

2011-9

Mad or Bad? The Portrayal of Mentally Ill Offenders in the Irish Print Media

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Mad or Bad? The Portrayal of Mentally Ill Offenders in the Irish Print Media

Karla Duffy

Dublin Institute of Technology

Mad or Bad? The Portrayal of Mentally Ill Offenders in the Irish Print Media

By

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Thesis submitted to the Department of Social Sciences, Dublin Institute of Technology, in partial fulfilment of the requirements leading to the award of Masters in Criminology.

Word Count: 13, 726

Dublin Institute of Technology

September, 2011

Declaration

I hereby certify that the material which is submitted in this thesis towards the award of the **Masters in Criminology** is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for any academic assignment other than part fulfilment of the award named above.

Signature of Candidate:

Date:

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost I would like to thank my family. To my sister and my mother, whose encouragement and assistance was invaluable.

Thanks also to David, who kept me grounded.

A special thank you to my supervisor, Kevin Lalor, for his guidance and advice throughout this process.

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Abstract

It has been argued (Pustilnik, 2005) that the majority of representations of mentally ill offenders falls into one of two models: the moral/punitive model, and the medical/therapeutic model. The moral/punitive model views mental illness as a personal failure rather than a medical condition, and any representations of offenders in this model will be unsympathetic. The medical/therapeutic model views mental illness as a medical condition, and views mentally ill offenders in a sympathetic manner.

The purpose of this study was to ascertain whether the representation of mentally ill offenders in the Irish print media conforms to one of these two models. In order to do this, content and discourse analysis was carried out on four newspapers over a two month period. It was found that the Irish print media's portrayal of mentally ill offenders overall did not fit into one of the two models suggested. The portrayal of mentally ill offenders was heavily mediated by gender, age and type of crime committed. Whether the portrayal of offenders fit into the moral/punitive model or the medical/therapeutic model was thus dependent on these factors and varied hugely. Thus, it was argued that mental illness is a secondary factor in the eyes of the Irish print media, and is used to support the primary factors of gender, age and type of crime committed.

1. Introduction

The news media is an extremely influential institution. Van Dijk (1995b) argues that an important aspect of the news media's power is that of access. The news media is a persuasive force, in the sense that the media has, to some extent, the power to control and influence the minds of its readers and viewers. In this way, the media creates meaning. Groups or individuals who feature prominently in the media, therefore, have the potential to wield a significant amount of power.

Thus, studying the representation of crime and of offenders in the news media can be an important aspect of criminology. Though much research has been conducted into the media portrayal of mental illness in general (Cutcliffe & Hannigan, 2001), and into how the Irish print media portrays offenders (O'Connell, 1999), little research has been done into how the print media portrays mentally ill offenders. It is unknown, therefore, if the portrayal of mentally ill offenders follows the same patterns as the portrayal of mental illness in general, or the portrayal of offenders as a group. Pustilnik (2005) theorises that the portrayal of mentally ill offenders throughout history has fallen into one of two categories: the moral/punitive model, in which portrayal is unsympathetic and negative, and the medical/therapeutic model, in which portrayal is more sympathetic and positive.

Aim of the Study

This study aims to further our understanding of the Irish print media with respect to mentally ill offenders. The current study aims to ascertain if the portrayal of mentally ill offenders falls into the medical/therapeutic model, or the moral/punitive model. Furthermore, it is known that the media's portrayal of offenders and of mental illness follows distinct themes and patterns. It is expected, therefore, that the portrayal of mentally ill offenders in Ireland will also feature distinct themes and patterns. The current study aims to identify these themes and patterns.

Summary

The structure of this dissertation is described in the following paragraph. Chapter One outlines the research questions of the current study. Chapter Two outlines the background

research and examines the pertinent literature. Chapter Three describes the methodology of the current study. Chapter Four outlines the results of the research. Chapter Five examines the implications of the findings. Finally, Chapter Six provides the conclusions and recommendations which can be made from the current study.

Research Questions:

- 1) Does the media portrayal of mentally ill offenders fit the moral/punitive model or the medical/ therapeutic model?
- 2) Is this portrayal mediated by gender, age or the type of crime committed?

2. Literature Review

Introduction

This section will outline the theoretical background of the current study. The different definitions of “mental illness” will be examined, and the definition used in this study will then be discussed. Previous research concerning the print media in general, and the Irish media in particular, shall be explored. Pustilnik’s (2005) moral/punitive and medical/therapeutic models will then be discussed. Finally, the media’s portrayal of female offenders, young offenders and paedophiles will be discussed.

“Mentally Ill”

The term “mental illness” or “mental disorder” can be construed in many different ways. Schinnar, Rothbard, Kanter and Jung (1990), in a review of the literature, noted that seventeen different definitions of the term have appeared in the literature to date. These definitions range from the very wide to the very narrow. One example of a wide definition is the definition given by the National Institute of Mental Illness. This definition states that a person suffers from a serious mental illness if they meet three criteria: a two-year or longer history of mental illness or treatment, a diagnosis of personality disorder or non-organic psychosis, and finally, disability, which encompasses at least three of eight further criteria. Ruggeri, Leese, Thornicroft, Bisoffi and Tansella (2000), drawing on the work on Schinnar et al., (1990) note the usage of some very narrow definitions of mental illness, such as the definition which states that a person has a mental illness if they have been diagnosed with a non-organic psychosis and have been treated for such for two years or more, and dysfunction. This dysfunction is defined on two levels: one, a score that falls below 70 on the Global Assessment of Functioning (GAF), and two, a score of 50 or less on the GAF scale (Ruggeri et al., 1990).

Jemelka, Rahman and Trupin (1993) state that there is no definitive consensus on what the term “mental illness” means, and furthermore, that the term “mentally ill” has been applied to many diverse and varied populations of offender. This ranges from those who are considered to be mentally ill in a legalistic sense, such as found unfit to stand trial by reason of insanity, to those such as drug addicts, who are considered medically ill but are nevertheless fit to stand trial. The term “mentally ill” has also been applied to those who are found to be

suffering from a myriad of disorders after diagnosis in prison, and those who are admitted to mental health facilities in lieu of prisons (Jemelka et al., 1993).

The Irish Mental Health Act 2001 takes a wide view of mental illness, and defines the term as:

“a state of mind of a person which affects the person’s thinking, perceiving, emotion or judgment and which seriously impairs the mental function of the person to the extent that he or she requires care or medical treatment in his or her own interest or in the interest of other persons.”

(Mental Health Act, 2001:10). It has also often been noted that an addiction to substances such as drugs and alcohol is often co-morbid with mental illness (Dani and Harris, 2005; Johnson, 2005). Indeed, the third edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM), published in 1980, was the first edition to recognise substance abuse as a distinct illness, earlier editions having grouped substance abuse with personality disorders. The DSM- IV (DSM-IV-TR, 2000:227): defines substance abuse as:

“A maladaptive pattern of substance use leading to clinically significant impairment or distress, as manifested by one (or more) of the following, occurring within a 12-month period: (1) recurrent substance use resulting in a failure to fulfil major role obligations at work, school, or home (2) recurrent substance use in situations in which it is physically hazardous (3) recurrent substance-related legal problems (4) continued substance use despite having persistent or recurrent social or interpersonal problems caused or exacerbated by the effects of the substance.”

For the purposes of this research, a hybrid definition of “mental illness” shall be used. The definition used in the Irish Mental Health Act 2001 shall be used, but substance abuse, using the definition given in the DSM-IV-TR, shall also be incorporated. Thus, the definition of mental illness in this study is:

“a state of mind, including addiction, of a person which affects the person’s thinking, perceiving, emotion or judgment and which seriously impairs the mental function of the person to the extent that

he or she requires care or medical treatment in his or her own interest or in the interest of other persons.”

Social Construction and the Media

Texts, such as articles in newspapers, contain layers of meaning. Part of that meaning is obvious – it is the message that the text has been constructed to convey. However, texts can also hold many other meta-messages. Some of these messages are naturalised – that is, it comes to the reader in the form of assumptions or stereotypes that the reader instantly understands (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, Sasson, 1992). In other words, a single text contains many subtexts; a text cannot be taken at face value, nor can it be said that a text has only a single meaning.

It has been shown by cognitive psychologists that people use heuristics, or short-cuts, when processing information. One of the most commonly used heuristic is that of “availability”. Using the availability heuristic, people predict the frequency of an event based on how easily an example of that event can be brought to mind (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973). The more information available on a particular subject, the quicker that subject will be brought to mind.

It has been found that the availability heuristic operates with regard to the perception of crime (Lichtenstein, Slovic, Fischhoff, Layman & Combs, 1978). In other words, the more prevalent the representation of violent crime in the media, the more likely it is that people will begin to believe that the media representation of crime reflects the actual crime statistics. This is obviously worrying.

It could be argued that the public is aware that the media runs stories that are “news-worthy” and that may not accurately reflect matters as they truly are (Cohen, 2002). However, Dowler (2003) found that the majority of the public use the print media as their primary source of information about crime, and that other sources of information do not have a moderating effect. Furthermore, it was found that the media’s pervasive portrayal of violent and unusual crime had a significant influence on the punitive attitudes towards crime that people may possess.

Van Dijk (1995b) argues that the media is a very influential and important institution because it can, to some extent, control the minds and thoughts of its readers and viewers. Thus, it is important to research how the media portrays certain groups within society. This is

particularly important with regard to the vulnerable groups within society, such as the mentally ill, or mentally ill offenders.

Before the medical/therapeutic model and the moral/punitive model can be discussed, it is necessary to examine any existing themes in the portrayal of offenders in the Irish media. The following sections shall examine the depiction of the mentally ill in the media, and the Irish print media in general.

Depictions of Mental Illness in the Media

Mental illness and violence have long been associated in the public forum. There may be several reasons for this; it has been argued that from the mid-1990s onwards in Britain, mental health care policies have become increasingly more coercive in tone, and have emphasised the management of dangerous people with mental health disorders (Cutcliffe & Hannigan, 2001; Byrt, 2000). However, it can be argued that the most pervasive source of the apparent connection between violence and mental illness is the mass media.

Empirical evidence suggests that there has been a decline, in Britain, of homicide incidents carried out by people with mental health issues in the last forty years. However, it has been noted that references to mental illness in the British print media appear at least once a week, and that the vast majority of these references emphasise the propensity of the mentally ill for violence, criminality and general dangerousness (Cutcliffe & Hannigan, 2001). Thus, it is possible that the British media overemphasise the likelihood of the mentally ill carrying out violent crimes.

In 1993, the Scottish Mental Health Working Group commissioned a study into the media representations of mental health and illness. A content analysis of the print media, which took place over the course of one month, found 562 items relating to mental health (Glasgow University Media Group, 1993). Five main categories of themes were found in these 562 items: violence to others (62%), harm to self (13%), sympathetic coverage (18%), criticism of accepted definitions of mental illness (1%) and 'comic' images (2%). By far the most common type of coverage in the media was that that linked mental illness with violence.

In the second half of the study, 70 members of the public were asked about their perceptions of mental illness. Over 40% of the sample reported that they linked mental illness with

violence, and that the media was the source of their beliefs (Glasgow University Media Group, 1993).

The Media in Ireland

Though violent crimes make up the minority of crime statistics, and are in fact, relatively rare occurrences, it has been long established that stories concerning violent crime are over-represented in the media. Cohen (2002), analysing a British sample, found that the print media focuses on stories that are “newsworthy”. These stories are, more often than not, atypical, eye-catching and out of the ordinary.

This same rule holds for the Irish print media as well. O’Connell (1999) found that the Irish media give preference to stories involving violent crime, and also that more print space was given to stories involving these types of incidents. Using the measurement of “wordage” (the number of words per article) O’Connell found that 25% of the 2191 article sample was dedicated to the crime of murder and 13% to rape. This is compared to .64% of the sample dedicated to larceny, 1% dedicated to car theft, and 4.57% dedicated to serious drug offences. It is also likely that this trend has resulted in a distortion in how the Irish people view violent crime: one somewhat dated but telling survey found that the Irish public believe that all crimes were on the rise, but that violent crimes such as murder, manslaughter and rape were increasing far more in frequency (O’Connell and Whelan, 1996). Similarly, O’Connell (1999) found that the public perception of levels of crime in Ireland were far higher than the relevant crime statistics. O’Connell argues that the Irish print media is directly responsible for this misconception in the levels of violent crime in Ireland.

Mental Illness and the Norm of Responsibility

Pustilnik (2005) argues that there have been two models that are primarily concerned with how mentally ill offenders are considered within the public consciousness. These are the moral/punitive model, and the medical/therapeutic model. In the moral/punitive model, mental illness is portrayed in an unsympathetic manner. The illness is considered in the same vein as a personal failing. It is the result of a failure of individual responsibility, and is not perceived to be a concrete medical condition. According to this model, an offender who suffers from a mental illness is simply failing to control themselves and their symptoms, and

also failing to comply with the socially accepted methods of behaviour. It is this failure of responsibility that results in a crime being committed – the mental illness is not a direct contributor to the criminal event. The offender is considered inherently deviant. Because of this, any punishment received by the offender is not likely to take the illness into account. Pustilnik (2005) argues that, for the most part, the media will take a “them-and-us” stance, and portray the mentally ill offender as being completely separate from the rest of society, who are usually represented as being inherently moral and virtuous. In contrast, the offender will be portrayed as unchangeably deviant and wicked.

Pustilnik (2005) asserts that this model has been active throughout history, and that this is the reason for the high rate of incarceration of the mentally ill. Morgan, Fischer, Duan, Mandracchia and Murray (2010) argue that the “mad or bad?” debate dates back to the European Enlightenment. It has also been found that those with mental illnesses stand a far higher chance of being incarcerated within the course of their lifetime (Hiday, Schwarz, Swanson, Borum & Wagner, 1999). Hodgins (1995) found that the prevalence of mental illnesses among the population of offenders was four times higher than the prevalence among the general population, and it has been estimated that a person with a serious mental illness is 1.5 times more likely, than a person with no illness, to be incarcerated instead of hospitalised for treatment (Morrissey, Meyer and Cuddeback, 2007). It is also true that the prevalence of the mentally ill is far higher in Ireland’s prison population than in the general population (Irish Prison Service, 2010).

In the second model, the medical/therapeutic model, mental illness is considered to be a medical condition that requires treatment and support. It is not a failure of individual responsibility – indeed, if there is any failure attributed to mental illness, it is the failure of health systems in diagnosing and treating the condition (Pustilnik, 2005). An offender with a mental illness is then viewed in a more sympathetic manner, and is considered to require treatment for their condition rather than a sentence of incarceration. They are not inherently deviant, but rather have been made deviant through various circumstances. Pustilnik (2005) argues that, within this model, incarceration is seen as primarily a last resort, a measure to be fallen back on when treatment has failed. Thus, punishments received by the offender are more likely to be lenient. Similarly, much emphasis is put on any mitigating factors leading to the crime, including the illness itself.

Pustilnik (2005) states that the portrayal of mentally ill offenders has, throughout history, fallen into one of these two models. It is possible that the Irish media representation of mental illness will also follow one of these two models. The current study aims to investigate this. However, it should be noted that various research has demonstrated that the media's portrayal of offenders as a group can be mediated by various factors such as gender. This research shall be discussed in the following section. Thus, it is expected that the portrayal of the mentally ill offender will also be mediated by such variables. The variables investigated in this study shall be gender, age and type of crime committed.

Gender

In the past, there has been a noticeable pattern of labelling female offenders, particularly those who commit violent crimes, as mentally ill (Angel, 2010). Female violence is also over-reported in the print media, despite the fact that violent crime committed by women occurs far less often than violent crimes committed by men (Clark- Robbins, Monahan & Silver, 2003). Frequently, the female killer is portrayed and viewed as being far more unstable and mentally ill than their male counterparts (Motz, 2001).

One legal example of the propensity to consider female offenders as insane, particularly in Ireland, is the permissibility of the insanity defence for the crime of infanticide. There is some evidence of this in other countries: Cavaglioni (2008), in an Israeli study, found that women who kill their children are more likely to be viewed as insane, in comparison to men who kill their children. Women convicted of this crime are more likely to be viewed as amenable to treatment as opposed to punishment, whereas incarceration is viewed as the appropriate punishment for male offenders. It is worth noting, however, that the effect of women being portrayed as insane was mediated by their status; those of ethnic minorities or those who did not hold the traditional status as wife were considered more responsible for their actions than those who were of the dominant race and married (Cavaglioni, 2008). Thus, it is possible that the perceived mental instability is related to the rejection of traditional female roles, as well as the act of violence itself.

It can be argued that the tendency to portray female offenders as being much more unstable than their male counterparts can be related back to the medical/therapeutic model. In cases of female offenders, mental illness is often emphasised, and treatment is considered as

punishment rather than incarceration. Thus, it will be interesting to see if the portrayal of offenders with mental illnesses varies in the case of female offenders.

Age

There are many examples of the media portraying young offenders in a negative light. Jewkes (2004) argues that perhaps one of the best examples of media vilification of children can be seen in the Jamie Bulger case. In this case, two children, having been arrested for the murder of another younger child, were tried as adults despite their young age. Jewkes (2004) argues that part of the reason for this was the media portrayal, and subsequent public reaction, to the pair of offenders.

Morrison (1997) recounts how one of the defending barristers in this case assembled 247 press cutting which compared the two defendants to Myra Hindley, a notorious adult serial killer, and to Saddam Hussein. Furthermore, Morrison (1997) states that expert witnesses called into the case were asked to give evidence on the mental maturity of the defendants, rather than any possible mental illness.

It is interesting to note the differences of this case to more recent, similar case that occurred in Japan (Jewkes, 2004). In this case, a twelve year old boy was caught on CCTV leading a four year old to his death. The older boy was portrayed in the Japanese media as being a sympathetic case, in need of significant treatment. Furthermore, his name and face were not released to the media out of respect for this condition and of his family (Jewkes, 2004). In general, the attitude of the media to the offender was one of sympathy, and recognition of a need for treatment rather than incarceration.

Similarly, Pizarro, Chermak and Gruenewald (2007) found that, in an American sample, the news media gave much attention to stories involving violent crimes committed by young offenders. Little attention is given to stories involving theft or other minor crimes. Much attention is also given to crimes involving weapons. It was also found that the media coverage of a crime was directly proportionate to the youth of the offender – the younger the offender, the more coverage is given in the media.

Jewkes (2004) argues that, in recent years, there has been a shift in the British print media away from portraying young offenders as inherently violent and depraved, and rather portraying them as being impressionable children in need of protection. This can be seen as a gradual change from portraying young offenders as possessing adult characteristics such as

responsibility and accountability to being victims, primarily innocent beings who have been led astray. Thus, it can be argued, in terms of the moral/punitive and medical/therapeutic models, that the media has somewhat shifted from portraying young offenders in accordance with the moral/punitive model to a representation within the lines of the medical/therapeutic model.

Thus, it will be interesting to see if the portrayal of mentally ill offenders in Ireland varies with respect to age, and whether the portrayal of mentally ill young offenders accords with the medical/therapeutic model or the moral/punitive model.

Type of Crime Committed

Jewkes (2004) argues that paedophilia has become embedded in the public consciousness as the most heinous crime of the last two decades, so much so that it constitutes a moral panic. Sex offences have usually been considered newsworthy stories, and as such, are covered extensively in the print media. The term “paedophile” became prominent for the first time in 1996, when the UK print media began to focus on the theme of paedophiles in the community. Jewkes (2004) argues that there were several catalysts for this outburst of interest in paedophiles: the rise of report of sex abuse cases in Ireland, the release from prison of a notorious child sex offender in Belgium, reports in the UK of paedophiles in residential areas, and finally, reports of a cover-up of paedophile activity by the Catholic Church.

Cross (2005) argues that even the more liberal newspapers are likely to portray paedophiles as inherently dangerous and violent, and are also likely to radically overestimate the number of paedophiles in the population. Cross (2005) points out that very polarised language is used in describing paedophiles, such as “evil” or “demons”, and some newspapers have gone so far as to call on the community to act as vigilantes against paedophiles. There is very little mention in the British print media of paedophilia as a mental illness, and very rarely is rehabilitation or treatment of a paedophile mentioned (Cross, 2005).

Thus, it can be said that the portrayal of paedophiles in the British print media as being separate from the rest of society, who, for the most part, are moral and good. Very little

mention is made of paedophilia as an illness, and very rarely is treatment mentioned. It is possible that the portrayal of paedophiles in the Irish print media will follow along the same lines.

3. Methodology

Introduction

This section shall outline the research methodology of this thesis. An explanation for the decision to employ content and discourse analysis will be given. The processes and different steps through which the study was conducted will be explained. The effect of the researcher's background on the study shall be discussed. Finally, the limitations and ethical aspects of the study will be examined.

Epistemology

The research paradigm of this study is rooted in social constructionist thought. Clarke (2006, p.389) defines social constructionism as:

“A perspective that explores the assumptions embedded in the labelling of people and places and emphasizes the importance of social expectations in the analysis of taken-for-granted or apparently natural social processes.”

Social constructionism holds to the idea that what constitutes social reality is constantly in shift. The social construction of reality is an ongoing process that is produced and reproduced by people acting on what they perceive to be social reality. Thus, to speak of a definite, solid social reality is somewhat unfounded.

One aspect of social constructionism that is particularly relevant to this study is that topics such as identities, memories and attitudes which were previously discussed in the literature as being relatively fixed phenomena can instead be conceptualised as fluid and interactional.

Content Analysis

Description

Content analysis is a documentary method of social research that aims to analyse the content of texts, films, pictures and other forms of verbal, visual or written communication (Sarantakos, 1996). It is directed towards subjective information such as attitudes or values. It is used to investigate the thematic content of communication and then aims to make inferences about individual or group values, sentiments or ideologies as expressed in the

content of communication. It can also be used to assess the effect this communication has on the audiences reached (Sarantakos, 1996).

Content analysis is amenable to both qualitative and quantitative research. Frequency of certain themes and patterns within communication can be analysed, followed by an interpretation and investigation of the content.

The context in which the gathered data is being analysed is crucial to the study. The context in this case was the representation of mentally ill offenders in the Irish print media.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Content analysis is an unobtrusive method of analysing data, this being its main strength, but also its main weakness (Sarantakos, 1996). Content analysis allows us to investigate avenues of research that otherwise may be closed.

Because of the nature of content analysis, the researcher has a significant impact upon the data gathered and the themes and patterns found within the data. One important weakness of content analysis, then, is that false inferences may be made on the part of the researcher that may be detrimental to the value of that research.

However, there are various methods of restricting the impact of these false inferences. These include contextual relevance and the frequency of the units being found.

Coding

The collection of data becomes possible through the method of establishing categories and the process associated with those categories. These categories must be established so that they are independent, mutually exclusive, and exhaustive (Sarantakos, 1996). The categories must also be clearly defined.

The units of analysis can be words, symbols, sentences or individual characters. In this study, the unit of analysis shall be individual words.

Discourse Analysis

Description

Wetherell, Taylor and Yeats (2001) state that discourse analysis is best described as the study of talk and texts. It is a set of methods and theories for investigating language and the use of language in social contexts. Potter and Wetherell (1992:86) state that discourse analysis provides an understanding of

“how the social world is grouped and categorized, how material interests and the nature of relevant objects are determined”.

Thus, discourse analysis is a way of investigating the meanings that can be found in a piece of text, and also a way of analysing the dialogues in text which constitute social action, along with the patterns of signification and representation which Wetherell et al., (2001) state make up culture.

Analysing a piece of text using discourse analysis is a time-consuming and very involved process. Each piece of text must be scrutinized line-by-line, and this process gives rise to various themes which can then be documented.

Strengths and Weaknesses

One of the main strengths of critical discourse analysis is that the technique is not solely concerned with simple analysis. It is critical, in the sense that it seeks to determine connections between language and those other elements in social life which are otherwise opaque, such as social relations between power and domination, and the negotiation of personal and social identities (Fairclough, 2001).

Analysis

Fairclough (2001) states that both the paradigms and the syntax of texts must be analysed when using critical discourse analysis. The paradigmatic aspect of the language concerns the range of choices from linguistic systems or genres of language. The syntactical aspect of the analysis concerns the organisation or chaining of words together in structures.

Thus, the whole-text language organisation, the combination of clauses and the clauses themselves, along with the words of the text must be analysed. Through this analysis, the patterns and themes inherent in the text may be revealed and explored.

Research Design

The research question focuses on the representation of mentally ill offenders in the Irish print media; thus, four newspapers, namely the Irish Times, the Irish Independent, the Irish Daily Mail and the Evening Herald, were analysed.

Content analysis was carried out in order to determine the frequency and type of representations of mentally ill offenders, and also the type of articles featuring mentally ill offenders. Discourse analysis was then used in order to fully explore any themes or patterns which may have arisen from this analysis.

The four newspapers were analysed over the months of March and April 2010, using the online content of each newspaper. These months were chosen in random order.

Search Terms

Four search terms were used to guide the data collection. These terms were “mental illness”, “mental health”, “abuse”, and “mad”. “Mental Health” and “Mental Illness” were chosen because it was thought that these would be the most mentioned terms in relation to mentally ill offenders. “Abuse” was chosen in order to find articles relating to alcohol or drug abuse. Finally, “mad” was chosen because it was thought that this search term would find appropriate articles in the tabloid newspapers.

It should be noted that it was not enough for the article to simply feature one or more of the search terms. In order for an article to be included in the sample, the article must also focus on a single offender or group of offenders. Thus, articles that included the search terms but that did not focus on the research topic were avoided.

Sampling

The four Irish newspapers chosen to be analysed in this study were the Irish Times, the Irish Independent, the Evening Herald, and the Irish Daily Mail. It is necessary when conducting a study involving the print media to ensure a wide sample of newspapers, as different newspapers espouse different political views, aims, target audience, and so on. Thus, it was hoped that the mix of tabloid and broadsheet newspapers in the current study would ensure an adequate coverage of the Irish print media.

The Irish Times is a daily broadsheet newspaper launched in 1859. According to the Audit Bureau of Circulations (2011), the Irish Times had a daily circulation of 102, 543 from January 2010 to January 2011.

The Irish Independent is Ireland's best-selling newspaper, and is published in both broadsheet and compact formats. The newspaper was founded in 1905. The Irish Independent had a daily circulation of 138, 510 from July 2010 to January 2011 (Audit Bureau of Circulation, 2011).

The Evening Herald is a popular tabloid newspaper published from Monday to Saturday. Its daily circulation from July 2010 to January 2011 was 65, 435 (Audit Bureau of Circulation, 2011).

The Irish Daily Mail is a tabloid newspaper launched in 1996. According to the Audit Bureau of Circulation, its daily circulation was 2,100,300 from the 4th April – 01 May 2011 (Audit Bureau of Circulation, 2011). It should be noted, however, that this figure includes UK readers. Figures for Irish readers only were unfortunately unavailable.

All of the above named newspapers keep online archives. It is from these archives that the data for the current study was drawn.

Analysis

Content analysis began with coding the data. A unique number was given to each newspaper article in order to aid the development of this coding scheme. This unique number consisted of the appropriate search term, the newspaper the article originated in, followed by the date. The number and type of articles gathered shall be discussed in Section Four.

Features of the articles were analysed in order to provide a basic overview. These features included the overall word count and format of the articles. Following this, the frequency of certain words and phrases was assessed. It was hoped that this frequency analysis would document the noted difference between broadsheet and tabloid styles of reporting.

Critical discourse analysis was then used to analyse the themes expressed within a text. Sarantakos (2006) notes that content analysis may sometimes fail to take into account the various subtleties of language found within texts. Therefore, it was hoped that critical discourse analysis will balance this effect, and would allow the researcher to properly analyse themes and patterns that the content analysis alone would otherwise overlook.

Limitations of Study

It is accepted that the researcher has in some way influenced the study. Wetherell et al., (2001) state that:

“The aim is to position her or himself within the project, as part of the social world in which the research is being conducted” (2001:19).

It is extremely unlikely that the researcher’s own experience and background have not influenced the study. It was hoped that the combination of content and critical discourse analysis would mitigate this effect to some degree, though the influence of the researcher must still be guarded against.

It should be noted that the current study spans only two months of newspaper coverage. Thus, it is felt that a longitudinal study on this topic would be of interest. It is thought that such a study would underline further the trends and themes involved with the Irish media’s portrayal of mentally ill offenders.

Ethics

The Codes of Ethics adhered to in this research are the ethical principles of the Dublin Institute of Technology (Dublin Institute of Technology, 2008). Also considered were the Code of Ethics for Researchers in the Field of Criminology as provided by the British Society of Criminology (British Society of Criminology, 2011).

Due to the relatively unobtrusive nature of the research design being used in this study, it can be argued that there are few ethical concerns related to the study. Content and discourse analysis are methods of text analysis, and so do not impact directly upon that which is being studied (Sarantakos, 1996).

However, it should be noted that the areas of mental illness considered in this study, most especially paedophilia, are sensitive topics, and, as such, especial care must be taken with the topic.

4. Results

Introduction

The following chapter presents the research data. The results from content analysis of the sample are presented first, and deal with any data that could be expressed numerically. Secondly, the thematic analysis of the sample, conducted using discourse analysis, is presented.

Initial Results

A total of 158 articles, published between March 2010 to April 2010 and which included one of the search terms and reference to offenders, were identified. These were broken down into four categories.

Format of Articles	Number of Articles
Reporting	145
Opinion Piece	12
Commentary	1

Table 4.1: Format of Articles

As can be seen from table 4.1, the vast majority of articles were reporting articles. This was to be expected.

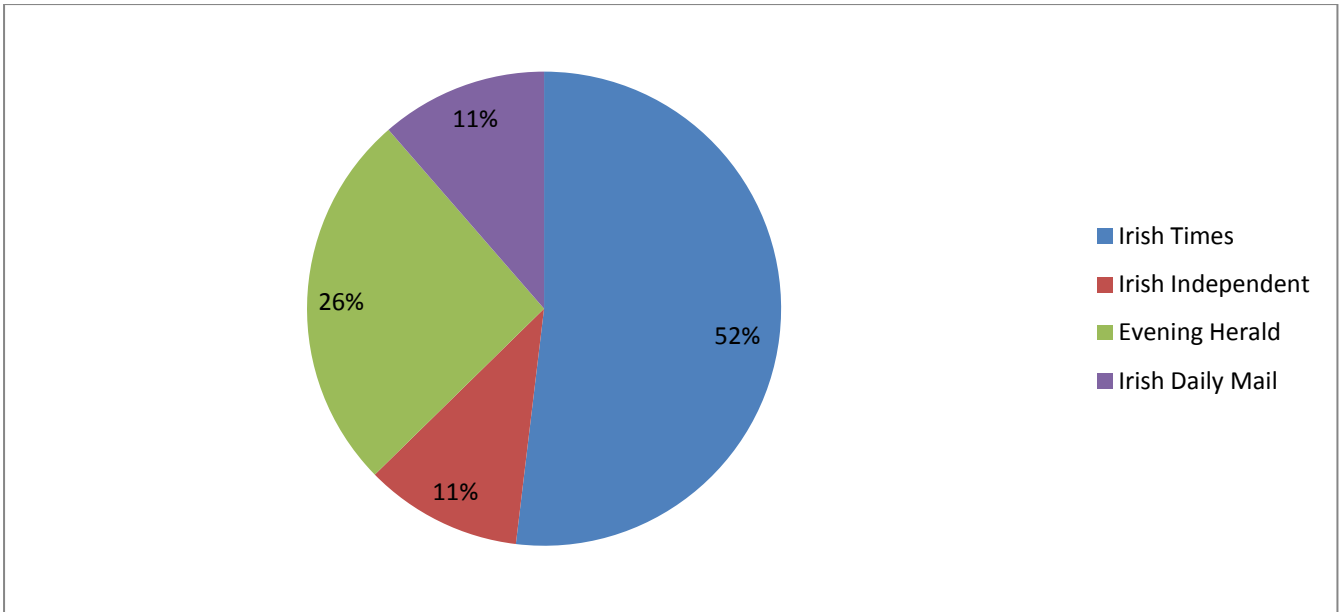


Figure 4.1: Distribution of Articles among Newspapers.

As can be seen from Figure 4.1, the newspaper featuring the most number of articles relating to mentally ill offenders was the Irish Times, followed by the Evening Herald.

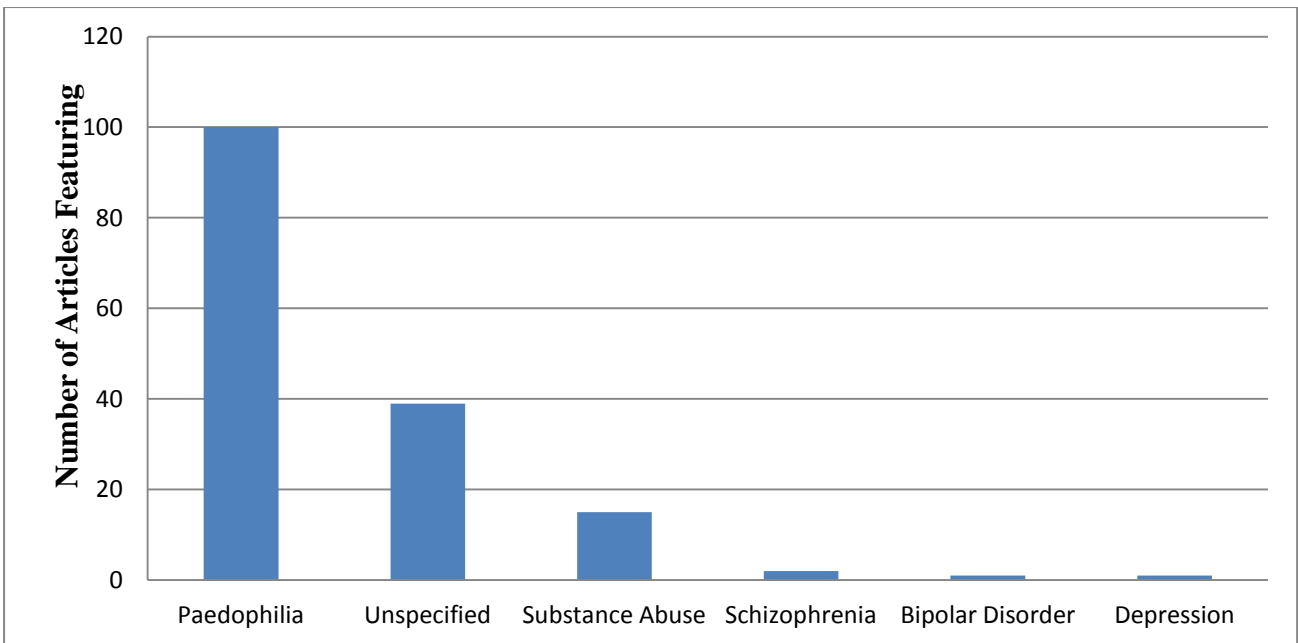


Figure 4.2: Categories of Mental Illnesses.

Paedophilia was by the far the most common mental illness reported. Unspecified mental illnesses were the second most common, usually referred to as “mental illness” or “mental

health issues”. It is noteworthy that, with the exception of paedophilia, the exact mental illness is usually not specified. This may suggest that the print media considers it necessary to mention that an offender has a mental illness, but that mental illness itself is not considered an important enough issue to go into in further detail.

Categories of Crime

As can be seen from Figure 4.3, the sexual abuse of children was by far the most common crime within the sample.

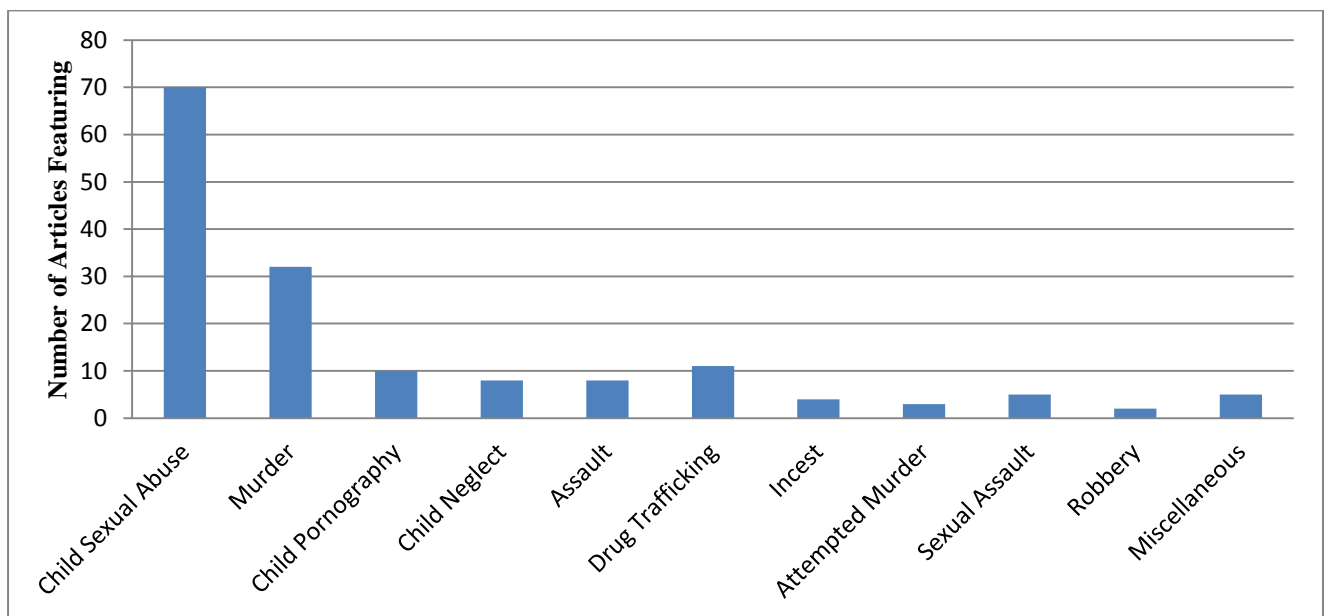


Figure 4.3: Categories of Crime

This finding was expected, as the sample was gathered at a time when the sexual abuse of children by priests was often in the news. Murder was the second most common crime.

Wordage

The majority of articles fell into the 300 – 399 wordage category.

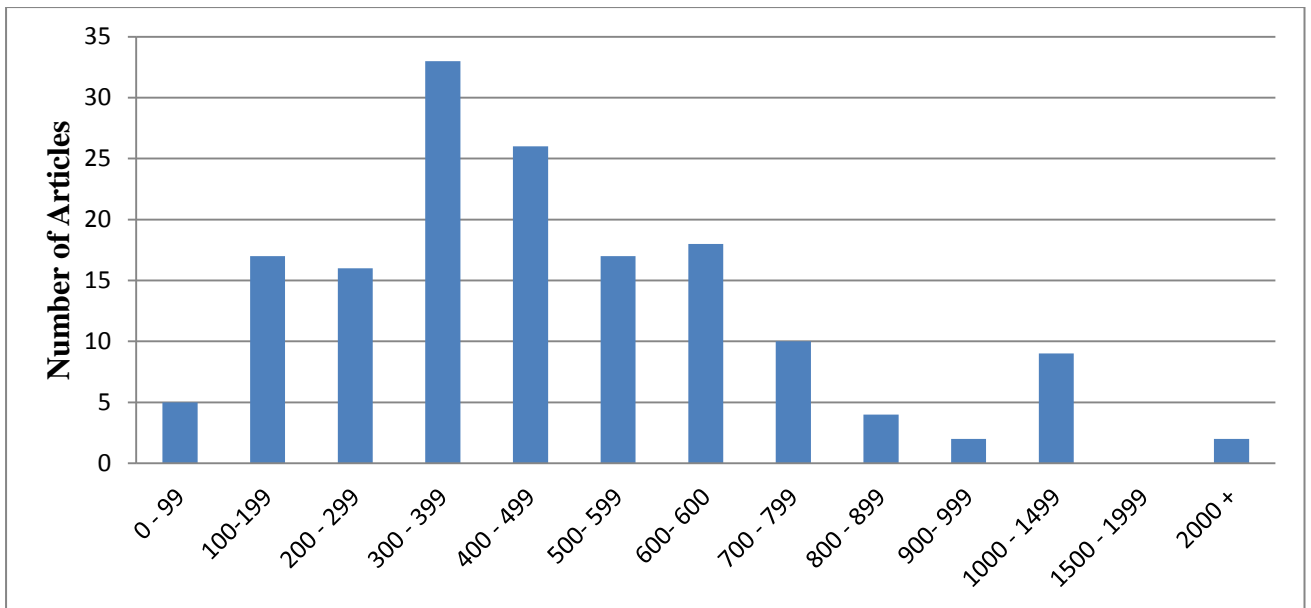


Figure 4.4: Wordage of Articles

It is noteworthy that, though the majority of articles were sourced in the Irish Times, the longest articles (2,325 and 2,396 words respectively) were both published in the Irish Daily Mail, and both concerned the same offender. Similarly, it is worth noting that most of the longest articles (those in the 1000 – 1499 range) were opinion pieces.

Thematic Analysis

General analysis.

Section 1: Biased language

There are many examples of biased language at use in the articles. Article 3D/20/02/2010, published in the Evening Herald, refers to sex offenders as “perverts”. This article is interesting in that sex offenders are referred to as perverts only in the headline of the piece, rather than the body of the text. Thus, it may be that such a prejudiced word was used in the headline only in order to attract readers.

Article 3D/15/03/2010, also published in the Evening Herald, referred to a paedophile offender as “ruthless”, “smarming” and “rabid”. Article 4D/4/04/2010, published in the Irish Daily Mail, referred to a paedophile offender as “evil”.

Article 1D/20/03/2010 in the Irish Times describes a paedophile offender as an “evil spirit”, “relentless”, “grotesque”, “evil”, and as “an ogre”. It also describes the offender as an “apocalyptic figuregrowling” into the camera at court.

It is worth noting that not all examples of biased language in the broadsheet newspapers came from opinion pieces. Reporting pieces, which usually avoid the use of overly prejudiced language, also featured examples of biased language, though this is rarer than examples of biased language occurring in opinion pieces. An example of this is the use of the word “deranged”:

“A deranged former medical worker” – Article 2B/23/03/2010

It is also notable that most of the emotive language used in the sample is used to depict those offenders who have committed crimes against children. Most of these crimes fell into the category of child sexual abuse. This shall be discussed in greater detail in the sections below.

Though murder was the second most common crime mentioned in the sample, there are very few examples of incendiary or unsympathetic language used to describe violent offenders. One article describes a violent offender as a “knife-wielding maniac”, and another depicts an offender as “frenzied”.

There are in fact more examples of articles portraying murderers as sympathetic figures than articles demonising them. Many articles focusing on offenders who commit murder emphasise good aspects of the offender’s character, such as being a good mother or having carried out community service, and most also focus on mitigating factors such as alcoholism or drug abuse at the time of the crime. It is very interesting, however, that offenders are portrayed in a sympathetic manner usually when they are female or when they are young. These themes will be discussed in greater detail below. When offenders who have committed murder are male, they are not portrayed in a sympathetic language, but for the majority of articles, neither are they described with unsympathetic language.

Section 2: Treatment/Therapy

There is little emphasis on a need for treatment or therapy of mentally ill offenders. The majority of references to therapy or treatment made are made with respect to paedophiles.

Article 1D/23/04/2010, published in the Irish Times, describes the offender's own attempts at receiving therapy for paedophilia. The article also refers to the defence counsel's plea that the offender be given a punishment outside of prison, due to the lack of rehabilitation services in prisons. The article also emphasises the judge's attempts at structuring the sentence so the offender would receive treatment upon his release from prison.

Article 3B/25/03/2010, published in the Evening Herald, refers to a schizophrenic man's past treatment, and the necessity of continuing that treatment in the future. This article also refers to a statement made by a judge about the immorality of convicting the mentally ill offender.

"Judge Ann Ryan said it would be inappropriate to convict King, saying she was delighted he is well and continuing with his treatment."

- Article 3B/25/03/2010

Another article, published in the Irish Times, refers to the therapy given to a paedophile offender before his arrest:

"The priest was moved to Munich for "therapy" in 1980 after abusing a boy."

- Article 1D/19/04/2010

That the word therapy is put in quotation marks denotes suspicion and disbelief. It is clear in this case that the author regards the offender's therapy as an excuse or as an effort to save face. Therapy in this case is not treated as a valid option for offenders, nor is it portrayed as effective or useful.

It is worth noting that references to treatment when made with regard to paedophiles are usually couched in suspicious and disbelieving language. It is made clear that treatment is not considered an adequate method of dealing with paedophiles.

"On many occasions over several decades, Fr Smyth availed of psychiatric and other forms of treatment. None of these interventions had any effect. It is clear that the only effective means of dealing with a person of his propensity is through the rigour of criminal law."

- *Article 1D/18/03/2010*

It should be noted, however, that the majority of references to the treatment of paedophiles were references to paedophiles who were also priests. Thus, it is possible that the suspicion and derision with which these references are made could be related to the Catholic Church's activities in covering up abuse, and not to the concept of treatment itself. Nevertheless, it is clear that treatment is not considered an option for these paedophiles.

References to therapy or treatment are also made with respect to substance abuse.

"She said her daughter was addressing her drug addiction and was in a stable relationship....."

- *Article 3D/20/04/2010*

"Ms Horan asked the judge to order a probation report, saying Carrick is now stabilised on methadone, is back living at the family home, and has made some improvements."

- *Article 3D/04/03/2010*

Mentally Ill Offenders as a Group

There are several opinion pieces concerning mentally ill offenders as a distinct group. Overall, these pieces portray sympathy towards mentally ill offenders.

This sympathy is evident in two articles, both published in the Irish Times, describing Mountjoy prison. The first is an opinion piece written by a retiring member of Mountjoy Prison Visiting Committee. This article describes the overcrowding in the prison using such descriptors as "horrifying" and "appalling". The article attributes the overcrowding in part to the needless incarceration of mentally ill offenders. That the incarceration of the mentally ill is needless is emphasised in this article:

"...the imprisonment of mentally ill/disturbed individuals who should receive appropriate mental health care outside of the prison regime."

-Article 1B/26/04/2010

The article also focuses on the need to provide treatment for mentally ill offenders, and indeed, implies that this provision is a duty and purpose of the prison.

The second article, a reporting piece, provides more context. The overcrowding situation at Mountjoy is described as “an affront to civilised society”. Again, it is made clear that incarceration in prison is considered an unsuitable punishment for the mentally ill:

“Prisons should be places of last resort, reserved for serious, dangerous criminals, rather than used as a dumping ground for inadequate, impoverished or mentally disturbed citizens.”

“The number of mentally ill/disturbed individuals who should have been treated in more appropriate settings, is not known.”

- *Article 1B/27/04/2010*

This article also heavily criticises the Director of the Prison Service, and attributes part of the overcrowding problem to his actions. He is portrayed as uncaring and needlessly harsh.

“Director of the Prison Service Brian Purcell put it plainly when he said: “I don’t make the call about who is committed to custody: that is for the courts”. Mr Purcell, however, appears comfortable with a policy of providing ever more prison places, rather than support for the alternative approach of community service, restorative justice and minimum incarceration.”

- *Article 1B/27/04/2010*

Thus, it is clear that, in this article, mentally ill offenders are not considered to be particularly dangerous. Treatment is considered a better option for these offenders than prison. Similarly, those who seem to be responsible for the incarceration of the mentally ill, among others unsuitable for prison, are portrayed in a negative manner.

It is worth noting that the majority of articles that express sympathy towards mentally ill offenders are opinion pieces.

Gender

Of the 171 articles gathered, 18 mentioned female offenders. Of these, thirteen articles had female offenders as their main focus. The remaining five articles focused on pairs of male and female offenders. The wordage of these articles ranged from 143 words to 825. The average wordage was 497.

One theme emerged very strongly across the majority of these eighteen articles: the theme of motherhood.

Section 1: Motherhood

Motherhood was the primary theme which emerged from the analysis of gender. Of the eighteen articles gathered, ten viewed the offender primarily as a mother, and focused heavily on the offender's position as a mother.

“Anne Burke (56), a mother of four, was sentenced to five years in prison...”

“A mother of four who bludgeoned her husband to death...”

“The mother, with the assistance of what.....”

“The fact that this grossly unfit mother succeeded....”

Several headlines also primarily identify an offender as a mother:

“Mother fails to overturn HSE care order on daughter.”

“Mum's jail sentence extended for knife attack.”

“‘Yes, I killed my babies’: Mother who murdered six newborns sentenced to 15 years in jail.”

“Mother in lake plunge with body of disabled daughter after she ‘killed her by accident’”

This theme is particularly noticeable in four articles, all published in the Irish Times, that focused on the same event and trial: a female offender on trial for the murder of her husband.

The offender's relationship with her children, and the fact that her children asked for her not to be imprisoned, is a major focus of the articles. In all four articles, the offender's children

are mentioned in the first paragraph, and one headline reads: “Children appeal for mother to be spared jail term.”

That the children were willing to testify against their mother’s imprisonment, despite the murder of their father, was of huge importance to the trial. This was greatly emphasised in the articles:

“A woman who bludgeoned her husband to death... but whose children appealed for her not to be jailed, has been allowed to walk free from court...”

Article 1B - 24/03/2010

“She said her mother was sorry for what she had done and was living in a prison of her own making every day. “But I hope it will not be a prison made of bricks as this would break my heart . . . I love her unconditionally,” she said.”

Article 1D1 – 23/03/2010

“Her children, who were present in court, broke down and wept silently”

Article 1D2 – 23/03/2010

Two of the four articles then end with reference to the offender’s children.

Women who deviate from the caring and nurturing characteristics normally associated with motherhood are viewed as being doubly deviant. This can be particularly seen in five articles referring to the same incident: a husband and wife arrested for the sexual abuse and neglect of their children. The first article, a reporting article, focuses on the status of both offenders as parents, and no particular mention of the female offender as a mother is mentioned. However, the second article, an opinion piece, provides more context on the matter and focuses almost exclusively on the female offender as mother. Article 3A/02/03/2010, published in the Evening Herald, begins by referring to the crime that was, in reality, committed by both offenders, but refers only to the abuse committed by the mother. The male offender is not mentioned in this context. When the abuse committed by the male offender is mentioned, it is pointed out that the offence took place with the knowledge of the mother:

“...the children in one cluster of horror called a family suffered incest by their mother. A 12-year-old was raped by his father once a week -- with the mother's knowledge.”

- *Article 3A/02/03/2010*

It is interesting to note that the initial paragraph mentions the female offender's crimes only. When the crimes of the male offender are mentioned, it is with reference to the female offender's crimes. This is suggestive of blame and responsibility. The female offender is responsible for her own crime, but she is also responsible for the male offender's crimes. She is thus portrayed as more deviant than the male offender. References to her crime and her responsibility continue throughout the article:

"And then the mother -- the mother we now know to be serving a seven-year sentence for incest -- went to the High Court to prevent the children being taken into care."

"The fact that this grossly unfit mother succeeded in her misuse of the law..."

- *Article 3A/02/03/2010*

In contrast, the male offender is mentioned once only.

Out of five articles, one article, published in the Evening Herald, makes particular reference to the male offender's status as father.

"Mr Justice White said the father's abuse was an appalling breach of trust on an innocent and vulnerable child. "Your offences are more reprehensible because of the position you enjoyed in the family," the judge told the convicted sex offender. You were head of the family and in a dominant position."

- *Article 3A/05/03/2010*

Reference to motherhood is also made even when the children of the offender were not relevant to any crimes committed. This can be seen in the case of a woman arrested for allegedly plotting to murder a cartoon artist. Though the offender's family were not part of the plot and were not relevant to the case in other ways, her child is mentioned several times throughout the course of the article.

"Ms Paulin-Ramirez told her family after she left in September that she went to Ireland with her six-year-old son and married an Algerian whom she met online, Mrs Mott said."

- *Article 3B/14/03/2010*

The offender's extended family and marriage are also mentioned.

Section 2: Mitigating Factors

An emphasis on the mitigating factors of a crime was also another theme noted in the articles analysed for patterns relating to gender. These mitigating factors always included mental illness. The majority of references to mental illness fall into this theme.

In four articles reporting on a female offender who murdered her husband, the lack of responsibility for her crime was heavily emphasised. Several references are made to the offender's abuse of alcohol and experience of domestic abuse committed by the victim, her husband.

"Burke described her marriage as a "litany of abuse"....she only started drinking so she could stand up to her husband who would start fights when he was drunk....the deceased was responsible for frequent abuse and sometimes shocking incidents in the home."

- Article 1B - 24/03/2010

"...the physical and mental abuse continued until his death.....she said she had started drinking at 10am on the day in question..."

Article 1D – 24/03/2010

The effect this abuse had on the offender's state of mind is emphasised several times, and it is also implied that had the abuse not taken place, there was a chance that the offender would never have become violent.

"... Justice Patrick McCarthy said he was satisfied that Burke was suffering from a serious mental condition at the time, partly caused by her domestic circumstances."

-Article 1D/ 24/03/2010

"During her brief trial, the court heard that Burke...was suffering from severe depression at the time of the killing which diminished her responsibility."

- Article 1D2/23/03/2010

"He said the most important mitigating circumstance was her mental disorder."

- Article 1D1/23/03/2010

-

Thus, the offender's state of mind is very heavily emphasised. She is portrayed as a sympathetic character, a mother who would not have committed such a violent crime if not for the actions of her husband. In accordance with this, the victim is portrayed in a negative manner. Several references are made to the abuse committed by him prior to his death

Most interesting is how a character statement given by the victim's brother is portrayed. In this statement, the victim is described as a good man who cared deeply for his family, who worked hard in order to support them and who was "not the monster portrayed in the trial". The articles, however, are careful to include the judge's assessment of this statement:

"while I do not disregard what [he] believes completely, I feel [his] perception was wrong as to what happened in the home..... the deceased was responsible for frequent abuse and sometimes shocking incidents in the home."

- Article 1D/ 24/03/2010

The emphasis on mental illness can again be seen in an article describing a woman arrested for a bottle attack. References are made to her substance abuse, and her state of mind in general.

"Karen Quigley, O'Connell's mother, told Mr McQuade that her daughter suffered from low self-esteem due to learning difficulties and developed a "serious" drug problem with "heroin, cocaine and ecstasy" after leaving school aged 14 years old..... Mr McQuade said O'Connell was a "fragile, vulnerable lady with low self-esteem who would appear to be easily lead".

-Article 3D/20/04/2010

Article 4B/18/03/2010, published in the Irish Daily Mail, focuses on a mother who murdered her daughter and afterwards committed suicide. The article makes several prolonged references describing mitigating factors to the crimes, and in particular describes the mother's mental illness.

“Mrs Richmond....had suffered a mental breakdown and become obsessed with Scientology....She displayed 'classic signs of bipolar disorder', including dramatic mood swings, erratic behaviour and obsessive tendencies, and became convinced doctors had wrongly diagnosed Millie ...her condition was actually caused by an allergy to metal.”

“She would demand that friends removed metal watches in her presence and would invite them to eat using ceramic cutlery.”

“the inquest heard that she displayed the 'classic signs' of bipolar disorder...”

“...her family suffered a history of mental illness...she experienced a 'psychotic episode' in the week leading up to her death.”

-Article 4B/18/03/2010

Thus, the offender is portrayed in a very sympathetic manner. There are, however, several examples of female offenders who harm their children who are not portrayed in a sympathetic manner. This will be discussed further below.

Section 3: Rehabilitation

The final theme that emerged during the analysis of gender was that of rehabilitation. Of the eighteen articles gathered, four focus on the redemption or rehabilitation of the female offender. The theme of rehabilitation of the offender is correlated with her portrayal as a mother. If the offender can be portrayed as a good mother, then the rehabilitation of the offender is emphasised. Similarly, if it is clear that the offender is not a good mother, then their rehabilitation is not emphasised.

This is particularly obvious in four articles relating to the same event – that of an offender murdering her husband. In each article, the efforts of the offender towards rehabilitation are emphasised:

“He said she was no longer drinking and that “all the signs for the future bode well” in that there is little risk of her reoffending and she had very good interaction with the probation service.”

- *Article 1D – 23/03/2010*

“...she would have to undergo a regime of treatment and comply with the terms of her psychiatrist and any one in her medical and therapeutic assistance.”

- *Article 1D – 24/03/2010*

Rehabilitation is again mentioned in an article focusing on a female offender arrested for assault.

“He said there had been a long period of joblessness but that was changing and she was willing to engage with the probation service.”

- *Article 3D/20/04/2010*

When the offender has committed a crime that contradicts the societal norms of motherhood, such as child abuse and neglect, there is no mention of rehabilitation. One article, reporting on the court case of a mother and father arrested for child neglect and abuse, refers to the parents as “depraved”. The female offender in this article refers to herself as “the worst mother in the world”. There is no mention of rehabilitation of any kind.

From this section it is possible to say that the portrayal of mentally ill offenders is influenced by gender. It is certain that the extent to which the portrayal is influenced is in itself mitigated by other factors, namely motherhood. Female offenders are portrayed in a sympathetic manner if they fulfil the role of a good mother. If, however, they do not fulfil this role, then they are more likely to be portrayed in a more prejudicial manner than other offenders.

Age

Of the 158 articles gathered, seven focused on offenders under the age of 18. Another three articles, one published in the Irish Times, and two in the Irish Daily Mail, focused on the offender Jon Venables, who was arrested for an unspecified crime. These articles were included in the analysis of age because these articles also focused on crimes committed by Venables when he was ten.

The wordage of these articles ranged from 74 to 2, 396. It should be noted, however, that the largest word counts belonged to articles focusing on Jon Venables. Articles not focusing on Venables ranged from 74 to 159.

Section 1: Mitigating Factors

The majority of articles portrayed the young offender in a sympathetic manner. Emphasis is given to mitigating factors such as mental health issues, drug dependence and troubled background. This is notable due to the extremely short word count of these articles; the mental illness of the offenders is clearly considered important enough to emphasise.

“The Probation Service had been trying to work with the boy to help him to address his offending and to involve him in cannabis addiction counselling.”

- Article 3B/31/03/2010

“A 15-year-old boy with special education needs and a drug problem, who stole a bottle of perfume from a shop in Dublin, has been remanded on bail.”

- Article 3A/29/04/2010

“A youth who threatened his father and sister has told a court that he's had a problem with cannabis for over four years.”

- Article 3D/16/04/2010

Indeed, one article, published in the Evening Herald, is dedicated entirely to the possible mental illness of an offender:

“..the HSE told the Dublin Children's Court yesterday that two psychiatric reports from separate doctors were available. He said one stated that "it is not a case where the young man is suffering from a mental disorder". However, the second psychiatrist diagnosed post traumatic stress disorder and "identifies a particular mental disorder".”

- Article 3A/15/04/2010

The references to mental illness are always made in a sympathetic manner.

Section 2: Jon Venables

Three articles regarding young offenders focused on Jon Venables. Though Venables was over the age of eighteen when he was arrested, the majority of these articles focused on his crimes committed as a ten year old, and it is certain that his original crimes influenced his portrayal. Because of this, articles focusing on him was included in the analysis of young offenders.

Venables was arrested when he was ten for the murder of a toddler, James Bulger. It is worth noting that the longest of the articles relating to young offenders, and indeed, the longest articles in the entire sample, concerned Venables.

Two articles portray Venables in an extremely biased manner. Both of these articles were published in the same tabloid newspaper, the Irish Daily Mail. The first article speculates as to why Venables was arrested. At the time, authorities refused to inform the public as to why Venables had been arrested a second time. Because of this refusal, the authorities are portrayed as being uncaring and “callous”, most especially with regard to Bulger’s mother, Denise Fergus:

“.....decision to inform Denise that Venables is in custody, without telling her what he has done, is very callous and insensitive.”

“...the decision to hide the truth is a 'disgrace' and 'one more kick in the teeth for James and his family'.

- *Article 4B/05/03/2010*

Any parties that show any leniency towards Venables are portrayed in a very unsympathetic manner. Both articles refer to the laws that kept Venables’ and Thompson’s identities secret after their release from jail as “draconian”, and portray them as needlessly unfair to the public at large. Venable’s time spent in prison is also portrayed with derision. One article refers to the offender’s sentence as “pampering”. The prison sentence is portrayed as luxurious and comfortable.

“In 2003, both Venables and Thompson were believed to have been treated to a holiday at taxpayers' expense to keep them safe on the tenth anniversary of the toddler's horrific death.”

“During their eight years of detention, they lived a life of comfort and expensive rehabilitation, cookery lessons and trips to watch Manchester United. Coming from broken homes and dysfunctional families, they enjoyed an education far better than most of their contemporaries.”

“He had his own room - with TV and PlayStation - in the modern, 20-bed complex, with the use of a garden, gym, games room and computer room. Venables'was even cushier.....He could ride scramble motorbikes in the school grounds, enjoyed regular family visits and took trips to Wales and a swimming pool in nearby Wigan. Every month £25 was put into his account.....For each birthday he received £30 and for Christmas £40.”

- Article 4B/05/03/2010

Emphasis is also put on the sum of taxpayer money spent on Venables' during his prison sentence and his rehabilitation.

Finally, Venables himself is also portrayed in a prejudiced manner. One article refers to Venables as “evil”.

“I would have put a lot of money on it not being Jon because he was by unanimous agreement the lesser evil of the two,' he told the BBC.”

- Article 4B/03/03/2010

These articles also focus on Venables' reputation for violence, focusing on previous instances of assault and stabbings. Details are also given of Venables' alleged drug taking.

One article, published in the Irish Times, takes a more sympathetic view of Venables, and describes the original trial in which he and Robert Thompson were tried for murder. The article portrays them primarily as children, and emphasises their youth several times.

“... it was the little boys' legs dangling above the floor, as they sat in the specially raised chairs that allowed them to see over the dock, in a courtroom and an ancient system designed explicitly for adults.”

- Article 1A/ 13/03/2010

The article also describes Venables' and Thompson's background in detail. This detail is given in order to contrast the newspapers at the time, who did not report on the background of the two offenders.

".....a mental picture of rough, tough, feral street kids, the damaged, abused products of families riven with alcoholism, physical abuse, poverty and neglect."

It is worth noting the contrast here with other articles referring to young offenders. In all other articles, mitigating factors such as familial abuse or substance abuse are hugely emphasised. These references are sympathetic in all cases. However, the majority of articles focusing on Venables make no mention of these factors. Instead, Venables is portrayed as inherently deviant and beyond redemption. Thus, it is possible that his extreme youth prompted the non-inclusion of any mitigating factors to the crime.

This article also describes the newspapers reporting on the trial at the time, and portrays them as more interested in egging on the public than in reporting the trial. The tabloids are also described using words such as "shrieking" and one headline, published in the Sun, is described as "the most prejudicial headline of our lifetime".

"The tabloids and the mobs fed off each other. People demanded that the 10-year-olds be hanged while the tabloids urged them on, calling the boys beasts, bastards, brutal, cunning, freaks."

The article also refers to the tabloid's lack of evidence in their reporting.

"Meanwhile, anyone who cared to listen to evidence....."

It is notable that articles referring to other offenders who have committed murder do not portray the offender in such a biased manner, and neither are offenders who have been arrested for possessing child pornography. Thus, it is likely that this extreme bias is a reaction to Venables' youth when the original crime was committed. It is notable that, at the time of the original crime, Venables was much younger than other young offenders included in the sample. Thus, it is possible that his extreme youth negatively influenced the media's portrayal of him.

From this section it is possible to see that the portrayal of mentally ill offenders is influenced by age; young offenders are more likely to be portrayed in a sympathetic manner, emphasising mitigating factors to the crime. However, it is possible that if the offender is very young when the crimes are committed, then they will be portrayed in a more prejudicial manner than other offenders.

Type of Crime Committed

As mentioned above, the rehabilitation and treatment of offenders is mentioned throughout the sample. It is noteworthy, however, that almost no reference is made to the rehabilitation of those offenders who commit crimes against children, and very few references are made to treatment.

Section 1: Crimes Against Children

Offenders who commit crimes against children are portrayed in an extremely negative manner, compared to offenders who committed other crimes such as murder and assault. This can be most easily seen in articles focusing on paedophiles.

The vast majority of biased language in the sample is used in reference to paedophiles. As mentioned above, an article in the Irish Times describes a paedophile offender as an “evil spirit”, “relentless”, “grotesque”, “evil”, as “an ogre ...growling” into the camera.

References to treatment in the sample are usually made in a sympathetic manner, sometimes referring to the rehabilitation of the offender. This is not so with paedophiles. Instead, references to treatment or therapy are made with suspicion and derision.

“The priest was moved to Munich for “therapy” in 1980 after abusing a boy.”

- *Article 1D/19/04/2010*

It is also notable that, when a reference to therapy is made, it is immediately followed with a reference to continued crimes committed by the offender.

“...where he was to undergo therapy but was allowed to return to ministry and was later convicted of molesting children.”

- *Article 1D/13/04/2010*

“...where he underwent therapy for suspected “sexual relations with boys”. But he then ...was suspended in early 1985 following new accusations of sexual abuse.”

- Article 1D/13/03/2010

One reference in the Irish Times makes it clear that therapy is not considered an option for paedophiles. However, it should be noted, as earlier, that it is possible this extreme derision and suspicion of therapy is related of the Catholic Church’s activities in covering up the abuse of children.

“On many occasions over several decades, Fr Smyth availed of psychiatric and other forms of treatment. None of these interventions had any effect. It is clear that the only effective means of dealing with a person of his propensity is through the rigour of criminal law.”

- Article 1D/18/03/2010

It was found in the above sections that female offenders are portrayed in a more sympathetic manner than male offenders. It is notable that this is not so when the female offender harmed a child.

When a female offender has committed a crime against a child, mental illness, and indeed any other mitigating factors are not emphasised. This can be seen in the case of a female offender who attacked her brother’s girlfriend with a knife, described in the Evening Herald. Particular reference is made to the offender’s previous convictions – dangerous driving which resulted in the death of her daughter. In this way the offender is firmly cemented as a failed mother. The offender is then described as “frenzied” and “vicious”. Although reference is also made to her alcoholism, it is not an attempt at sympathy. Rather, her alcoholism is used as an example of the offender’s personal failure.

“An alcoholic mum jailed for a crash that killed her daughter and her friend has received a further three-year sentence for a vicious knife attack.”

“..... pleaded guilty to attacking her brother's girlfriend in a frenzied attack while she was on bail for her drunken crash.”

-Article 3A/30/04/2010

Also notable is a female offender arrested with her husband for the abuse and neglect of her children. As noted in the previous sections, she is portrayed as doubly deviant.

Article 4B/18/03/2010, published in the Irish Daily Mail, focused on a mother who killed herself and her child and portrayed the mother in a sympathetic manner. It is possible that this sympathetic portrayal was due to the mother's death alongside the child.

It was also found in previous sections that young offenders are portrayed in a more sympathetic manner. Articles put emphasis on mitigating factors such as mental illness. It is interesting, however, that two articles published in the Irish Daily Mail, portrayed the same offender, John Venables, in an extremely negative manner as discussed in Chapter 4. It is possible that this negative portrayal was due to the offender's extreme youth, but it is also likely that the negative portrayal was due to the original crime of murdering a child.

Thus, it can be seen that the type of crime committed hugely influences the portrayal of mentally ill offenders. Indeed, the type of crime committed supersedes gender and age as the main factor influencing portrayal of the offender.

5. Discussion

Introduction

The following section will outline the position of the current study in relation to pre-existing research. Predominant themes in the portrayal of mentally ill offenders shall be discussed, including the moral/punitive and medical/therapeutic model. Research into gender and age shall be discussed. Finally, research into the media portrayal of paedophiles will be examined.

Models

The initial findings support established research which states that “newsworthy” crimes are the most reported, and that these crimes are normally unusual and eye-catching (Cohen, 2002). Research that states that the Irish print media typically over-report violent crime is also supported (O’Connell, 1999).

There were very few predominant themes found in the portrayal of mentally ill offenders as a distinct group. Portrayal of mentally ill offenders was mitigated by their gender and the type of crime they committed, and to a lesser extent, by their youth.

The main research question of this study asked whether the Irish print media portrayal of mentally ill offenders falls into the moral/punitive model or the medical/therapeutic model. Pustilnik (2005) notes that the main characteristics of the moral/punitive model are a lack of sympathy in the articles, along with a lack of reference to mitigating factors of the crime. The mental illness is not viewed as a medical condition, and instead is portrayed as akin to a personal failing. Finally, punishment of the offender is emphasised, normally in the form of incarceration. In the medical/therapeutic model, however, newspaper articles focus on the mental illness as a condition that adversely affected the behaviour of the offender. Emphasis is put on treatment and rehabilitation, and the offender is portrayed as a sympathetic figure (Pustilnik, 2005).

The print media portrayal of mentally ill offenders in Ireland does not fall neatly into one of these categories. Instead, the category is dependent upon other factors relating to the offender such as gender and type of crime committed.

Gender

It was found in this study that the media emphasises mitigating factors related to crimes committed by female offenders. In the majority of articles concerning female offenders, mitigating factors such as mental illness were much emphasised. Treatment and rehabilitation of these offenders was also highlighted. Finally, female offenders were more likely to be portrayed as sympathetic figures. Thus, the portrayal of female offenders can be said to fall into the medical/therapeutic model.

This sympathetic portrayal of female offenders supports existing research. Worall (1990) argues that female offenders are more likely to be considered “mad, not bad” by the court system. Mitigating factors such as alcoholism, other drug abuse, mental illness, or indeed, abuse suffered by the offender, will be emphasised. These will be used to explain why the otherwise “good” offender committed such crimes. Thus, male offenders are considered to be more at fault for their crimes than female offenders, even when the same crime has been committed.

However, female offenders who committed crimes against children were not portrayed as sympathetic figures in the sample. Indeed, these offenders were portrayed in the media as being more criminal and more deviant than their peers. This was evidenced by the lack of reference to any mitigating factors of their crime, and a lack of reference to their possible rehabilitation. More biased and prejudiced language was used in reference to these offenders. Thus, female offenders who commit crimes against children were portrayed in a manner more in accordance with the moral/punitive model. This is particularly evident in the case of a mother and father pair of offenders arrested for child abuse and neglect, the female offender is portrayed as not only being responsible for her own crimes, but also the crimes of her husband. Thus, she was portrayed as doubly responsible and doubly deviant.

This finding supports established research which shows that women who commit these kinds of crime are considered to be “doubly deviant” (Lloyd, 1995).

Pollak (1950) was the first researcher to forward the chivalry thesis, which states that women are treated more leniently by male judges and jury due to their inherent protectiveness of women. Lloyd (1995) argues that this chivalry effect does indeed occur, but only for those women who conform to socially pre-ordained roles. The predominant role is that of a good mother, caring and protective of her children. Those who do not conform to this role can be

treated more harshly than their peers, and are considered to be “doubly deviant”. These offenders are, in essence, punished for their crime, and punished for failing to conform to conventional ideals of femininity. This echoes research conducted by Cavaglion (2008), who found that women who did not hold to conventional forms of womanhood were portrayed in a more prejudiced manner in the media.

However, the current finding does not support some research relating to female offenders. Peter (2006) argues that society expects women, most especially in their role as mother, to be nurturing and caring. If a woman acts in a way that contradicts this, then society cannot easily comprehend her or her action. Society will attempt to make sense of the offender, and will portray her as insane, and not inherently evil or malicious. She is “mad, not bad”. In this way such unusual acts are explained. Thus, any articles focusing on a mother who harms children would portray the offender as mad, and would emphasise mental illness in an attempt to explain the crime.

This argument is not supported by the current research. The majority of articles focusing on mothers who have harmed their children portray the female offender as being “depraved”, in full command of her faculties, and as inherently evil. Any mention of her mental health is dismissive, and it is clear that she is considered to be fully responsible for her crimes. Only one article in the sample portrays the female offender as “mad, not bad”, and it is possible that the media were swayed by the offender’s death.

Overall, however, it can be argued that the portrayal of female offenders falls under the medical/therapeutic model. Offenders are, for the most part, portrayed in a sympathetic manner, taking into account mitigating factors such as mental illness or other factors such as abuse, and with an emphasis on the offender’s rehabilitation and treatment.

Age

The portrayal of young offenders follows in a similar vein. For the most part, articles in the sample focus on mitigating factors for the crimes committed, most particularly substance abuse. Several references are made to the treatment and rehabilitation of the offender. It is also interesting to note that some articles relating to young offenders blame society and the Irish government for the crimes. These articles blame the offender’s crime on a failure of

societal supports and health services. Thus, it can be said that the portrayal of young offenders falls into the medical/therapeutic model.

Jewkes (2004) states that, over time, the portrayal of young offenders has transitioned from being punitive and somewhat prejudiced, to a more understanding and sympathetic portrayal. The current study supports this. Similarly, Pizzaro et al., (2007) state that less attention is given to crimes involving young offenders unless the crime involves violence; this holds true in the current sample. It is notable that the two longest articles in the sample focused on an offender who committed a violent crime in his youth. Though the offender was now in his twenties, and had been arrested for a non-violent crime, both articles focused on his previous crime, and both were extremely unsympathetic. Though both articles mentioned the treatment given to the offender, these references were made with scorn and disdain. No mention was given to the mitigating factors of the crime, and huge emphasis was put on the incarceration of the offender. Thus, it is certain that the portrayal of this offender falls into the moral/punitive model.

Paedophiles

It is certain that the type of crime committed hugely influences the media portrayal of that offender. This can be particularly seen with reference to paedophilia. As mentioned in section four, paedophilia was the most common mental illness in the sample. The portrayal of paedophiles was uniformly negative. Almost all examples of biased language in the sample referred to paedophiles. Any mentions of treatment or therapy were treated with derision and suspicion. Finally, very little recognition was given to paedophilia as a mental illness. More often, paedophiles were portrayed as being inherently evil and unnatural. This portrayal, then, falls into the moral/punitive model. The portrayal also supports current research.

Jewkes (2004) argues that paedophilia has become embedded in the public consciousness as the most heinous crime of the last two decades. Thus, paedophiles will be portrayed in a prejudiced manner, with emphasis on responsibility for their crimes and with little mention of mitigating factors or treatment. Similarly, Cross (2005) argues that very biased language will be used in relation to paedophiles, and only rarely does the media portray paedophilia as a mental illness. Cross (2005) also notes that even more liberal newspapers will portray paedophilia using polarised language, and will not portray it as an illness. The current study

supports this argument. It is notable that examples of some of the most polarised language in the sample came from the Irish times, a reputable broadsheet newspaper.

It is interesting to note that this punitive attitude can be extended to any offender who commits a crime against children. Parents who are neglectful of their children, or parents who physically hurt their children, are portrayed with equal punitiveness. Similarly, no reference to mitigating factors, rehabilitation or lack of support services is made. Thus, this portrayal falls into the moral/punitive category.

It can be argued, therefore, that the most important factor in the portrayal of a mentally ill offender appears to be the type of crime committed. The portrayal of offenders who harm children, whether they are paedophiles or not, is almost uniform. The offenders are portrayed as being in complete control of their faculties, and as inherently deviant. No mention of rehabilitation or of mitigating factors is made, and no mention of treatment or therapy is made. The mental illnesses of these offenders are portrayed as akin to moral and personal failings rather than as medical conditions.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Pustilnik (2005) theorises that the majority of representations of mentally ill offenders will fall into the moral/punitive model. This is not supported by the current research. Instead, the present study suggests that, in the Irish print media, mental illness is viewed as a secondary factor in the portrayal of offenders. The portrayal of mentally ill offenders is primarily viewed through the lens of gender, age and of the type of crime committed, and is thus heavily mediated by such. Mental illness is used to mitigate the crimes of those offenders already perceived as “good” or as in some way vulnerable, based on other factors such as gender. It is not, in itself, viewed as a primary characteristic of the offender.

Social constructionism states that meaning is socially constructed. If this is true, then the portrayal of offenders in the media informs society’s definition and opinion of offenders. Research suggests that this takes place through a process of naturalisation (Gamson et al., 1992). In light of this, the results of this study are particularly concerning.

Research suggests that the mentally ill stand a far higher chance of being incarcerated during their lifetime than the general population (Hiday et al., 1999). Similarly, the rate of mental illness is far higher in the prison population of Ireland than in the general population (Irish Prison Service, 2010). Thus, it is certain that mental illness is an extremely important factor to offenders, and also to Ireland’s population of offenders. It is concerning that this is not reflected in the media.

The current research findings suggest further avenues of study. Though the current research illuminates how the media portrays mentally ill offenders, research investigating the public’s opinion of mentally ill offenders would further illuminate the topic. Similarly, research investigating why mental illness is considered a secondary factor in the media would be beneficial.

It is certain, however, that the mental illness of offenders should be a more pressing issue in the media. If it is accepted that meaning is socially constructed, then it is important that the print media engage in accurate representation of offenders and the issues concerning them.

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