

The Impact of Media Portrayals of Depression and Alcohol Dependence on Social Distance and Emotional Response

Tabea Gottwald

(M.Sc. Psychology with emphasis on Clinical Psychology and Psychological
Empowerment) Diploma Hochschule, Germany

ABSTRACT

The present study examines the impact of media portrayals of depression and alcohol dependence on social distance and emotional responses among the general population. A total of 173 participants in Germany were surveyed online between April and July 2021. The quantitative data collection was based on an experimental group assignment, in which participants read a newspaper article describing one of the respective mental disorders and subsequently reported their emotional responses and desired social distance toward individuals affected by depression or alcohol dependence. The results of the multifactorial analyses of variance demonstrate that the type of media portrayal has a significant influence on the perception of mental disorders. In particular, negative reporting led to greater social distance and more negative emotional responses toward those affected. These findings highlight the important role of the media in shaping public attitudes toward mental illness and offer valuable implications for the development of destigmatizing media strategies.

Keywords: Stigma, mental illness, media potrayals of depression and alcohol dependence