

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Portrayal of mental illness in Japanese newspapers, 2001–2014

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## Abstract

**OBJECTIVES:** A large body of the literature has shown that media images of mental illness and people with mental illness are often negative. In Japan, where in 2002 the old term for schizophrenia ‘Seishin Bunretsu Byō’ (split-mind disease) was replaced with a new term “Tôgô Shitchô Shô” (integration disorder) to reduce stigma against this illness and its sufferers, little is known about the portrayal of mental illness in the media and about the effect of the renaming on the portrayal. In the present study, we aimed to look at changes in the newspaper coverage of mental illness in Japan before and after the renaming (2001, 2003 and 2014). We also aimed to examine changes in the content of newspaper articles featuring schizophrenia and its sufferers over the same period.

**METHODS:** We analysed articles from two national newspapers using qualitative content analysis (n=270).

**RESULTS:** The proportion of negative articles about mental illness and those affected significantly decreased between 2001 and 2003 and yet this did not hold between 2001 and 2014. The proportion of negative articles featuring schizophrenia or its sufferers showed a non-significant decrease both between 2001 and 2003 and between 2001 and 2014.

**CONCLUSION:** Newspaper coverage of mental illness largely remained negative and distorted over time, although there was a significant improvement in 2003. The findings suggest that the influence of the renaming on the portrayal of mental illness in newspapers was limited to a short period.

## INTRODUCTION

Media is a major source of information about illness for the general public, and media images of mental illness can affect people’s attitudes to mental illness and people with it (Lupton 1999; Angermeyer *et al* 2005; Dietrich *et al* 2006; Clement *et al* 2013). A large body of research has demonstrated that newspaper coverage of mental illness is often negative and distorted (Wahl 1992; Sieff 2004; Stout *et al* 2004; Pirkis *et al* 2006; Stuart 2006; Nairn 2007; Klin & Lemish 2008). Amongst mental illnesses, schizophrenia or people having it is consistently misrepresented, particularly in

the manner that people with schizophrenia are violent and dangerous, and the nature of newspaper coverage of this has not changed over time (Clement & Foster 2007; Goulden *et al* 2011; Park *et al* 2012).

Whilst much research has been conducted on newspaper coverage of mental illness in English-speaking countries, little is known about this in Japan, where the old term for schizophrenia ‘Seishin Bunretsu Byō’ (split-mind disease) was officially replaced with the new term “Tôgô Shitchô Shô” (integration disorder) in 2002. The Japanese Society of Psychiatry and Neurology had discussed renaming the old term since 1993, as the old term was not conceptually appropriate and

gave a negative impression to people. The families of people with mental illness also asked for the old term to be renamed, as they regarded it as stigmatising (Iwadata *et al* 1996; Sato 2006). Some studies using convenient samples in Japan revealed that the respondents had had less negative images for the new term than the old term (Koike *et al* 2015; Takahashi *et al* 2009). However, it is not known how the depiction of schizophrenia or its sufferers in the media has changed since the renaming. This study aimed to look at the changes in newspaper articles about mental illness in Japan for the period from just before the renaming in 2001 to just after it in 2003, and for the period between 2001 and 2014. The year 2014 was selected in order to examine the latest trends and changes over a longer time period. This study also aimed to look at changes in the depiction of schizophrenia in articles over the same period. We hypothesised that there would be:

- (1) a significant decrease in the proportion of negative articles about mental illness or people with it between 2001 and 2003; (first hypothesis)
- (2) a significant decrease in the proportion of negative articles about mental illness or people with it between 2001 and 2014; (second hypothesis)
- (3) a significant decrease in the proportion of negative articles about schizophrenia or people with it between 2001 and 2003; (third hypothesis)
- (4) a significant decrease in the proportion of negative articles about schizophrenia or people with it between 2001 and 2014 (fourth hypothesis).

## MATERIAL AND METHOD

### Newspapers analysed

Two high-circulation national newspapers were selected for analysis: the Yomiuri newspaper and the Asahi newspaper. Between January and June 2013, Yomiuri sold, on average, approximately 10 million morning papers monthly, followed by Asahi which sold 7.6 million. These newspapers have been selected not only because they have the highest circulation, but also because they are different in their political thoughts; Yomiuri is right-leaning, while Asahi is left-leaning. With the difference, the present study aimed to avoid finding results which inclined towards a particular political position.

### Search strategy

The newspaper databases were searched using the following terms: mental illness OR mental disorder OR neurasthenia OR psychiatric OR manic OR schizophrenia OR bipolar disorder OR depression OR PTSD OR anxiety disorder OR panic disorder OR eating disorder OR obsessive compulsive disorder OR personality disorder. Substance use disorders and organic disorders associated with aging were excluded, for, as Wahl (1992) argues, these disorders present a different kind of concern about public attitudes.

### Sample procedure

We employed constructed week sampling, which is a stratified random sampling technique popular in media studies. This sampling involves identifying all Mondays, and randomly selecting one Monday, and repeating the same procedure for all the remaining days of the week to construct a week. Constructed week sampling is superior to simple random sampling and consecutive day sampling because it more adequately represents the population (Riffe *et al* 1993; Lacy *et al* 2001). The present study constructed six weeks per year for each newspaper, for Luke *et al* (2011) showed that sampling a minimum of six constructed weeks was most efficient to accurately estimate one-year of one newspaper's coverage.

### Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Articles fulfilled the inclusion criteria if they focussed upon mental illness, those who were receiving psychiatric treatment, those experiencing mental illness, the services they receive or mental health related laws and regulations. Obituaries, articles about art, sports, travel or things that happened outside Japan and notices of lectures, social gatherings and so forth were not included.

### Method of analysis

We analysed the articles using qualitative content analysis. The first author developed a coding frame based upon existing studies of newspaper coverage of mental illness in the United Kingdom and the United States (Corrigan *et al* 2005; Goulden *et al* 2011), as there was no Japanese study which could be referred to for its coding frame.

Story themes derived from the two studies above were piloted with a 7% random sample. Each article was coded for its primary theme. The initial coding frame was developed by accepting, adjusting or rejecting the story themes or creating and adding new themes. The first author checked this coding frame with a 10% random sample and revised it. The second author was trained to code articles. The two authors then coded another 7% random sample articles independently for a reliability check. Cohen's kappa was used to measure agreement. Kappa score was 0.76, which signifies substantial agreement between raters.

Table 1 shows story themes in the existing studies and those included and newly created in the present study. The story themes were classified into four categories: 'Dangerousness', 'Understanding mental illness', 'Mental illness as stress-related illness' and 'Services, institutions and laws'. The four categories were divided into two groups according to the characteristics of each category: 'Harm to others/themselves' and 'Understanding of/concern for mental illness'. In this grouping, the category 'Dangerousness' was classified into the first group and the other categories were classified into the second group. When testing the four hypotheses, the articles falling under the first group were regarded as negative articles.

*Statistical analysis*

Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS version 22.0. Pearson's chi-squared tests were used to test the first and second hypothesis and Fisher's exact was used for the third and fourth hypotheses. The alpha threshold for statistical tests was 0.05.

**RESULTS**

Table 2 shows the frequency and proportion of each of the primary story themes in 2001, 2003 and 2014. Articles about dangerousness of mental illness or people with it occupied the highest proportion throughout the

period, except for 2003, when the proportion of articles categorised as 'understanding mental illness' slightly exceeded that of articles about dangerousness. When looking at the category 'understanding mental illness', most of articles were about individuals and groups affected by mental illness, whereas articles explaining cause, treatment and symptoms were relatively rare. Whilst the proportion of articles falling under the category 'mental illness as stress-related illness' increased, the proportion of articles about services, institutions and laws decreased over the period.

The proportion of negative articles significantly decreased from 49% to 31% between 2001 and 2003

**Tab. 1.** Story themes in the previous studies and present study.

<b>Corrigan et al (2005)</b> <b>Themes</b>	<b>Goulden et al (2011)</b> <b>Themes</b>	<b>Present study</b> <b>Themes</b>
Blame	Bad news	Articles about people who harmed others and/or themselves
Personal blame	Danger to others	Dangerousness
Parental failure	Suicide and self-injury	Violent crime
Genetic or biological cause	Victimisation and severe mistreatment	Nonviolent crime
Environmental cause	Strange, inept or burdensome	Suicide and self-injury
Dangerousness	Good news	Mental illness as legal defence
Danger to others	Understanding mental illness	Victimisation and severe mistreatment
Violent crime	Explaining: causes, treatments, prevalence and symptoms	Articles about understanding of / concern for mental illness
Nonviolent crime	Biological	Understanding mental illness
Suicidal or self-injurious behaviour	Psychosocial	Individuals and groups affected by mental illness
Mental illness as legal defence	Not specified	Research advances
Legal competence	Individuals and groups affected by mental illness	Explaining: cause
Criminal victimisation	Services and advocacy	Genetic or biological
Drug and alcohol abuse	Mental health service inadequacies and improvements	Environmental
Treatment and recovery	Stigma, discrimination and public education	Others
Research advances		Explaining: treatments
Biological treatments		Biological
Psychosocial treatments		Psychosocial
Recovery as an outcome		Others
Advocacy actions and concerns		Explaining: prevalence and symptoms
Poor-quality and concerns		Mental illness as stress-related illness
Shortage of resources		Stress caused by work
Homelessness		Stress caused by other reasons
Housing issues		Services, institutions and laws
Insurance parity		Inadequacies
		Improvements
		Introduction of new services or institutions

(Pearson's  $\chi^2=5.93$ , d.f.=1,  $p=0.015$ ), which supported the first hypothesis. However, the proportion showed a non-significant increase between 2001 and 2014 (55%) and therefore the second hypothesis was rejected. With respect to articles featuring schizophrenia or people with it, although it should be noted that many articles (27–43%) did not mention a specific diagnosis in each year, the proportion of negative articles about schizophrenia or people with it decreased from 86% (6/7) to 58% (7/12) between 2001 and 2003, but this failed to reach statistical significance ( $p=0.144$ ). The proportion also decreased between 2001 and 2014 (76% or 13/17) but yet again this was not statistically significant ( $p=0.538$ ). Thus, both the third and fourth hypotheses were not supported.

## DISCUSSION

In the present study we found a significant proportional decrease in negative articles featuring mental illness between 2001 and 2003. The decrease in 2003 was largely

due to the increase in the proportion of articles about 'understanding mental illness', and this increase may reflect the renaming of schizophrenia in 2002, which aimed to reduce the stigma against people with it; there is a possibility that the renaming caught journalists' attention to mental illness and they therefore published more articles which can help the reader understand mental illness. However, the proportion of negative articles about mental illness increased between 2001 and 2014 and between 2003 and 2014. The proportion of negative articles about schizophrenia decreased both between 2001 and 2003 and between 2001 and 2014, although these were not statistically significant and the proportion increased between 2003 and 2014. Overall, it seems that reporting on mental illness remained largely negative over the sample period and that the renaming of schizophrenia had a positive impact on the portrayal of mental illness for a short time period but not over the long term, although one cannot say that the renaming is the only reason for the improvement in 2003.

**Tab. 2.** Story themes of newspaper articles in 2001, 2003 and 2014.

Themes	2001		2003		2014	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Dangerousness</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>55%</b>
Violent crime	27		13		27	
Nonviolent crime	1		1		5	
Suicide and self-injury	2		4		3	
Mental illness as legal defence	6		1		7	
Victimisation and severe mistreatment	7		10		7	
<b>Understanding mental illness</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>20%</b>
Individuals and groups affected by mental illness	13		17		15	
Research advances	1		5		2	
Explaining: cause						
Genetic or biological	0		1		0	
Environmental	0		1		0	
Explaining: treatments						
Biological	1		0		0	
Psychosocial	1		1		0	
Others	0		0		0	
Explaining: prevalence and symptoms	4		5		1	
<b>Mental illness as stress-related illness</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12%</b>
Stress caused by work	2		3		11	
Stress caused by other reasons	1		4		0	
<b>Services, institutions and laws</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12%</b>
Inadequacies	12		4		5	
Improvements	2		2		2	
Introduction of services/institutions	8		21		4	
<b>Total</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>100%</b>

The finding of this study – that the depiction of mental illness and sufferers is largely negative – is in line with the findings of some other existing Japanese studies (Harada *et al* 2002a; Harada *et al* 2002b) and studies conducted in other countries (Australia; Kesic *et al* 2011; Czech and Slovak; Nawka *et al* 2012; Croatia, Czech and Slovak; Nawková *et al* 2012; US; McGinty *et al* 2013; Spain; Aragonès *et al* 2014). With respect to time trends, prior longitudinal studies of newspaper coverage of mental illness has shown mixed results, with some studies finding deterioration or little change and others finding improvement over time. Whitley & Berry (2013) found no linear increase in positive articles about mental illness or decrease in negative articles about mental illness in Canadian newspapers between 2005 and 2010. Roberts *et al* (2013) found that the proportion of articles relating to dangerousness of people with mental illness significantly increased between 1991 and 2011 in Bermudian newspapers. These findings generally agree with the overall findings of the present study, although the increase of negative articles in 2014 was not statistically significant in the present study. On the other hand, there are also some longitudinal studies finding overall positive changes. Goulden *et al* (2011) found a significant decline in the proportion of articles containing ‘bad news’ themes, whilst the proportion of articles containing ‘understanding mental illness’ themes such as explaining causes and treatments and mentioning individuals with mental illness significantly increased over the sample period (1992, 2000, 2008) in British newspapers. Thornicroft *et al* (2013) also found that there was a significant proportional increase in anti-stigmatising articles between 2008 and 2011 in British newspapers. The finding of the present study – that there was a significant improvement in articles about mental illness between 2001 and 2003 – agrees with those of these prior studies. However, this study did not detect an overall positive change and in this regard the findings of the present study are different to those of the two existing studies.

In the present study, although the proportion of negative articles featuring schizophrenia decreased, both between 2001 and 2003 and between 2001 and 2014, articles about schizophrenia were often related to dangerousness in each year, which mirrors the findings of the prior studies (Dubugras *et al* 2011; Magliano *et al* 2011; Cain *et al* 2014). Furthermore, some studies showed little changes in the depiction of schizophrenia over time, with the depiction remaining negative (Clement & Foster 2008; Doyle *et al* 2012; Park *et al* 2012). The present study’s findings about articles featuring schizophrenia are generally in line with the findings of the existing studies, for although the proportion of negative articles decreased in two time periods (between 2001 and 2003 and between 2001 and 2014) in this study, these were not statistically significant and the proportion increased between 2003 and 2014. One

of the possible reasons for the negatively distorted portrayal of schizophrenia is that the general public largely have stigmatising views on them, particularly in comparison to those with depression. In Japan, for instance, some vignette surveys found that the respondents had shown significantly higher levels of stigma and greater hope for social distance to persons with schizophrenia than to those with depression (Griffiths *et al* 2006; Hanzawa *et al* 2007; Itayama *et al* 2012; Yamazaki *et al* 2012). However, there is also a possibility that negatively distorted images of schizophrenia in the media affect people’s views on this illness. In fact, research showed that the depiction of mental illness in the media could influence people’s attitudes to those affected (Dietrich *et al* 2006; Clement *et al* 2013).

The present study has several limitations. Firstly, the sample comes only from two national newspapers. Some prior studies conducted in other countries showed that the trend for articles about mental illness varied between types of newspapers (for example, between tabloids and broadsheets; Nawková *et al* 2012; Cain *et al* 2014). It would be ideal to include various types of newspapers to understand the images of mental illness in newspaper coverage. However, the databases of most of the other newspapers in Japan only contained articles published since 2005, which made it difficult to include a wider variety of newspapers in this study.

Secondly, the present study analysed only newspaper articles. This was because of the difficulty in searching data from other media sources such as TV or radio programmes systematically. However, existing studies have shown that the portrayal of mental illness and its sufferers in media other than newspapers (e.g. films and TV programmes) is also largely negative and distorted as in newspaper articles (Owen 2012; Goodwin 2014). Therefore one might be able to say that the results would not be significantly different even if other media source were included in the analysis in the present study.

## CONCLUSION

The present study analysed Japanese newspaper articles about mental illness and those affected between 2001, 2003 and 2014. Throughout the period there were a high proportion of articles related to dangerousness of mental illness. Although there was a significant proportional decrease in negative articles about mental illness between 2001 and 2003, this was not true between 2001 and 2014, which signifies that the portrayal of mental illness largely remained unchanged over the sample period. Similarly, there was little change in the proportion of negative articles featuring schizophrenia, although it decreased slightly. From these findings, it seems that the influence of the renaming of schizophrenia in 2002 on the media’s portrayal of mental illness and those affected is limited to a short time period.

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