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Title

Media Portrayals of Substance Use Disorder and its Impact on Primary Care Treatment: A Scoping Review

Priority 1 (Research Category)

Systematic review, meta-analysis, or scoping review

Presenters

Taylor Bosworth, BSc, MD/PhD Student, Nicole Henry, Paris Kelly, MS, MaCee Boyle, BS, Alyssa Tilhou, MD, PhD, Ella Bochenski, MD Student, Katherine McGough, BS, MD Student, Jessica Battle, BS, Alyssa Ashford

Abstract

Context: Stigma surrounding addiction and substance use disorders (SUDs) hinders access to intervention and treatment, directly impacting primary care efforts. Media portrayals of addiction shape public perceptions, directly affecting individuals' willingness to seek treatment. Evaluating these portrayals, particularly in the context of substance use and addiction, is crucial as they form the foundation for societal attitudes that impact treatment engagement and support.

Objective: This study aims to examine how mass media reinforces negative stereotypes of individuals with SUDs. Further, we aim to evaluate the impact of these portrayals on public perception, focusing on intervention and treatment for people with SUDs. We aim to explore avenues of advocacy for de-stigmatized communication strategies to enhance public understanding of addiction and promote engagement in treatment.

Study Design: We utilized a scoping review approach, which is a non-exhaustive selection of literature pertaining to and examining a specific topic. We conducted a literature search using PubMed for Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) terms “(addiction) and (portrayal)” (n=58) and “(addiction) and (portrayal) and (media)” (n=37). The search yielded 58 peer-reviewed unique articles (duplicates removed; n=37); 42 articles were excluded, and 16 articles were included.

Population Studied: Media portrayals of Substance Use Disorder

Outcome Measures: Themes identified through thematic analysis from published articles.

Results: Inductive thematic coding was performed on 16 included articles. In the spectrum of primary care, the following themes were highlighted: (1) Positive Endorsement (n=8, 50.0%), (2) Risky Behaviors (n=6, 37.5%), (3) Policy Making (n=5, 31.3%), (4) Unreliable, Unstable, or Uncontrollable (n=3, 18.8%), and (5) Interventions or Treatments (n=3, 18.8%).

Conclusion: Mass media continues to reinforce negative stereotypes of individuals with substance use disorders, which hinders treatment efforts. To promote effective, anti-stigmatizing communication about addiction and encourage treatment engagement, counter-campaigns should involve primary care providers, patients' partners, addiction science experts, and science communicators.

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