

Media Representation of Personality Disorder in Jamaica – Public Scholarship as a Catalyst of Health Promotion

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To ascertain whether the public scholarship of the epidemiology of personality disorder (PD) in Jamaica prompted a health promotion outcome.

Methods: A January 2011 to December 2012 trawl of news media articles linking ‘PD’ to published public scholarship articles on the epidemiology of PD, recorded titles and contents of the reports that were culled to capture the emotional responses and psychological defence mechanisms expressed. These were analysed with concomitant social, psychological or behavioural activities occurring in Jamaica, using SPSS version 17 software.

Results: Two public scholarship interventions to two major broadsheet newspapers triggered 25 contributed articles, which in turn prompted 160 responses from the public, five commentaries on leading radio stations and four Internet blogs.

Keywords: Health promotion, Jamaica, media representation, personality disorder, public scholarship

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One hundred and sixty-six (85.7%) of the titles targeted PD in the Jamaican nation; 30 (14.3%) articles targeted PD in leaders, athletes and productivity in Jamaica. One hundred and fifty-five (79.1%) expressed agreement with the scientific epidemiological observations, while 20.9% (n = 41) expressed disagreement. Eighty-two (41.8%) of the responses expressed rationalizations, 47 (24%) were expressions of reaction formation, 27 (13.8%) were in frank denial, while 25 (12.8%) were expressing open acting out responses or blunt projection (15, 7.7%) to the published epidemiology. The difference between 139 (70.9%) popular media responses to contemporary social problems and 57 (29.1%) reports that made no reference to social problems was statistically significant ($p < 0.03$).

Conclusions: The hypothesis that public scholarship reports prompted a popular media response, generating a health promotion outcome linking contemporary social events to this medical research is confirmed.

INTRODUCTION

Jamaica has the third highest murder rate in the world (1), and extremely high levels of criminality and corruption in public life (2). Recent medical enquiry has focussed on the development of values and attitudes in Jamaica, particularly on the nature and epidemiology of personality disorder. Recent population studies demonstrated rates of personality disorder in excess of 40% of the Jamaican population (3) and this has been advanced as a possible explanation of the escalating social disorder in that country. In a public scholarship letter to the Jamaica Gleaner newspaper (4), the epidemiological finding that two-fifths of the Jamaican population was eligible for a diagnosis of personality disorder based on a population survey carried out in 2009 was shared with the Jamaican public. The publication of this public scholarship (5) as Letter of the Day in that newspaper led to an avalanche of expressions of public opinion in Jamaican news media in the ensuing years. This unleashed a cathartic debate that overlapped with the period of social unrest in the country that had culminated in the insurgency and State of Emergency in the Western Kingston political constituency of Tivoli Gardens in May 2010. The hypothesis advanced by this study is that the newspaper reports of the personality disorder epidemiology in Jamaica represents a public scholarship event in Jamaica that triggered a popular media response of newspaper report and editorials, and social media comments, which in turn generated a health promotion outcome linking contemporary social events and public response to this medical research.

METHOD

Three Jamaican newspapers, The Gleaner, Star and Observer were trawled visually and online between January 2011 and December 2012 for all articles linking ‘personality disorder’, ‘Hickling’, ‘Paisley’, and ‘mental illness in Jamaica’, and the titles of these articles were recorded in an Excel database. Titles of responses made to these articles were also culled and recorded in the database. Recorded radio interviews by the authors to the public scholarship article in the Gleaner on 7th January 2011 were also included in the database.

The newspaper editorials, reports and contributed responses, and radio interviews were assessed, critically analysed for form and content and then coded to reflect the summary message of the article. The articles were then coded to capture the primary and secondary emotional responses and the expression of psychological defence mechanisms (6) in the article in an Excel database. Qualitative examples of these psychological expressions were culled and reported in this article. Each article/comment was assessed for whether it made reference to social, psychological or behavioural activities occurring in Jamaica. A quantitative Chi-squared statistical analysis was carried out on this cohort of the articles and their psychological responses using SPSS version 17.

RESULTS

1. *Lead scientists interventions*

In the two-year period studied, the lead scientific investigators made two public scholarship interventions to the local newspapers. The first on January 7, 2011 (4) laid out the methodological credentials of the study and the crucial elements of the findings that nearly two-fifths of the Jamaican population was eligible for the diagnosis of personality disorder:

“...The study is based on a four-stage, stratified random-sampling method funded by the CHASE Fund and carried out by Don Anderson and Associates in November 2009 on a representative population sample consisting of 1506 Jamaicans, aged 18–64 years. Two-fifths of the population was eligible for a diagnosis of personality disorder.... This indicates that nearly one million adult Jamaicans suffer from the mental illness of personality disorder. This rate of personality disorder in the Jamaican population is significantly higher than the rate of six to 15 per cent identified internationally...” (4).

The link to the high levels of behavioural dysfunction in Jamaica was made in this public scholarship disclosure with the findings extrapolated to the high rates of murder and violence, rape and other sexual atrocities, and crimes such as theft and praedial larceny crippling the Jamaican society. The public scholarship report made deliberate comparison to findings of the prevalence rate in other parts of the world.

The second interpolation of public scholarship in the Jamaican news media came four months later (7) exhorting the society to face up to its personality disorder, pointing to the numerous reported incidents of domestic violence – homicide and suicide – and episodes of pathological mendacity headlined in the current Jamaican newspapers.

“...Clearly, the psychological pathology relates not only to the persons who have committed these crimes, but also points to the collective pathology of a society that has allowed, if not actively participated in, the proliferation of guns, the wholesale political development of a garrison culture that fosters criminality, extortion and murder, and a divisive political system.... Personality disorder can be successfully treated. Collectively, the country needs to undergo an 'Insight Revolution', which demands seeing our reality for what it really is; facing the real situation by acting on the insight; setting clear goals and tasks...” (7).

This second public scholarship communication sought to reinforce the initial engagement, encouraging the Jamaican society to abandon psychological denial as a response to social trauma. This current communication, however, went beyond the epidemiological and the diagnosis, and sought to outline a prescription for social healing by encouraging the society to seek treatment from the pervasive culture of transgression by a process of epiphany, insight and resilience formation toward personal and collective transformation.

2. *Distribution of news media responses over time*

In the two-year period under consideration, there were seventeen articles on personality disorder published in the *Jamaica Gleaner* newspaper and ten articles published in the *Jamaica Observer* newspaper, the two major broadsheet newspapers in the country. There were one hundred and sixty public comments from the public following the twenty-seven articles published. There were five commentaries on three radio stations and four Internet blogs. The initial public scholarship communication on 7th January 2011 was followed

by a response of five newspaper reports by news reporters, one radio commentator report, one independent newspaper columnist article and one letter to the editor published by the newspaper in the month of January 2011. There were seven comments to the initial public scholarship communication and sixty-nine public comments to the news reporters' stories published by the newspapers in mid-January 2011. The independent newspaper columnist report at the end of January 2011 was followed by twenty-eight public comments published by the newspapers (Figure).

3. Analysis of the titles of newspaper articles

The majority (n = 166, 85.7%) of the titles of the articles published in the newspapers in the period targeted a general expression of personality disorder in the Jamaican nation.

Specific examples of these titles are:

“Outrage over Jamaica personality disorders report” – Gleaner 11/2/2011

“Tackling our antisocial culture” – Gleaner 23/4/2011

“Gleaner’s Silver Pen awardee clarifies personality disorder” – Gleaner 17/8/2011

Jamaican families were targeted in the titles of 14 (7.1%):

“Are you living with a narcissistic spouse?” – Observer 23/1/2012

“Bauh blames personality disorder on broken families” – Gleaner 17/9/2012

Specific individuals were targeted in 10 (5.1%) of the articles published. There were four separate articles (2%) where Jamaican leaders were specifically targeted:

“Disorder in high office” – Gleaner 16/1/2011

Athletes were specifically targeted in the title of one of the articles:

“Irons: Athletes have personality disorder too” – Gleaner 23/5/2011

Institutional inmates were specifically targeted in the title of one of the articles:

*“Release mentally ill inmates to their families with follow-up treatment” –
Gleaner 26/1/2011*

Jamaican productivity was specifically targeted in the title of one of the articles:

“Jamaican productivity and mental illness” – Gleaner 29/1/2011

4. Psychological analysis of media responses

The majority of published news media responses (n = 155, 79.1%) to the lead scientist public scholarship seed article of 7th January 2011 expressed agreement with the opinions expressed about the high levels of personality disorder in the Jamaican society by the scientific epidemiological observations. However 20.9% (n = 41) of published responses expressed disagreement to the epidemiological findings. Only two (1%) public responses expressed surprise or sadness to the epidemiological results, while 93 (47.4%) responders expressed frustration about the findings and 66 (33.7%) persons expressed anger and hostility to the high rate of personality disorder reported in the lead articles.

The psychological analysis of the defence mechanisms expressed by the published responses to the lead public scholarship revealed that 82 (41.8%) of the responses expressed rationalizations to the epidemiological findings, 47 (24%) were expressions of reaction formation, 27 (13.8%) were in frank denial of the findings, while 25 (12.8%)

were expressing open acting out responses or blunt projection (15, 7.7%) to the published epidemiology (Table 2).

5. Links to social events in Jamaica

One hundred and thirty-nine (70.9%) popular media responses of newspaper reports, contributions and editorials, and social media comments generated health promotion references that linked their comments to contemporary social events and problems to this medical research, while 57 (29.1%) made no reference to social events or problems in contemporary Jamaica (Table 3).

DISCUSSION

The principles of health promotion have their foundation in the World Health Organization Declaration of Alma Ata in 1978 (8), which link evidence-based medicine with community participation to promote the determinants of health in a supportive environment and to trigger cultural change through equity and partnerships. The hypothesis advanced by this study is that the two letters submitted by the lead scientists on personality disorder epidemiology in Jamaica represent a public scholarship event (5) that triggered a popular media response of newspaper reports, contributions and editorials, which in turn generated a health promotion outcome linking contemporary social events and public response to this medical research. The findings that link the difference between 139 (70.9%) popular media responses to contemporary social events and problems and 57 (29.1%) reports that made no reference to social events or problems

was statistically significant at a probability < 0.03 . This indicates that the health promotion response to the evidenced-based publication of the personality disorder epidemiology in Jamaica prompted a public scholarship response that produced a level of insight in the public imagination, which is reflected in the following public comments.

Columnist Mark Wignall wrote:

“...In January, Professor Freddie Hickling...reported that based on studies he concluded that as many as a million Jamaicans...suffer from varying degrees of personality disorders... Last week, Professor Hickling was on Nationwide radio unleashing another bombshell first reported by last week's Sunday Observer. According to him, the 'gal inna bungle' syndrome whereby men surround themselves with multiple partners has indicated, from his own internal studies and disaggregation's among his patient profile, that those patients also have personality disorders...one-third of our people are living in informal, 'squatter' communities, we are constantly in the top five for rates of murder, we are unkind to the elderly and the very young and those with obvious signs of personality disorders...Many of our men, probably parented into personality disorders, have never learned how to relate to females as partners... (9).

Wignall's column was making the link between personality disorder, multiple sexual partners and the poor socio-economic conditions of informal squatter settlements, and was using the news media to raise the level of insight in the Jamaican public. Another quotation from a blog published over one year later makes the following startling observations and insight linkages:

“...Watching that bloodsport called the nightly news has become as frightening as watching a horror flick. Policeman kills pregnant woman. 5 women raped in one house. Careless bus driver mows down innocent bystanders. Angry mob hacks man to death.... Turns out that these are deep-rooted psychological problems. And what the good Professor Hickling has concluded, might in fact be

right. Jamaicans are mad people. Think about it. Only mad people could commit these kinds of crimes and only mad people could watch the news, get up the next day and go about their daily lives and pretend as if nothing happened. Only mad people can watch their government massacre dozens of people, and not say anything about it, because they think the mad people who live in Tivoli don't deserve to live. Only mad people drive public transportation, break every single road law, and when you call them out, they tell you 'guh suck yu madda'. Then again, only mad people choose to take daredevil public transportation. Only mad people condone music that talks about demon worship and killing people in broad daylight, and when the singer comes out in public saying his main target audience are our children, no one gets up and says, 'this is madness!'... ” (10).

Health promotion has been a tool of public health in the dissemination of evidence-based practices to promote healthy behaviour. It is imperative that the delivery of high-quality healthcare is ensured through the successful implementation of cost-effective health technologies (11). One of the greatest challenges facing health promotion and disease prevention is translating research findings into evidence-based public health and clinical practices that are actively disseminated and widely adopted.

Public scholarship (5) is the capacity to reintegrate and reconnect the disparate, ever-multiplying strands of knowledge, to bring *meaning* to information and forge wisdom upon the anvil of changing times. Public scholarship confirms that ideas *matter*, and that disciplined study, when combined with unfettered, wide-ranging curiosity and intellectual courage, can overcome the “dumbing down” that is becoming conspicuous in public life (5). Public scholarship engenders and enhances freedom of inquiry—not merely as an intellectual exercise but as a lived imperative addressing, illuminating and alleviating the pressing social issues of our times (12). Public scholarship through health

promotion engenders public response, psychological insight and working through. The critical issue is the generation of public policy and therapeutic transformation to catalyse what follows public insight.

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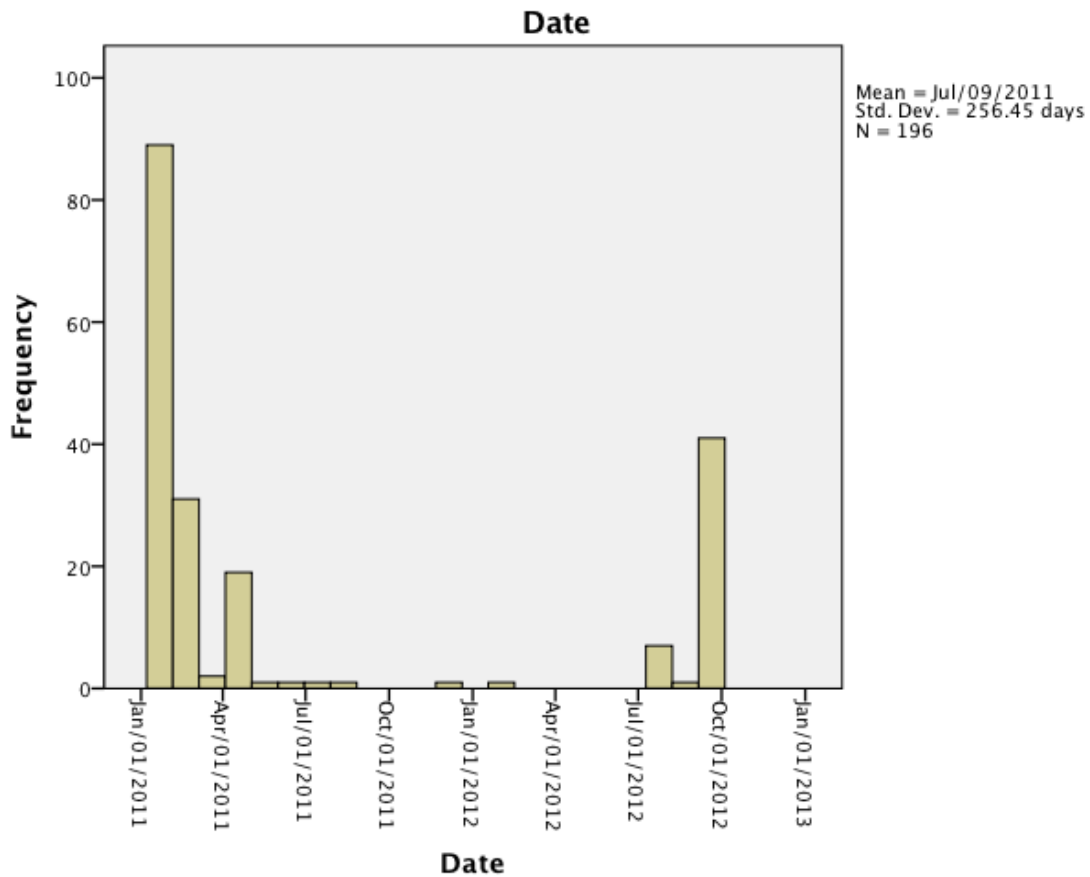


Figure: Frequency of comments to newspaper article published in January 2011.

Table 1: Analysis of titles in newspaper articles on personality disorder

Title of article	(n)	%
Personality disorder in nation	166	85.7
Personality disorder in nation's leaders	1	0.5
Personality disorder in institutional inmates	1	0.5
Personality disorder in nation's families	14	7.1
Personality disorder in nation's athletes	1	0.5
Personality disorder in individuals	10	5.1
Personality disorder and productivity	1	0.5

Table 2: Defence mechanism identified in public responses, with examples

Defence mechanism	Qualitative quoted example from article
Rationalization	Crime statistics proves article – Gleaner 16/1/2011
Reaction formation	Article is a lie! Unemployment and poverty as problem – Gleaner 16/1/2011
Denial	People need to survive, criminality part of our culture – Gleaner 07/1/2011
Acting out	This is why people want to go abroad - Gleaner 16/1/2011
Projection	Psychiatrists trying to gain publicity; petty nonsense, please say nice things about Jamaicans – Gleaner 07/1/2011

Table 3: Media links to social problems and events in Jamaica

Author	Reference to social problems/events in Jamaica	No reference to social problems/events in Jamaica
Public commentator to lead article	107	53
Newspaper editor, reporter, contributor	27	4
Radio host commentator	5	0

Chi-square + 7.253, 2 df, $p < 0.03$