

Abstract

Among the reporting biases, selective reporting is a commonly observed practice where media filters and provides incomplete information (Baum & Zhukov, 2015; Baron, 2006). According to previous studies, it is common that media reports emphasize negative attributes of mental illness (Wahl, 1992). Given the prevalence of mental illness stigma and the media being one of the major information sources on mental illness, this study serves to examine whether and how selective reporting would affect the social stigma towards mental illness.

In this study (n=223), participants were divided into four groups, each receiving different combinations of newspaper extracts on a mass shooting case, i.e. extracts on crime description, the perpetrator's mental status, and his background. Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire that measures (i) their causal attribution of the crime, (ii) their degree of stigmatization towards the perpetrator and (iii) stigmatization towards people with mental illness in general.

Results support the hypothesis that participants reported lower level of stigma if they were provided with the perpetrator's background, but higher level of stigma if they were given the cue that the perpetrator had mental disorder. However, results do not support the generalization of this pattern to people with mental illness in general.