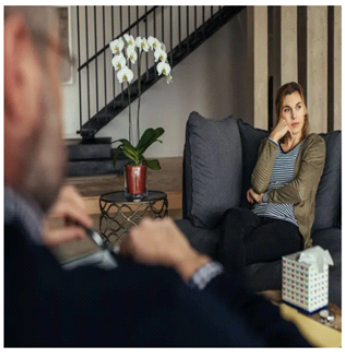
Ne începem și încheiem ziua în aplicații. Dar ce preț plătim pentru dependența asta?

The PressOne platform also pays close attention to mental health. Among the topics covered over time are burnout, the status of psychologists, the phenomenon of fake therapists, addictions, and autism.



ȘTIRI 19/11/2023

Fenomenul falșilor terapeuți din România. Un coach oferă consiliere psihologică prin telefon și le cere clienților să facă „salturi cuantice" de 400 de lei



ȘTIRI 05/11/2024

Psihologii români nu sunt evaluați psihologic la intrarea în profesie. Verificarea periodică a sănătății lor mintale, doar o „obligație morală"

Patricia Cîrtog and Daria Gîzdavu from PressOne will publish an article this year on adolescents and mental health: The impact of body dysmorphia on the mental health of young people and adolescents.

The two journalists won one of four scholarships offered by the Center for Independent Journalism and UNICEF in Romania as part of the project "Media education for mental health – topics on the public agenda."

As part of the same project, the CIJ and UNICEF in Romania organized two training sessions for journalists on how to write about mental health and how to approach mental health from a solutions journalism perspective. The training sessions and discussions with journalists highlighted the fact that there is a personal interest in mental health, especially among the younger generation of journalists. It is a paradigm shift, one that is already leading to a greater number of mental health topics being addressed by young journalists, such as Ancuța Popa from Ziarul de Iași.

Paradigm shift

Ancuța Popa has been working at Ziarul de Iași for a year and a half, where she mainly writes about health. Before being hired, she worked for several print and radio newsrooms. In none of them did she feel valued, even though, she says, she worked excessively hard for little pay, which was barely enough to survive on. She did not find any openness to more sensitive topics in these newsrooms. So she left. The journalist says she received support and encouragement to write about mental health at Ziarul de Iași.

The year she joined Ziarul de Iași, she wrote about psychogenealogy courses, a type of "authenticity course" that helps identify genetically transmitted traumas. She was curious and passionate about the subject, but more than anything, she wanted to understand. She spent time with patients, pretended to be a patient herself, and spoke with specialists in the field, including those from the Socola Institute of Psychiatry in Iași:

> Even today, I believe that at least once a week I need to talk to a psychologist, because everywhere I go, it's like when doctors say they work in a multidisciplinary team. So when I go somewhere and write about a medical issue, whatever it may be, I realize that it always involves mental health. And then it's normal not to ignore it.

At the time of the interview, Ancuța Popa had just finished working on a topic that was not necessarily easy, about men who had died by suicide. She wrote from the same conviction that you should not ignore a topic for personal reasons. In addition, it gave her the opportunity to make some more calls to the Socola Institute so that she could write an entire article about men's mental health month.

Ancuța Popa writes about mental health because in her circle of friends, in her generation, there is a desire to normalize going to a psychiatrist or psychologist.

We are talking about a generation that is much more aware of its rights, of the need to have a balance between personal and professional life, no matter how much they love what they do.

At one point, Ancuța thought she was suffering from burnout. She had panic attacks and anxiety, and severe chest pains. That's how she ended up publishing the article about broken heart syndrome - "Patients in Iași treated in intensive care because they are suffering from a broken heart. Psychologist: 'It's not a metaphor, a strong emotion can actually do that.'"

> For me, it wasn't about love, it was very much about my job. I had constant pain, meaning I was physically affected by what I was writing, explains the journalist.

> Psychologically, at some point you realize that you're not okay, you're really not okay when you work all the time. Every day I write about death, every day I write about something tragic, and I have to take care of myself. Sometimes I feel like I have to choose between myself and this job. That's the problem I've been struggling with the most lately. And that's what I'm trying to discuss in therapy.

Journalism isn't just a game for Ancuța Popa; she said that she really loves what she does, that she cares deeply and wants to change things. But she has realized that she needs moments that are not at all about topics, deadlines, and her efforts are moving in that direction.

It's a discussion that is still difficult to have with journalists who have been in the business for over 15-20 years. It's a discussion that would have been impossible to have 15 years ago with a journalist in her early 20s, new to the profession, like Ancuța Popa.

However, it is necessary because it directly influences reporting on mental health. A journalist who does not believe that their mental health is relevant will not see its relevance in other people who could be the subject of an article. Or they will not see its relevance in addressing issues such as poverty or teenage mothers. Concern for mental health is essential when covering topics such as violence and human trafficking as a journalist, because you come into contact with vulnerable people, if they choose to speak, and you have to do so without re-traumatizing them.

However, it is not enough for journalists to be aware of the importance of their own mental health. It is also essential that those who run newsrooms understand this and act accordingly.

In one of the newsrooms where she worked before coming to Ziarul de Iași, Ancuța Popa had a challenging period in her personal life. It was Christmas, she was working, and at the same time she had to deal with a death in her family. She went to her boss to explain the situation. She didn't ask for time off, she just told him that she wasn't doing well emotionally, that she would do everything she could to do her job, but that she would have some limitations. Instead of understanding, she received advice on how she should forget about it and move on:

> I wasn't asking for advice, I just wanted to be understood that maybe I would not be myself, maybe I would... because I was constantly being reproached for it.

Fortunately, there are newsrooms that understand how to offer support, and their practices can serve as a model. One such newsroom is Átlátszó Erdély, an investigative media platform focusing on the Hungarian community.

Zoltán Sipos is the head of Átlátszó Erdély and, in this position, he has set up a program in several steps to prevent journalists from suffering from burnout.

He states from the outset that the reasons were purely pragmatic. His editorial team has six journalists. If just one of them left, it would be a disaster for them. It is difficult and time-consuming to train an investigative journalist. It is a process that can take three to five years, or even longer. In addition, they would also need to be Hungarian speakers. Zoltán Sipos came to the conclusion that it is much more expensive than investing in the mental health of the employees you already have.

What exactly did he do?

First of all, anyone in the newsroom can call a psychologist whenever they need to—before or after finishing a difficult story, when they feel overwhelmed by a story they are working on. The costs are covered by the newsroom, not the journalists.

After busy and/or demanding periods, journalists either get days off or days when they have to perform lighter tasks that are not too mentally and/or emotionally draining.

Thanks to a grant, journalists have the opportunity to go to the gym, swim, or even go horseback riding.

Beyond all this, Zoltán Sipos believes that it is important for managers to set an example.

> I set the standards, but not just with words, but also with actions. I am the one who says: Look, I worked all weekend, I'm super tired, today is Tuesday, I don't have anything important to do, I'm going to the forest on my bike. See you tomorrow!, explains Sipos. In this context, he considers it perfectly normal for a colleague to simply come and say: See you tomorrow, I'm not feeling ok today!

How a local newsroom views mental health

One of the local publications monitored in this research was Bihoreanul.

At Bihoreanul, the Health section is coordinated by deputy editor-in-chief Adrian Criș. Bihoreanul is the only publication that, during the monitored period, did not feature articles on topics such as how we sleep, what we eat, or what we drink. In their case, the articles are about legislative news, changes, and any issue that influences the citizen's relationship with the healthcare system. They also have articles based on complaints from citizens who write to them constantly, as well as press investigations on health issues.

At the time of the interview, Criș was working on a story about a woman who had been practically living in the psychiatric ward of Oradea County Hospital for over 30 years. He had access to talk to the woman, the doctors, and the nurses. The woman's story is actually the story of mental health services that do not exist outside the hospital.

Criș does not feel that there has been an increase in interest in mental health at the community level because people have had/have concerns that they consider more important—the pandemic, war, elections, inflation. But he acknowledges that when they write about mental health or address topics related to mental health, people are interested.

The editor-in-chief basically confirms that journalists can set the agenda. And to do that, they just need to write. It sounds simple, but it's not, especially when you don't have access to specialists, for example.

The journalist-specialist relationship

Alina Neagu, a journalist at HotNews, has been writing about health for eight years. She feels that mental health has been talked about more since the pandemic, when people were scared that they or their loved ones would die. On top of this fear came isolation, and in the case of doctors, burnout became an issue. Fear, the fear of death, is something that has affected journalists as well.

Starting from the fact that teenagers were extremely affected by the pandemic, Alina had in mind a fairly extensive feature article that she kept postponing because she couldn't find a psychiatrist willing to talk. A parent had told her that more and more young people are starting to take Xanax from the age of 15.

She finally found a psychiatrist willing to answer her questions on the subject, but after she sent the questions, she never heard back. What Alina is trying to emphasize is that there are topics where, without access and expertise, it is very difficult to achieve anything, especially on sensitive, controversial topics.

This year, she wrote about how children and adolescents do not have their own psychiatric hospital. She managed to write the article as she wanted because she had the full support of Dr. Florina Rad, head of the Pediatric Psychiatry Department at Obregi Hospital.

Another topic that is almost impossible to cover without access to specialists is that of institutionalized children. At the beginning of the year, Digi24 exposed the realities of institutionalized children in Mureș County. A kind of horror asylum, but for minors[15].

According to UNICEF, in 2022 there were 31,993 institutionalized children in Romania. 26% of them had a psychiatric diagnosis[16].

In the case of the centers in Mureș, these are children with neurological problems and various mental disorders. These children did not receive any form of therapy or rehabilitation services, and the conditions in which they were kept were inhumane[17]. The case was exposed by health journalist Carla Tănasie, and her reports led to the closure of these centers.

Carla is the only journalist who covers the subject of institutionalized persons. She has been doing so for more than seven years. She believes that the willingness of journalists to expose the abuses in these places is not enough. You need access and people who understand how things work, who can explain things to you and who are always available to answer your calls. Carla found all of these qualities in Georgiana Pascu, program manager at the Legal Resource Center, who has been fighting for the rights of institutionalized people for 20 years.

Copii cu dizabilități încuiați cu zăvorul și tratați cu medicamente expirate, descoperiți la mai multe centre din Târgu Mureș

Data actualizării: 11.01.2025 13:39
Data publicării: 11.01.2025 08:57



In Mureș, Carla found children who needed physical therapy but were not receiving it. The journalist recounts that when someone from Bucharest came and evaluated the children, they explained that if they did not receive physical therapy, it would put their lives at risk. This is because their bodies are deformed due to their illnesses and they could end up in a situation where their rib cage presses on their organs and they die.

These are things that not every journalist can document. Carla is always asked how she manages to do it. The journalist is convinced that things can only change if we talk about them. In addition, she is aware that only the press and NGOs can truly show what is happening in these centers.

VIDEO Ororile din „căminele groazei". Mărturiile unui medic despre copiii din Mureș: Au stat numai în pat, pe spate. Erau ca într-o cușcă

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Despite the resilience mechanisms she has developed, there was still a moment when she felt overwhelmed by the situation:

> Yes, I didn't come out of the pandemic very well emotionally or health-wise. I think the media needs to normalize this discussion about going to a psychologist, about taking care of your mental health, because it's like, I don't know, washing your hands or going to the doctor because you feel sick.

[15] *Asylums of Horror refers to a series of investigations published by journalists Ovidiu Vanghele (Media Investigation Center) and Bianca Albu (Buletin de București) about three centers in Voluntari, Ilfov County, where people with disabilities were kept in extremely dirty conditions, starved, held against their will, and beaten.*

[16] *Mihai Copăceanu, Irina Costache, The Mental Health of Children and Adolescents in Romania, UNICEF Romania, 2022, 2022, pag. 3*

[17] *Alina Popescu, Children with disabilities locked up and treated with expired medication, discovered at several centers in Târgu Mureș, Digi24, January 11, 2025, tinyurl.com/ysk9xxez*

> You have to take care of your mind too, and we don't do that because of the stigma; people look at you strangely and judge you in all sorts of ways. And unfortunately, these examples also come from our managers.

The pandemic also prompted Carla to propose a program to her editorial team whereby any of her colleagues could have access to a psychologist when needed. The editorial team was open to her suggestion.

Journalists wrote sporadically about the rights of institutionalized persons 10 years ago. However, Georgiana Pascu from the Legal Resource Center believes that it was Carla Tănasie who really put the issue on the public agenda. Carla was the journalist who went beyond the scandalous stories about institutionalized people. She looked at the money, at the conditions, and who the institutionalized people were.

> "She would come at night and stand in front of a placement center or a hospital without moving, then chase those responsible. This meant something for civil society people and for the people in the centers. She moved the topic into the spotlight from this perspective. Carla professionalized the topic," explains Pascu.

Two other things also mattered, continues the CRJ program manager. The first has to do with journalists and how they managed to link the centers to money and politicians: "I think people are much more attentive when it comes to corruption, as they see it as a more elitist issue."

The series Azilele groazei (Asylums of Horror), published by journalists Ovidiu Vanghele and Bianca Albu, gained momentum mainly because it involved Gabriela Firea, the Minister of Family Affairs at the time. In addition, the series led to the resignation not only of Gabriela Firea, but also of Labor Minister Marius Budăi.

După victimizări și amenințări, Gabriela Firea și-a dat demisia din guvern. Azilele groazei, un "război total față de mine"

STIRI ACTUALE 15-07-2023 | 08:33



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După ce, zile în șir a negat, s-a victimizat, ba chiar a amenințat că va da în judecată jurnaliștii, Gabriela Firea și-a dat vineri demisia din funcția de ministru al Familiei, Tineretului și Egalității de Șanse.

The second thing that made the subject more important to society was the raids on these centers, the fact that people saw prosecutors and masked men breaking down the door and entering those centers, conducting inspections.

Pascu says she does not feel that she was ignored by the press, only that she had to answer many questions that initially seemed to be loaded with prejudices about the beneficiaries. She understands where this lack of knowledge comes from. After all, people with disabilities locked up in centers are not discussed in psychology, social work, law, or journalism schools.

These people do not exist in any of the fields that deal with the services they receive or the defense of their rights. This lack of knowledge is particularly evident, explains Georgiana Pascu, in the case of people with mental disabilities involved in violent episodes. The approach, says Pascu, is along the lines of: a madman who slit his throat or a madman who set fire to the house.

Georgiana believes she has benefited greatly from the help of journalists, especially those with whom she has had a different kind of communication, who have been able to tell her directly what she is doing wrong when speaking on TV or radio, where time is limited. She learned, instead of talking non-stop and perhaps a little chaotically, to always stick to three clear ideas when she is invited to a show or interviewed.

The need for empathy

It is no coincidence that the journalists interviewed repeatedly mentioned the importance of mental health specialists. They did so out of necessity. Specialists provide context and explanations that go beyond the particular case that a journalist is documenting and, obviously, know the field much better than journalists.
Vlad Stroescu is a specialist who has not shied away from talking to the press when contacted on various topics over the years. A psychiatrist since 2004, Stroescu writes and speaks about mental health beyond the pages of specialist journals. In this case, too, he is the one who explains where the strong prejudices in the area of mental health come from.

What is defined today as a mental disorder, Stroescu explains, was in the past a situation in which a person became undesirable to society and was permanently removed:

> No distinction was made between mental suffering and crimes, violence, vices, class differences, sins (from a religious point of view), sacrileges, etc.
> Although we have had psychiatry, experimental psychology, psychopathology, and later neuroscience for over two hundred years, as well as many schools of psychotherapy, today's prejudices are nothing more than the stubborn remnants of all those ways in which society rationalized the exclusion of a person from its bosom.

What are the most powerful prejudices when it comes to mental health, from a psychiatrist's perspective?
The most common prejudice is that mental illness involves danger and violence, an association that emerged from monitoring, but which has also been observed by journalists writing about mental health.

> The percentage of mentally ill people who do such things is extremely small, probably much smaller than the percentage of violent people who do not suffer from psychosis, explains Dr. Stroescu.

There is a danger when people come to believe that mental illness automatically means violence:

> The anxiety of danger affects not only our patients, but everything that psychiatry means in the collective imagination: the hospital is seen as a kind of prison, perhaps even worse than a penitentiary; medications are dangerous drugs or chemical straitjackets; the psychiatrist is a jailer; it is a great shame to end up in the psychologist's office.

Another common prejudice is what Dr. Stroescu calls the permanence of mental illness. What exactly does this mean? People with mental illness are permanently labeled. This type of prejudice, explains Vlad Stroescu, leads to a permanent source of discrimination: once the label is applied, it is used to justify the restriction of certain rights, such as the right to work.

A third set of prejudices identified by the psychiatrist refers to the assumption that people with mental illness are fundamentally different from us:

> This leads not only to the stigmatization of people with mental disorders, but also to a kind of self-stigmatization, to delayed access to help, to accepting a burden without any benefit. The subject of mental health is actually of interest to all of us; no one is exempt from risk, and I don't think there has ever been or ever will be a person on Earth who has never experienced any mental health disorder in their lifetime.

Vlad Stroescu points out that these prejudices are not necessarily characteristic to the press; they are ideas and values of society that the press merely reflects. And it does so unconsciously, which is the problem, according to the doctor.

How are press reports on mental health viewed from a specialist's perspective?

Despite some lingering prejudices, Vlad Stroescu believes that the press has made many strides, albeit slow ones, in recent years. What progress has he observed specifically?

- Greater care when it comes to suicide stories, including mentioning the measures someone can take, the numbers they can call if they feel in danger.
- Reporters at psychiatrists' conferences.
- Better reporting of scientific progress.

However, beyond all this progress, sensationalism remains. But also a tendency toward "the irrational, the superstitious, conspiracy paranoia, in a highly political or politicized context." This inclination, the doctor observes, is not limited to part of the press, but also extends to part of social media and the public.

Regarding the topics/subjects that are missing from the press when it comes to mental health, the psychiatrist believes that "the deficits are more in nuance, complexity, and empathy."

> Personality disorders are a topic where empathy is urgently needed, but instead we have many portrayals of psychopathy and sociopathy that serve more as scapegoats.

One topic that the doctor finds fascinating and that does not receive enough attention is resilience: "the star of the report is generally the crisis."

Also on the list of topics he would like to see in the press is a "greater focus on communities and identities created as a reaction, a response to exogenous social labeling."

> I would like—and it's terribly difficult—to learn more directly from the source, from mental suffering to all its social consequences. We have at least as much to learn from our patients as we do from research and neuroscience.

The doctor points out an aspect that also emerged from the monitoring. The lack of voices from the private sphere. In 74% of the monitored material, voices from the private sphere were completely absent.

There are more and more doctors from different specialties who are moving away from specialist journals and toward social networks, media platforms where they write opinions, podcasts, blogs, and generally areas that are more accessible to the public. Vlad Stroescu believes that psychiatrists need to get involved in debates on mental health, but admits that this is very difficult, both pragmatically and ethically:

> Everything we say is practically a medical act, because it is seen as specialist advice, but an act that exists outside a classic, confidential therapeutic relationship. We must remain rational and limit ourselves to making statements based on evidence and experience if we are to remain a beacon in a sea of misinformation, superstitious remedies, and sellers of false hope.

However, he believes that things would be much easier if reputable professional associations developed and strengthened their relationship with the press, but also if they had their own communication outlets, i.e., intelligible and user-friendly sources of information for the public, not just for specialists.

Adolescents, more informed and open than adults

Since the quantitative analysis also focused on mental health in children and adolescents, the position of a psychiatrist specializing in children was absolutely necessary.

Florina Rad, associate professor, primary pediatric psychiatrist, head of the Pediatric Psychiatry Department at Obregia Hospital, is another specialist who opened her office door to the press.

How does Dr. Florina Rad believe that media bias affects parents' attitudes toward their children's mental health? The main effect of stigmatization, explains the psychiatrist, is fear—parents are afraid of everything related to psychiatry. Fear comes with shame; it is shameful to have a mental illness, to be hospitalized.

> We have many parents who refuse help, who, even if their kids end up, say, in the emergency room, refuse hospitalization because they do not want them to be admitted to 'such a hospital'. That's how they put it: 'such a hospital'. This is somewhat painful for us, because ultimately mental disorders are disorders like any other. They are no more shameful than somatic disorders.

In practice, stigma and prejudice hold back people from seeking medical help.

Stigma also affects treatment. Very often, parents ask doctors if they can give their children something herbal or leave them completely untreated. The psychiatrist emphasizes that the first line of intervention is psychotherapy. However, medication is sometimes necessary. The parents' refusal means that the doctor has to make a greater effort to explain and provide psychoeducation to the parent and the adolescent. Florina Rad considers psychoeducation to be extremely important.

Experience has shown Florina Rad that adolescents are more open than their parents when it comes to mental health. They are more accustomed to talking about their emotional needs. Also, participation through UNICEF in Romania in activities for students has shown the head of the Pediatric Psychiatry Department at Obregia Hospital that adolescents know a lot about mental health:

> First of all, they understood the concept of mental health, which is not just about having a mental illness or not. They were willing to share their knowledge with their peers.

The psychiatrist emphasizes that we cannot generalize, however, given the number of children and adolescents in vulnerable situations who do not have access to information.

The reason why adolescents seek information is based on their need to explain certain states and feelings they experience. "And yes, sometimes they self-diagnose, but not necessarily by labeling themselves, but rather by searching for terminology for their symptoms, for what they feel," explains the doctor.

Adolescents' searches may also be driven by the fact that mental health information in the media tends to focus on unique events—an accident, a suicide attempt. And the approach is often sensationalist.

With this kind of approach, a teenager won't find info about what mental health means, what to do when you feel certain things, what resources you can use, or who you can ask for support.

Beyond psychoeducation, the head of the Pediatric Psychiatry Department at Obregia Hospital believes that it is extremely important for doctors 'to step outside their offices'.

A psychiatrist who works with children and adolescents must always be up to date with what is happening, know about games, know what adolescents are concerned about, how they talk to each other. And spending time outside the office should not only be aimed at adolescents in order to gain a better understanding, but also at parents and teachers.

However, 'leaving the office' would only be feasible if there were enough psychiatrists for children and adolescents. Florina Rad explains that doctors and psychologists in mental health centers have a job requirement to go out into the community. But it is a strictly bureaucratic obligation as long as the number of these clinics is lower than the number of counties in Romania.

What Dr. Rad describes is a reality of mental health in children and adolescents that is not reflected at all in the media. It is a reality that highlights the lack of services, but also the way in which specialists are disconnected from the community.

Returning to the doctor-journalist relationship, Rad says that there are many requests to the hospital to talk to a doctor when an event occurs, but then they stop. It is not a constant process, but is directly related to episodes that attract public attention. After that, communication stops until a new event occurs.

In addition, Rad says, doctors are quite reluctant to communicate with the press. They fear that their statements will be taken out of context, that they will be quoted as saying something unrelated to the subject, that the journalist will not convey the doctor's message. As a result, some doctors even refuse to talk to the press.

How much can the press help with what the doctor called psychoeducation?

In this regard, Florina Rad recalled an article about a teenager with Asperger's. In that article, the teenager and his mother spoke, but the doctor's perspective was also presented. Shortly after publication, she was faced with a large influx of patients because parents had read the article and recognized certain experiences described in the journalistic material. Yes, the psychiatrist believes that these types of articles can contribute to the psychoeducation of adults and adolescents.

However, monitoring shows that in articles about mental health or that refer to mental health, the psychiatrist, psychotherapist, or even psychologist are not the first to be asked to provide expertise. As for the voice of the person concerned or their family, it is found in very few articles. And voices from the public sphere, such as school principals or teachers, are almost completely absent.

CONCLUSIONS



As psychiatrist Florina Rad pointed out, there is greater interest in mental health among adolescents. And the topics covered by the independent press about the challenges and pressures they face also highlight their interest in talking about all these things.

However, it is important that such topics are also addressed in the mainstream press. Teenagers need to be heard and they need to take part in a discussion that directly concerns them. This is not just about the journalist's professional obligation to produce balanced material. It is also about the credibility that the press ends up having in the eyes of teenagers.

Another danger, when you ignore the voice of teenagers, is that of turning them into 'curiosities' or blaming them. This subsequently leads to a form of alienation.

As the qualitative analysis shows, there is a new generation of journalists concerned about their own mental health, and the consequences of this concern are manifold. First, it implies an interest in current topics, including those that are much closer to the interests of adolescents. Secondly, it implies a balanced approach to mental health. And last but not least, it puts pressure on editorial offices to pay attention to the mental health of their employees. This attention translates into practices, policies, and programs targeting mental health.

Beyond these aspects, monitoring shows that, at present, the mainstream press writes about mental health when an event occurs, most often a tragic one. This directly creates an association between tragedy (crime, accident, violence) and mental health, leading the idea of mental health into an area with which you do not want to identify.

Such reports are also the ones that best expose prejudices: a person with a mental disorder/suffering is automatically a violent/dangerous person; a person who does unusual things clearly suffers from a mental illness.

Such prejudices are so deeply rooted that there are situations in which the authors of articles make diagnoses or insinuate that the person suffers from mental illness without any evidence to support this. Moreover, although the authors speculate about the mental health of the person they are writing about, they never seek the opinion of a psychiatrist.

The monitoring results show that the press has not developed the reflex to contact mental health specialists. Only eight articles requested the expertise of a psychiatrist, while in 30 articles the expertise comes only from the police, who provide information beyond their area of expertise. Depending on the subject, the police mention whether the person has been admitted to a psychiatric ward or whether they are considering suicide. The police also talk to students about addiction and bullying.

Prevention is currently treated superficially, in a sensationalist manner, and it's often limited to how eating certain foods can reduce anxiety.

Prevention treated in a balanced way from a journalistic point of view can also help to educate people about mental health. But this requires that the materials provide scientific information, properly cited, that they offer expertise, include the voices of those involved or related to those involved, discuss the types of services available and how they can be accessed. And, above all, they must move beyond topics strictly related to lifestyle.

Prevention can help explain certain phenomena, thereby preventing unfortunate events. Prevention can provide information that reduces the perception that mental health is something to be feared. This is because when journalists write articles with the aim of prevention, they do so without the pressure of a tragic event that has just occurred.

At present, the mainstream media does not really pay attention to content that focuses on prevention when it comes to mental health. This concern is more prevalent in the independent press, where the younger generation of journalists found refuge. However, there are a few exceptions in the mainstream press, with editorial offices increasingly opening their doors to young professionals. Not only have they opened their doors, but they are also listening to them.

There needs to be a greater openness on the part of specialists to communicate with the press. We are talking about a field that is difficult to report on in a balanced way without expertise. Specialists should not only speak up when the press asks them for their opinion. They can react to prejudices that appear in the press or to false information that spreads in the press.

It is true that this is not a role in which psychiatrists are comfortable, but science must be much more accessible to the public, and combating false information or prejudices can be an alternative way of moving specialists from a very formal area to one that is more friendly to the public, one with which they can relate better.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR JOURNALISTS AND EDITORS



Journalists are not immune to prejudice. However, they have the necessary means at their disposal to protect their work from it.

Approaches to mental health are influenced not only by prejudice, but also by a lack of knowledge and understanding. Consult specialists, whether they are psychiatrists, psychotherapists, psychologists, school counselors, or activists fighting for the rights of institutionalized people.

Try to look at sensitive topics that are explained through prejudice and from a mental health perspective. For example, how extreme poverty affects mental health and what long-term effects it has. Perhaps in this way we will hear less and less that Roma students do not want to go to school because "that's how they are." Or that beneficiaries of minimum inclusion income do not work because "that's how they are, just lazy."

Other important areas/topics that should be analyzed from a mental health perspective include motherhood, the relationship with work, addictions, and the phenomenon of teenage mothers.

Try to stop using just institutional press releases, which allow them to set the agenda. Demand a response, demand answers to your questions.

When the subject involves mental health, don't rely on police expertise. If it is a matter of mental health, the expertise must come from a psychiatrist. Otherwise, we will continue to perpetuate the prejudice that people who have been diagnosed with a mental disorder are aggressors.

In the same vein, stop promoting the idea that an aggressor is crazy/mentally ill/insane.

Stop making assumptions in your articles about the mental health of the person you are writing about. Journalists are not psychiatrists who can make diagnoses.

If you write articles on healthy living/lifestyle with a mental health component, clearly cite the studies and researchers you refer to. Otherwise, the material loses credibility, or you may end up promoting pseudoscientific information.

In addition to expertise, it is important to have other voices talking about the subject of the article: voices from the private sphere (family, friends) and voices from the public sphere depending on the subject (school principal, co-workers, boss). This is a way to ensure that the material is balanced.

Keep in mind that the person at the heart of a story can be approached in a context where they are not in a vulnerable state that does not favor dialogue, or when the discussion and subsequent exposure do not cause retraumatization. Also, when talking to a minor, parental consent is required in order to discuss the issue with them.

When writing about teenagers and mental health, try to address topics that directly affect them. This way, they will feel that they are part of the discussion. And their voice is extremely important.

Two examples:

- **What is the impact of challenges that teenagers and young people do on the internet?**
- **The impact of body dysmorphia on the mental health of young people and teenagers.**

These are two of the topics that won the "From Reporting to Change - Mental Health Disorders Beyond Stigma" scholarship offered by the Center for Independent Journalism and UNICEF in July.

Newsrooms should be more open to topics proposed by young journalists who, as research shows, are more concerned about mental health. It is not always easy to accept change, but the solution is not to dismiss proposals with the "argument" that they are "nonsense from an overly sensitive generation."

Editorial offices should be more attentive to the needs of journalists and develop policies/programs that address their mental health: from offering therapy sessions to adapting/flexing the schedule. These things would also help them to be better equipped to do their job in a balanced way. Qualitative analysis has shown that journalists who are concerned about their own mental health have the ability to report on mental health in a balanced, diverse, and timely manner.

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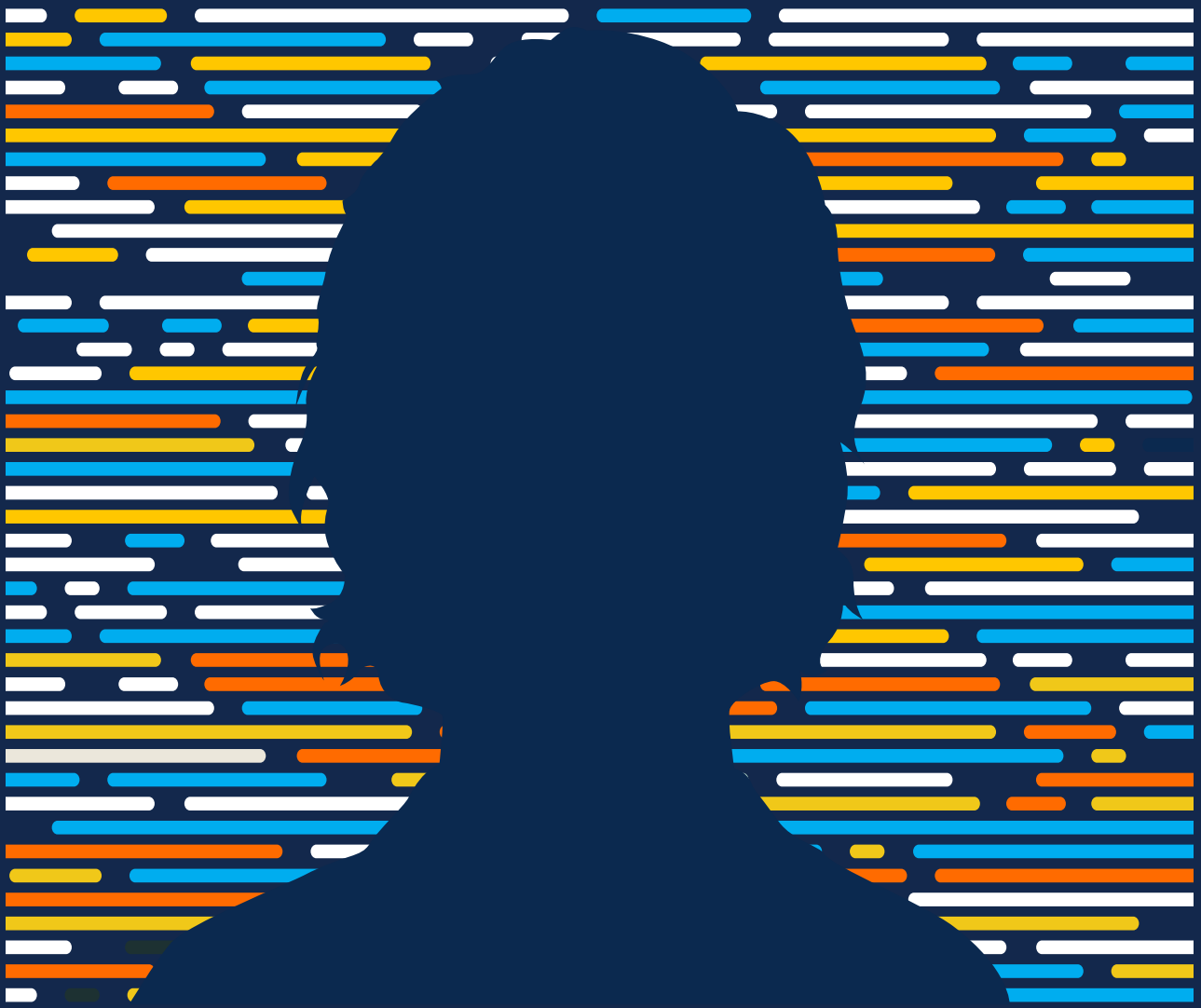
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