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Luis M. Romero-Rodríguez, Santiago Tejedor, David Rull Ribó, Jesús Martínez-Fernandez & Bárbara Castillo-Abdul

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Representation of Mental Illness and Disorders in Iberoamerica Digital Media

Luis M. Romero-Rodríguez[1,4], Santiago Tejedor[2], David Rull Ribó[2], Jesús Martínez-Fernandez[2], Bárbara Castillo-Abdul[3,5*]

[1] College of Communication. University of Sharjah. University City, Sharjah, UAE. lromero@sharjah.ac.ae +34680807181
[2] Department of Journalism and Communications Studies. Autonomous University of Barcelona. Edifici I 08193 Bellaterra (Campus UAB, Cerdanyola del Vallès), Barcelona, Spain. santiago.tejedor@uab.cat | david.rull@uab.cat | jesus.martinez.fernandez@uab.cat +34935811545
[3] University of Design, Innovation and Technology (UDIT). Av. de Alfonso XIII, 97, Chamartín, 28016 Madrid, Spain. barbara.castillo@udit.es
[4] ESAI Business School, Espiritu Santo University. Av. Samborondón 5, Samborondón 092301, Guayaquil, Ecuador.
[5] ECOTEC University, Av. Juan Tanca Marengo Km. 2, Guayaquil, Ecuador.

***Corresponding author:** Bárbara Castillo-Abdul, Ph.D. barbara.castillo@udit.es

Abstract

Background A recent bibliometric analysis of 130 research studies on media coverage of mental disorders between 2002 and 2022 found that, in most cases, research insists that media coverage of mental disorders is generally negative. The objective of this research is to examine the tone and content of articles on mental health in the main digital media in Ibero-America in 2023. Likewise, we sought to identify the most common types of disorders or emerging disorders and whether the news items establish very simplistic links of mental health with topics such as video games and social, financial, or gender issues. In this study, simplistic links were defined as media representations that establish direct and unsubstantiated causal relationships between mental health and a single external factor, such as social media use, video games, or certain social or gender conditions. For example, headlines that attribute depression exclusively to TikTok use or that associate anxiety solely with being female, without nuance or empirical support, were classified in this category. In contrast, approaches that acknowledge multiple causes or include expert perspectives were coded as complex or contextualized analyses. This distinction allowed for the identification of reductionist media narratives that reinforce stereotypes or oversimplify psychosocial phenomena.

Methods The most important digital media in each Ibero-American country was selected, and articles published on mental health in 2023 were collected (n=20,020). Subsequently, mixed analysis was performed using an analysis sheet of a representative sample of information units (n=1226).

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Results The majority representation of mental health was neutral in tone (56%), while a positive tone was evident in only 27% of the sample. Negative representation (17%) was generally linked to crime and substance abuse problems. The conditions with the highest frequency in the analyzed media were depression (n=161), anxiety (n=158), stress (n=144), suicide (n=88), substance addiction (n=83), and neurocognitive disorders (n=68). In 187 reports, simplistic links about disorders, especially the abuse of social networks and social issues, such as poverty or social exclusion, were found to emerge mainly in reports in which expert sources were contrasted.

Conclusions The neutral representation of mental health in the media should not be considered a positive aspect, since a more proactive approach should be encouraged, focusing on the details of each situation without articulating homogeneous stories, which invites us to reflect on the formative and sensitizing role of the media, especially in a context marked by misinformation, digital noise, and the rapid growth of mental illness in the population.

Keywords Mental Health, Media Framing, Media Portrayal, Stigma.

Introduction

Since the COVID-19 pandemic and several months of confinement in many countries, public debate on mental health has begun, with many media outlets warning that mental disorders could become the next global epidemic [1]. The World Health Organization (WHO) published the *World Report on Mental Health* 2022 [2], a publication containing more than 550 references and epidemiological data that estimated that by 2019, more than 970 million people in the world were living with mental disorders (approximately 13% of the world's population), most of which were LMICs [3]. Among the most common disorders, anxiety (31%), depression (28.9%), idiopathic diseases (11.1%), and attention deficit hyperactivity disorders (8.8%) were identified.

Mental health is highly stigmatized, and in many cases, it is the media as the main source of information and creation of social reality for public opinion, which perpetuates erroneous and distorted ideas of mental illness by presenting the mentally ill as peculiar, different and dangerous [4]. The consequences of negative media portrayals of people with mental illnesses are profound. In general, they affect self-esteem, help-seeking, compliance with therapies, medication intake, and recovery. However, the media can also serve to change public prejudices about mental health by normalizing mental health and promoting positive stories about people with mental disorders [5].

According to the scientific literature, one of the most common ways in which the media misrepresent mental health is that the framing or portrayal of people suffering from some type of disorder represents

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them with conceptions based on the social construction of madness, making the sufferer look like an otherness, that is, as something different or separate from normal people [6,7], a dichotomy that presents a kind of "us" (the healthy) vs. "them" (those suffering from mental illnesses or disorders) that affects the social representation of the disease. Understanding madness not as an objective medical condition, but as a socially and culturally mediated category, is crucial for analyzing how media representations reproduce or challenge stigma in the public sphere [6].

In line with this, the concept of “valorization” refers to the ways in which media discourses ascribe positive or negative value to individuals and groups. This process is not merely descriptive, but evaluative, shaping how audiences interpret mental health and those who experience it. Corrigan and Watson (2002) [8] argue that stigma functions precisely through these processes of valorization, whereby media and social narratives assign unfavorable attributes to people with mental illness, which in turn affects their self-esteem, help-seeking behaviors, and social inclusion. While social construction frames madness as a cultural category, valorization explains how these framings attach positive or negative value to individuals.

Situating our study within this framework allows us to examine not only the presence of mental health in Ibero-American media, but also the evaluative tone through which such coverage is constructed. Positioning our aims within this framework clarifies how we operationalize “tone” as an evaluative outcome of social construction and valorization processes, directly linking theory to our research questions and measurement strategy.

A recent bibliometric study of 130 research studies on media coverage of mental disorders between 2002 and 2022 [9] found that, in most cases, research insists that media coverage of mental disorders is generally negative and influenced by sociodemographic factors (e.g., age, gender, and cultural values). The results of this bibliometric review also show that social networks are becoming crucial for mental health communication and are gaining increasing interest as a research platform for the scientific community.

Previous studies in Europe and North America have consistently shown that the news media tend to associate severe mental disorders such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or psychosis with violence, crime, or unpredictability, thereby reinforcing public stigma and fear [10, 11, 12].

By contrast, more common conditions such as depression or anxiety are often framed more sympathetically, particularly in the context of treatment or recovery [13]. These findings suggest that media

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portrayals are not uniform across disorders, but instead reflect societal perceptions of severity and dangerousness. However, evidence from Latin America and the Iberian Peninsula remains more fragmented, with some studies reporting a gradual reduction of stigmatizing tones [14, 15, 16].

This contrast underscores the importance of situating Ibero-American findings within a broader comparative framework, but also positioning our study within this comparative literature allows us to identify whether Ibero-American contexts reproduce, resist, or transform these global tendencies.

For example, the systematic literature review on the perception of the mentally ill in Latin America and the Caribbean, carried out by Mascayano et al. [14] reports that some noteworthy findings related to public and family stigma differed from those reported in Western European countries. Interventions designed to reduce stigma related to mental illness in this region may benefit from considering the cultural dynamics of the Latinx population.

Similarly, Carrasco et al. [15], in a study on media coverage of youth mental health problems during the COVID-19 pandemic in Spain, concluded that the percentage of news in Spanish media referring to youth mental health in a stigmatizing manner (5.4%) or associated with violence (7.3%) is very low.

For their part, Grandón et al. [16], in their study on the representation of mental disorders in the Chilean press from 2000 to 2019, agreed with previous research, concluding that the media reports analyzed showed a low stigmatization towards mental disorders, which steadily decreased over time, indicating that the highest percentages of stigmatizing news in tone and content were observed in bipolar disorder and schizophrenia.

These dissimilar results between the research carried out in Iberoamerica and that of other countries make it necessary to review and update the analysis of media coverage of mental health in different Iberoamerican countries, not only for confirmation purposes, but also to find out whether positive coverage of mental illness occurs in isolation in certain media in Spain and Chile, or if not, the positive sensitivity in the handling of this information is a trend in the region. This will fill a gap in the literature and can be used as a springboard for new interventions aimed at improving the media coverage of these issues.

The main objective of this study was to examine the tone and content of articles on mental health in the main Ibero-American digital media in 2023. The research questions (RQ) that guide this study are as follows:

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RQ1: How is mental health portrayed in Ibero-American digital media?
RQ2: Which disorders are most frequently represented?
RQ3: To what extent are simplistic associations (e.g., with crime, social media, gender) present?

Methods

Design

A descriptive cross-sectional study of emerging mental health-related news in the main digital media in Ibero-America was conducted. Standard procedures for the analysis of news content in the media [17, 21] are as follows.

First, the most important digital media (legacy and native) with the highest reputation in each Ibero-American country were selected (Table I), according to the SCImago Media Rankings [18], for which four indicators were taken into consideration: Authority Score (25%), Domain Rating (25%), Citation Flow (25%), and Trust Flow (25%), from which an overall weighting can be obtained and a ranking is generated. The main reason for deciding to take the most reputable media in each country is that they tend to be the most widely read and even serve as sources for other media (radio, television, and other native and legacy print media).

Table I. Digital media (legacy and native) selected for the study.

Country	Media	Domain	Global Rank	Overall
Argentina	La Nación	https://lanacion.com.ar/	45	76.00
Bolivia	Los Tiempos	https://lostiempos.com/	695	57.25
Brazil*	R7	https://r7.com	163	68.25
Chile**	La Tercera	https://www.latercera.com/	333	63.50
Colombia	El Tiempo	https://eltiempo.com/	60	74.50
Costa Rica	La Nación	https://nacion.com/	360	62.75
Cuba	Prensa Latina	https://prensa-latina.cu/	857	55.50
Ecuador	El Comercio	https://elcomercio.com/	311	64.00
El Salvador	El Faro	https://elfaro.net/	1157	52.25
España	El País	https://elpais.com/	10	83.75
Guatemala	Prensa Libre	https://prensalibre.com/	325	63.75
Honduras	La Prensa	https://laprensa.hn/	756	56.50
Mexico	El Universal	https://eluniversal.com.mx/	146	69.00
Nicaragua	La Prensa	https://laprensani.com/	654	57.75
Panamá	La Prensa	https://prensa.com/	878	55.25
Paraguay	ABC Color	https://abc.com.py/	615	58.50

Perú	El Comercio	https://elcomercio.pe/	83	72.50
Portugal	Público	https://publico.pt/	261	65.25
Uruguay	El País	https://elpais.com.uy/	334	63.50
Venezuela	El Universal	https://eluniversal.com/	570	59.25

*Note: Leading media by country, according to SCImago Media Rankings Q3 2023 Edition. *The first resulting media "O Globo" had a paywall and could not be analyzed, so it was chosen for the second position. **The first resulting media "El Mercurio" had a paywall and could not be analyzed, so it was chosen for the second position.*

Following this, the journalistic pieces published by each of the media in reference were systematically compiled and, subsequently, a deductive quantitative analysis was carried out, for which a standardized codebook was created, adapted from previous work by other authors on the content analysis of mental health stories in the media [15, 19, 20] (Table II).

Table II. Codebook

General descriptive information	
Country	Country name
Date of story	Eight-digit format (e.g. 01012000)
Retrieval type	1. Legacy media 2. Native media
Disorder or “disease”	1. Unspecified, 2. Anxiety, 3. Stress, 4. Depression, 5. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), 6. Schizophrenia, 7. Bipolarity / Mania, 8. Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), 9. Panic or phobias, 10. Dissociative disorder / multiple identities, 11. Eating disorders, 12. Sleep disorders, 13. Sexual dysfunctions, Gender dysphoria, 14. Behavioral disorders, 15. Substance and addictions (alcohol, drugs, gambling), 16. Neurocognitive disorders (dementia, Alzheimer's), 17. Paraphilias, 18. Suicide.
What the news is due to?	1. The situation of a person with a mental disorder who affected himself/herself 2. The situation of a person with a mental disorder that affected others 3. Dissemination article about the disorder or mental health 4. Article about a specific scientific breakthrough/event in relation to the disorder or mental health
Who is the news focused on?	(1) Children (until 13 included) (2) Adolescents (from 13 to 18) (3) Both (4) Adults (from 18 to 65) (5) Elderly (+65) (6) Others

Who are the protagonists of the news?	(0) Unspecified/None (1) Women/Girls (2) Men/Boys (3) Both (4) LGBTIQ+ (5) Non-binary/transexual/transgender
Key Questions	
Is the general tone on mental health optimistic/positive?	(1) Optimistic/positive (2) Negative/pessimistic (3) Neutral
Are mental health experts or mental health community leaders directly/indirectly cited in the text (paraphrased)?	0. Not quoted 1. Positively quoted 2. Negatively quoted 3. Mix quoted (positively-negatively)
Does the article draw over-simplified links about the influence of social media, video games, social, financial or gender issues-seek facts?	0. No 1. Yes

In this study, a *positive* or *optimistic tone* was defined as one that presents mental health from a perspective of resilience, support, or social awareness, while a *simplistic link* was understood as the reductionist association between a disorder and a single social or technological cause without supporting empirical evidence. These tripartite categories (positive, neutral, negative) are based on established Qualitative Content Analysis (QDA) frameworks (*v. gr.* Krippendorff, 2004 [21]; Igartua & Humanes, 2004 [24]; McKeever, 2013 [25], Wahl, 2019 [26]).

To ensure full transparency and replicability, explicit operational definitions were established for all coding categories related to tone and simplistic linkages. These definitions were used consistently by all coders during the pilot test and the full coding process.

Tone of the article

The variable tone was coded according to a tripartite scheme widely used in content analysis research. The specific operational definitions applied in this study were:

Optimistic/Positive tone

Articles were coded as positive when they presented mental health from a perspective of improvement, resilience, or recovery. This included narratives highlighting effective treatment, coping strategies, supportive social environments, awareness-raising initiatives, or expert-based recommendations. Articles also fell into this category when they explicitly normalized mental health conditions or promoted stigma reduction.

Negative/Pessimistic tone

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Articles were coded as negative when mental health was associated with crime, violence, dangerousness, unpredictability, substance abuse, or highly stigmatizing language. Reports implying threat, alarm, or social risk without contextual nuance were also included in this category. Stories that portrayed individuals with mental illness as harmful to themselves or others, without expert clarification, were also coded as negative.

Neutral tone

Articles were coded as neutral when they adopted an informational, descriptive, or factual approach without value judgments. This included reports presenting data, institutional statements, general explanations, or clinical descriptions without framing mental health in either a positive or a negative manner. Neutral tone was assigned when no evaluative stance was apparent.

Simplistic linkages

The variable simplistic link captured whether the article established reductionist causal associations between mental health and a single external factor. The operational definitions were:

Simplistic linkage present

Articles were coded as containing simplistic links when they established a direct, unsubstantiated causal relationship between a mental health condition and one sole factor (e.g., social media use, video games, poverty, gender, or financial stress) without empirical support, contextual nuance, or expert explanation. Examples included headlines or statements implying that a specific platform, demographic characteristic, or social factor “causes” a disorder in a deterministic manner.

No simplistic linkage

Articles were coded as non-simplistic when they acknowledged multiple contributing factors, included expert voices, provided contextual explanations, or discussed correlations without implying a direct causal relationship. Articles presenting complex or multifactorial analyses were always coded as non-simplistic.

All coders used these operational definitions during the pilot test, which achieved a Krippendorff’s alpha of 0.780, and throughout the full coding process to ensure consistency, reliability, and replicability.

Sample

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To extract the sample from each media, each media source was accessed individually, extracting the emerging news items from January 1 to December 31, 2023. News items that included the following keywords in the title, subtitle and/or body of the publication were selected: [salud mental / Saúde mental or trastorno* mental* / perturbação* mental*] (in English: mental health or mental* disorder*).

An initial exploration reported 20,020 emerging results as the study universe using keywords, a sample that would be impossible to analyze in depth. In this sense, a simple random sampling was performed for each media to obtain results with 90% confidence and a 10% margin of error, assuming that it is a more or less homogeneous universe. This assumption of relative homogeneity across leading outlets is consistent with content analysis approaches where dominant agenda-setting sources share structural and editorial characteristics [17, 21]

Also, this sample configuration would provide good precision of the results and would allow a comparison between countries with similar samples to avoid possible later biases. The final sample consisted of 1,226 news items, varying between 60 and 66 for each of the 20 countries in the region (except in the case of Bolivia) (Table III).

Table III. Sample for each selected media

Country	Media	Sample
Argentina	La Nación	65
Bolivia	Los Tiempos	15
Brazil	R7	66
Chile	La Tercera	66
Colombia	El Tiempo	66
Costa Rica	La Nación	63
Cuba	Prensa Latina	64
Ecuador	El Comercio	65
El Salvador	El Faro	64
España	El País	66
Guatemala	Prensa Libre	60
Honduras	La Prensa	62
Mexico	El Universal	66
Nicaragua	La Prensa	61
Panamá	La Prensa	64
Paraguay	ABC Color	63
Perú	El Comercio	63
Portugal	Público	65
Uruguay	El País	61
Venezuela	El Universal	61
	TOTAL	**1,226**

Procedure

Four coders participated in screening, compilation, and analysis of the samples. The sampling strategy used was the constructed week

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technique [21, 22], which allows eliminating media bias due to a specific event or contingency. An average of 5.25 monthly news items was selected.

The sample excluded information that, despite appearing in the search engine with the reported criteria, was not directly related to subject matter. Also excluded were contributed contents (e.g., opinion articles, letters to the editor, columns), as well as items on topics related to drug or alcohol addiction, or psychiatric or psychological evaluations related to these topics, as has been done in previous research [15, 16, 19, 20, 23]. In this sense, items exclusively about substance use without an explicit mental health framing were excluded, but articles that framed substance use as a mental health condition were retained in line with prior research [15, 16, 19, 20, 23].

It was decided to exclude the contents provided and opinion articles because they do not necessarily reflect the editorial line of the media, nor are they formally informative. With respect to the abuse of psychotropic substances and alcoholic beverages, these reports would have substantially broadened and blurred the objectives of the analysis.

A pilot study of 6 samples from each medium (120 samples in total) was conducted to confirm the validity and reliability of the instrument (Table II). This led to an interrater reliability test. Krippendorff's alpha coefficient was used for this purpose. For the 120 pilot-coded news items, a mean value of 0.780 was obtained for the coders, indicating a high level of agreement. This level of reliability exceeds the conventional threshold of 0.70 recommended in content analysis research, supporting the robustness of our coding protocol. In addition, the use of multiple coders, cross-checking procedures, and adjudication of disagreements by a third coder are consistent with best practices in content analysis methodology [17, 21], thereby ensuring both reliability and validity of the data collection process.

Each coder was assigned five media, having to analyze an average of 305 news units in total with the codebook (Table II). The news was exported to PDF and organized in a shared Google Drive folder. After this analysis by each coder, another coder was in charge of verifying the information using the codebook to confirm the answers. When inconsistencies or differences arose between the initial observation and verification, a third coder decided on a dispute.

All codes were recorded in an Excel database created ad hoc from the contents of the codebook, which was subsequently exported to the *R* software to facilitate statistical analysis and graphing of results. Once all news items were coded, frequencies and percentages were calculated for each variable, including comparisons of variation

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between news items focusing on different demographic aspects and different disorders, and both contingency tables and logistic regression were performed. To measure the association between two categorical variables or the index of association, Cramer's V was used.

Results

Portrayal tone of mental health in the Iberoamerican media

The greatest representation of mental health in the analyzed media has a neutral tone with 56% of the sample, that is, more than half of the news items do not show a positive or negative bias towards mental health stories. The representation of a positive tone, that is, hopeful and optimistic about treatment and recovery, was only evident in 27% of the sample, while 17% showed a negative perception of mental health issues generally linked to crime, drug abuse problems, and stigmatization of diseases or disorders.

In relation to the representation and tone of mental health issues by country, as can be seen in Figure 1, in 95% of the countries analyzed, the majority representation had a neutral tone, which is congruent with the global result on tone. The only country that shows a difference is Ecuador, whose representation of mental health is mostly negative or pessimistic. Another country whose results stand out is Argentina, where there is a very similar count for all tones (negative, positive, and neutral).

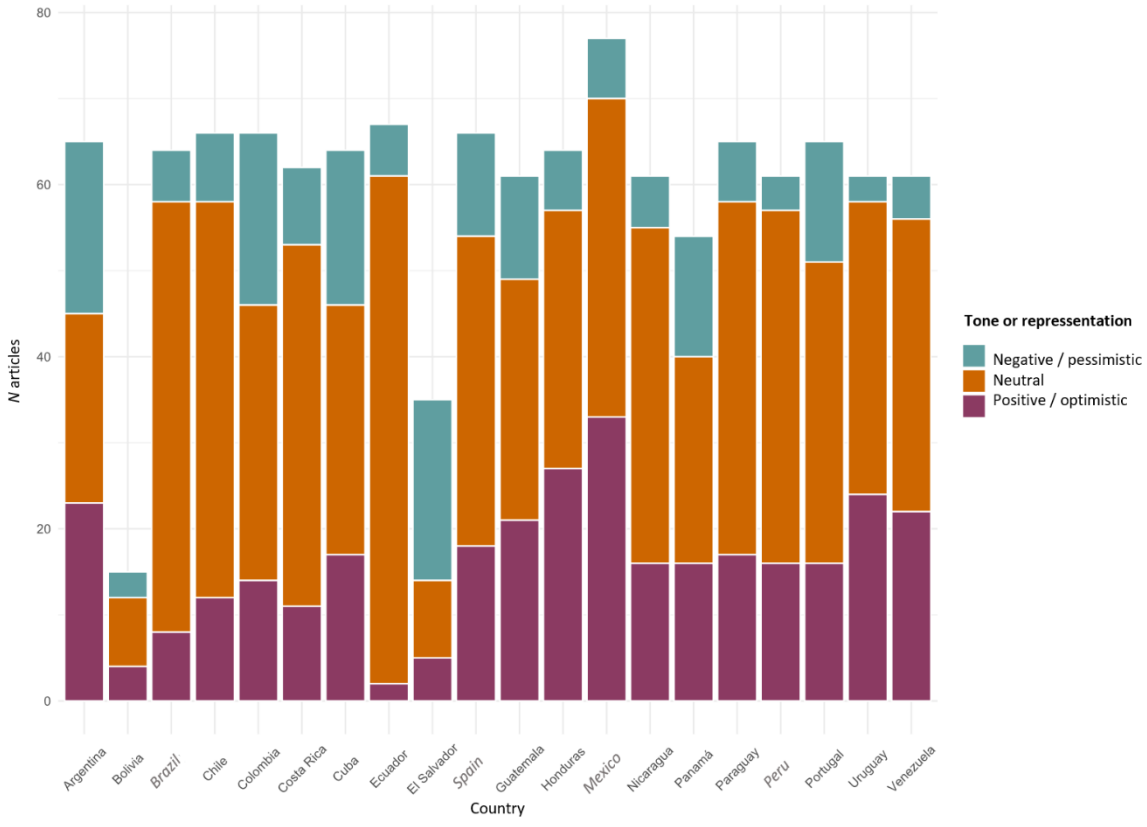


Figure 1. Tone and portrayal of mental health by country

Similarly, there was no significant difference in tone according to the type of disease or disorder, with the understanding that most of the samples analyzed (56%) had a neutral representation. First, a graph was made with all the diseases and disorders and their tones, many of them did not have a representation greater than once mentioned; therefore, for a better visualization and differentiation of diseases that are the most common, all those whose frequency was greater than 3 were taken. The diseases mostly showed a representation with a neutral tone, the only different one being "conduct disorder" which, although it was infrequent, shows that its representation is mostly negative/pessimistic. It can also be observed that the bar with the highest count was given for the notes that did not specify a specific disease but did talk about mental health.

Differences in representation according to the type of diseases and disorders

Taking as a reference those diseases or disorders that obtained more than three reports in the study, and in line with the result explained in Figure 1, most of the journalistic coverage on mental health had a neutral tone, the only different one being "conduct disorder" which, despite being infrequent in the sample, its representation is mostly negative/pessimistic. In the case of "narcissism", "OCD", "Schizophrenia", "Sexual dysfunctions", "Burnout", "Bipolar disorder" and "ADHD", negative or positive tones were not very representative (Figure 2).

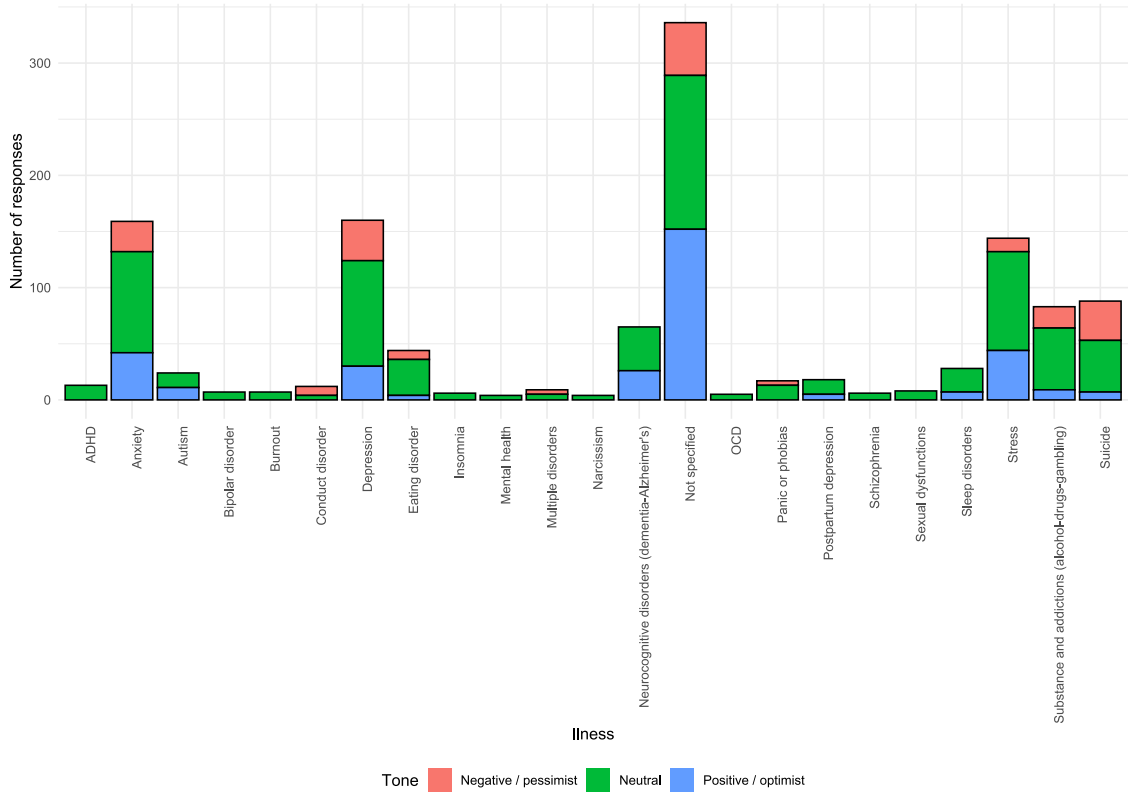


Figure 2. Differences in representation tone according to type of disease or disorder.

Differences in representation according to age and gender

Most of the articles analyzed dealt with adults between 18 and 65 years of age, and the tone was again mostly neutral. Likewise, it was found that for all types of representation, it is not specified whether these adults belong to a specific gender or collective, or do not mention a specific group. For all tones, the notes were directed towards both genders (men and women) (Figure 3).

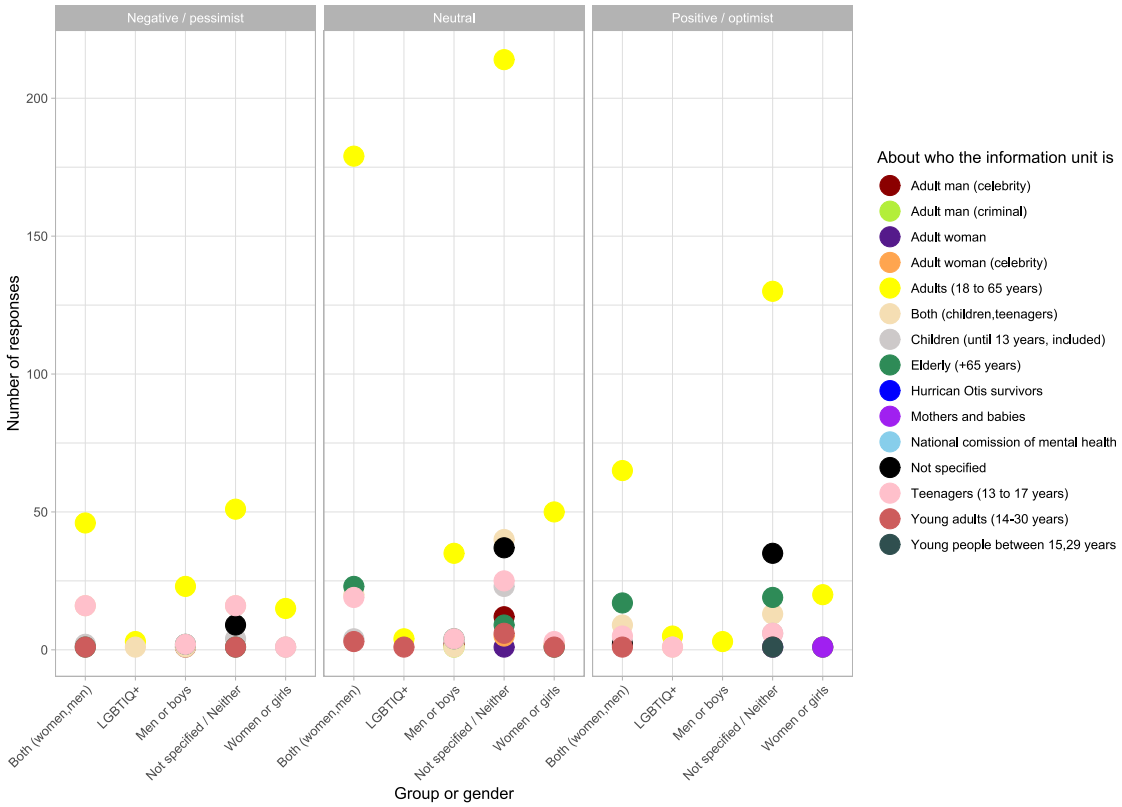


Figure 3. Differences in the tone of representation according to age and gender

Most frequent types of disorders or illnesses in media exposure

The largest number of articles (n=338) did not specify the disease to which they were referring. The diseases with the highest frequency were depression (n=161), anxiety (n=158), stress (n=144), suicide (n=88), substance addiction (n=83), and neurocognitive disorders (n=68). Information on Down syndrome, smoking, posttraumatic stress disorder, and narcissism was the disorder with the least coverage (n=4) (Figure 4).

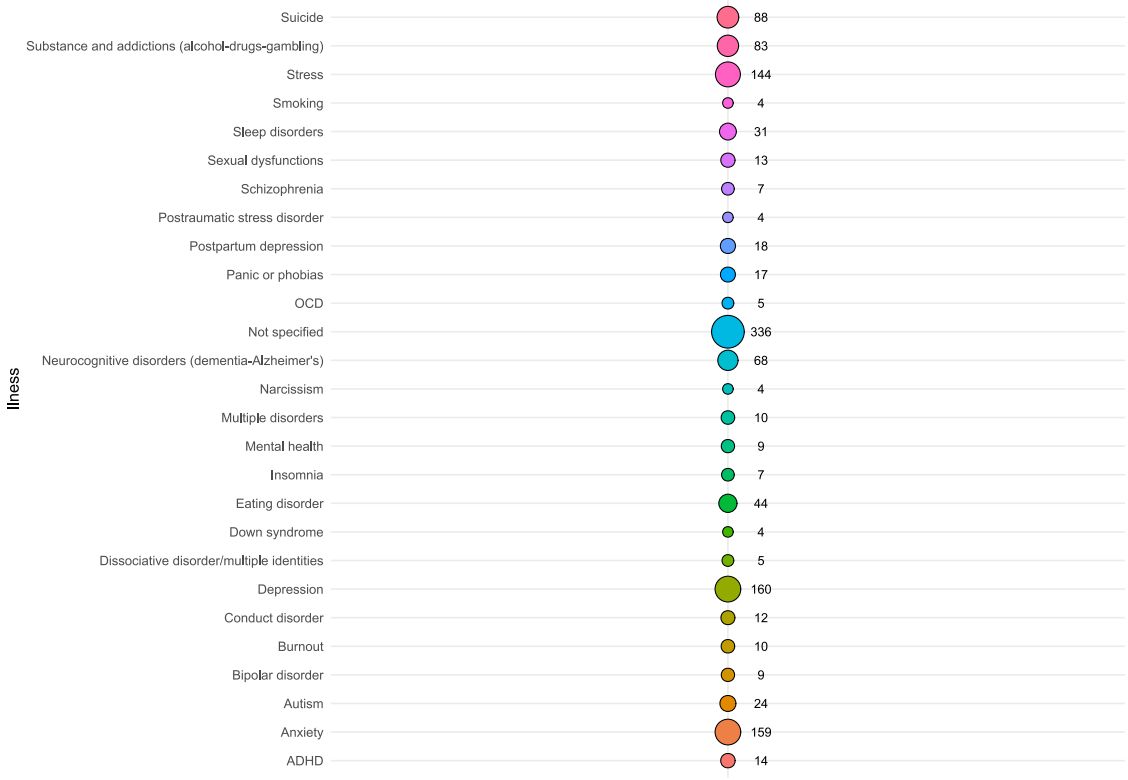


Figure 4. Frequency of reference to disorders or diseases in the sample

Incidence of disorders or illness on specific ages or genders

As shown in Figure 3, most of the diseases, disorders, or disorders have a higher incidence among adults (18–65 years), and in general, it is for both sexes. In the case of neurocognitive disorders, the count is higher for the elderly, which is to be expected since this is where diseases such as Alzheimer's disease and dementia are included. Conditions such as Anxiety, Depression and Suicide also showed significant counts for children and adolescents, as well as in the general public (Figure 5).

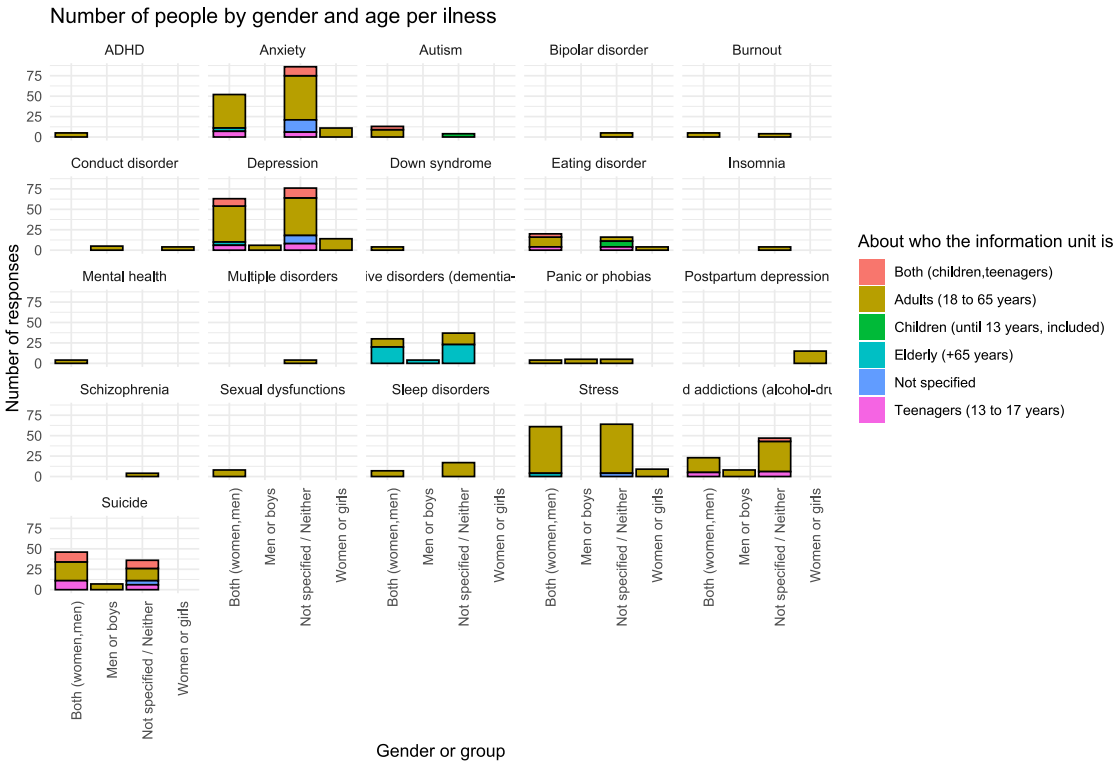


Figure 5. Disorders or conditions according to age and sex

Simplistic disease linkages

In general, the stories do not establish simplistic links, although in 187 reports (15.25%) of the analyzed sample, these links were evidenced, especially regarding the abuse of social networks and social issues, such as poverty or social exclusion. The diseases that can be observed where most simplistic links are made are anxiety, Burnout, Depression, Substance and addiction, and stress.

However, this is likely because there is a greater amount of note given to these diseases than to others, so it does not necessarily mean that they are the only ones that could be linked. Using the above results, the only one that receives some degree of stigmatization and can be viewed simplistically is substance use/abuse and addiction (Figure 6).

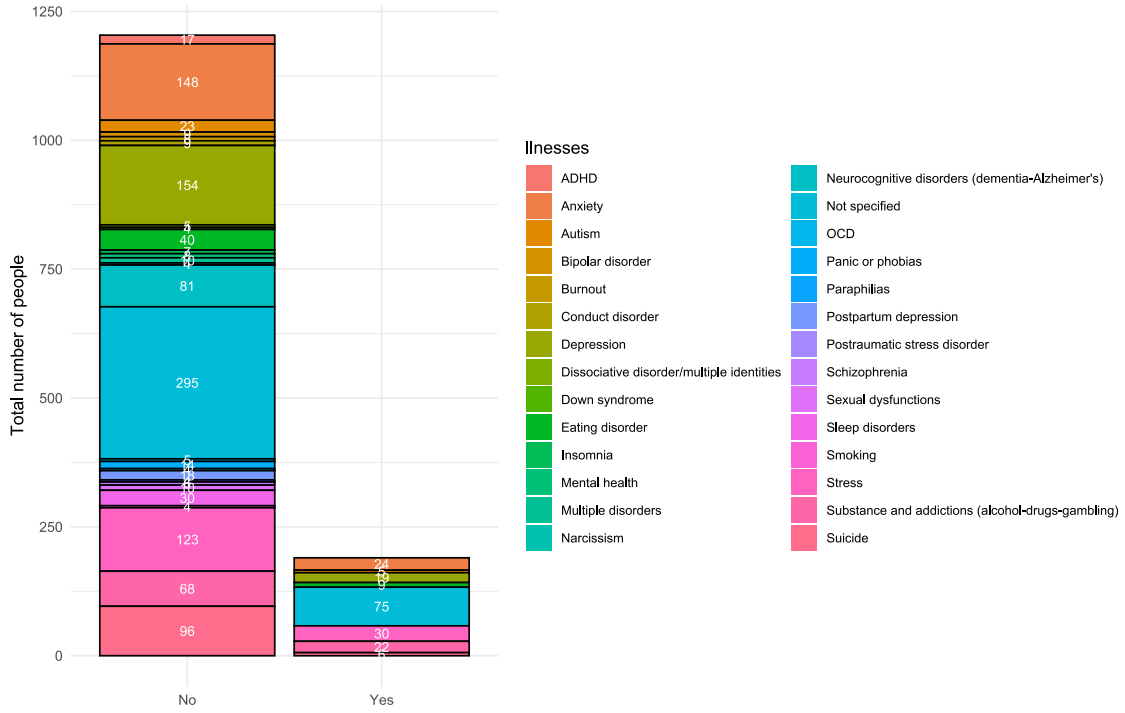


Figure 6. Correlation between simplistic links and type of condition, disorder, or disease.

In general, it may be related to the adult age group (18–65 years), but most likely because it is the group with the highest representation. Similar to the other divisions, there was no clear relationship with age (Figure 7).

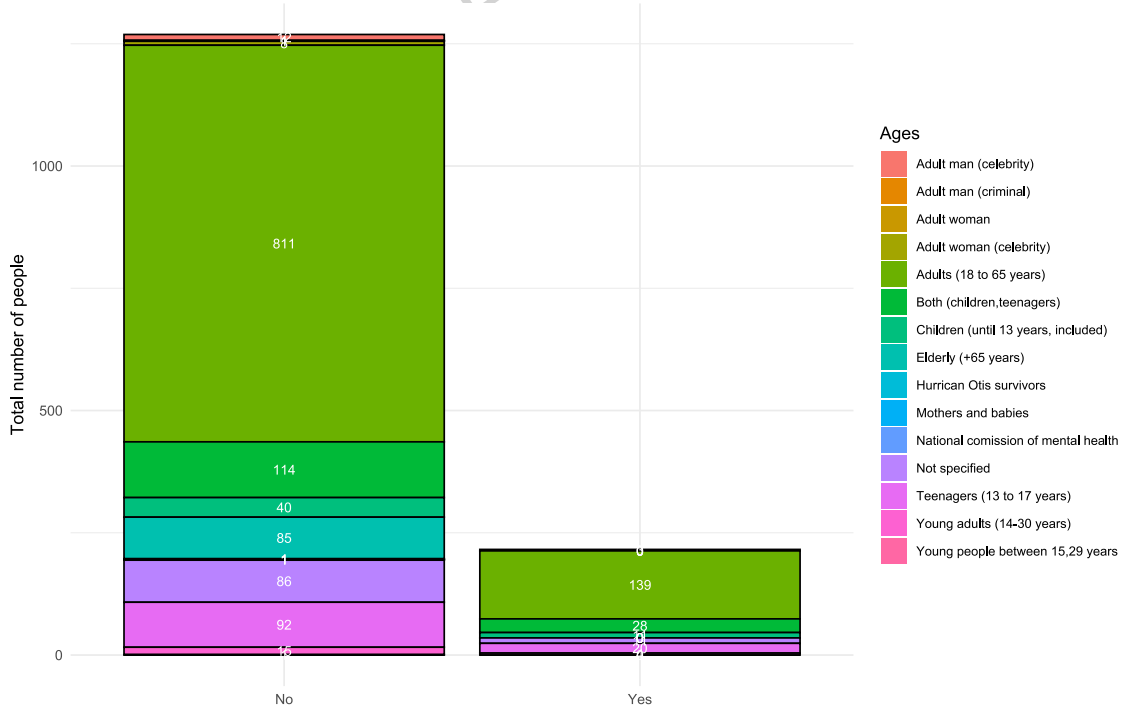


Figure 7. Correlation between simplistic links and age groups.

Regarding the simplistic links between causes of diseases and the absence of expert voices in the information, Figure 8 shows that there

is a difference in the distribution of simplistic links for articles in which experts are cited negatively. Likewise, the notes that cited experts in a mixed manner also contain simplistic links.

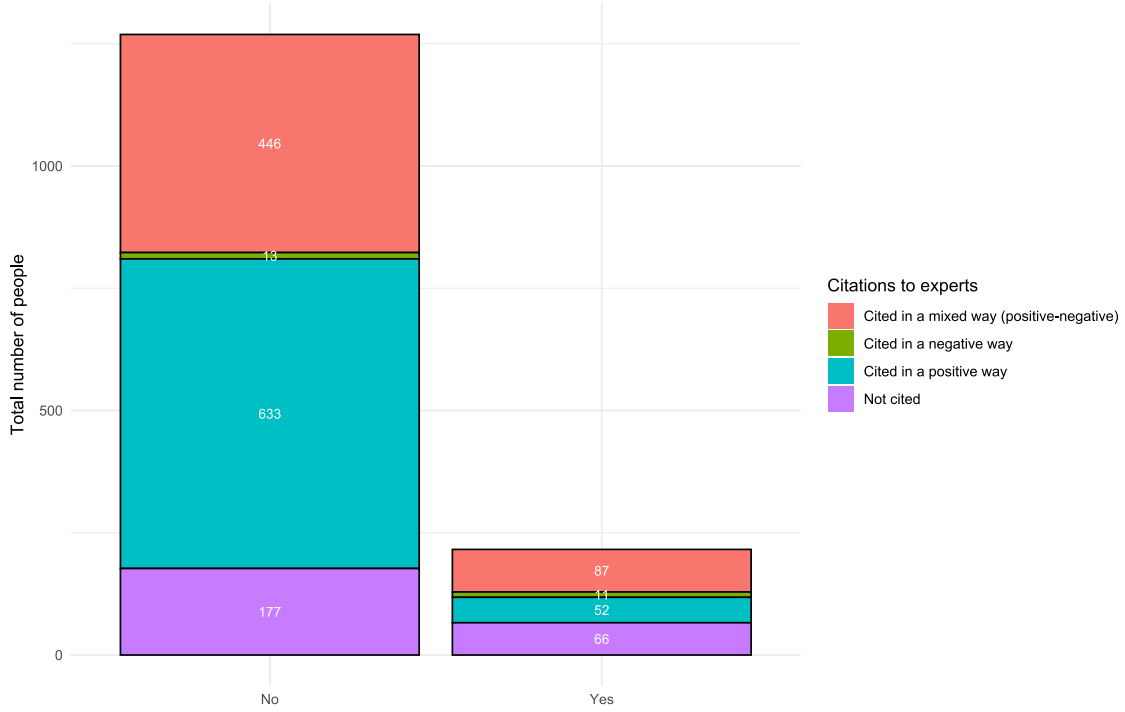


Figure 8. Correlation between simplistic links and absence of experts in information.

Qualitative analysis

Using a qualitative approach, the study identified a series of examples that denote different perspectives on the subject of study in this research. In this sense, for example, the example taken from the Guatemalan newspaper *Prensa Libre*¸ stands out for normalizing mental health and, in this sense, presents an informative piece that invites to face, counteract, or improve these situations through playful content that selects pastimes aimed, among other aspects, to improve emotional well-being and reduce stress or anxiety (Figure 9).

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Figure 9. *Prensa Libre* (Guatemala) April 6, 2023. "These hobbies will help your mental health (their importance and how to choose them)" (https://www.prensalibre.com/vida/salud-y-familia/estos-pasatiempos-le-ayudaran-a-su-salud-mental-su-importancia-y-como-elegirlos/)

However, it is striking that the headline does not complete the action. The sentence alludes to hobbies that "will help" mental health, but does not specify whether the contribution is to prevent, mitigate or identify, among other aspects, diseases or mental health conditions. On the other hand, the pretitle that alludes to "Health" and "Family" is positive insofar as it connects these problems with the family environment, a key aspect for the family group to become aware of and act in a coordinated manner in the face of the aspects that accompany these situations, through choral work.

Within the framework of the study, the title of the newspaper *La Prensa de Nicaragua* brings together a series of elements that synthesize the semantic aspects and approach or journalistic coverage to be avoided. The statement alludes, on the one hand, to mental health "problems"; while, on the other, it alludes to a "stigma", a concept that denotes a mark, imprint or sign of a negative nature (Figure 10). The definition of this term, in which the headline connects with "problems", alludes to a set of unfavorable attitudes or beliefs that generally discredit or reject a person or group because they are considered different. Stigma is a concept that brings us closer to prejudice. On the other hand, the structure "that still persists" emphasizes the continuity, in negative, of this situation, while generalizing it as a whole and obviating its nuances to the whole of Latin America.

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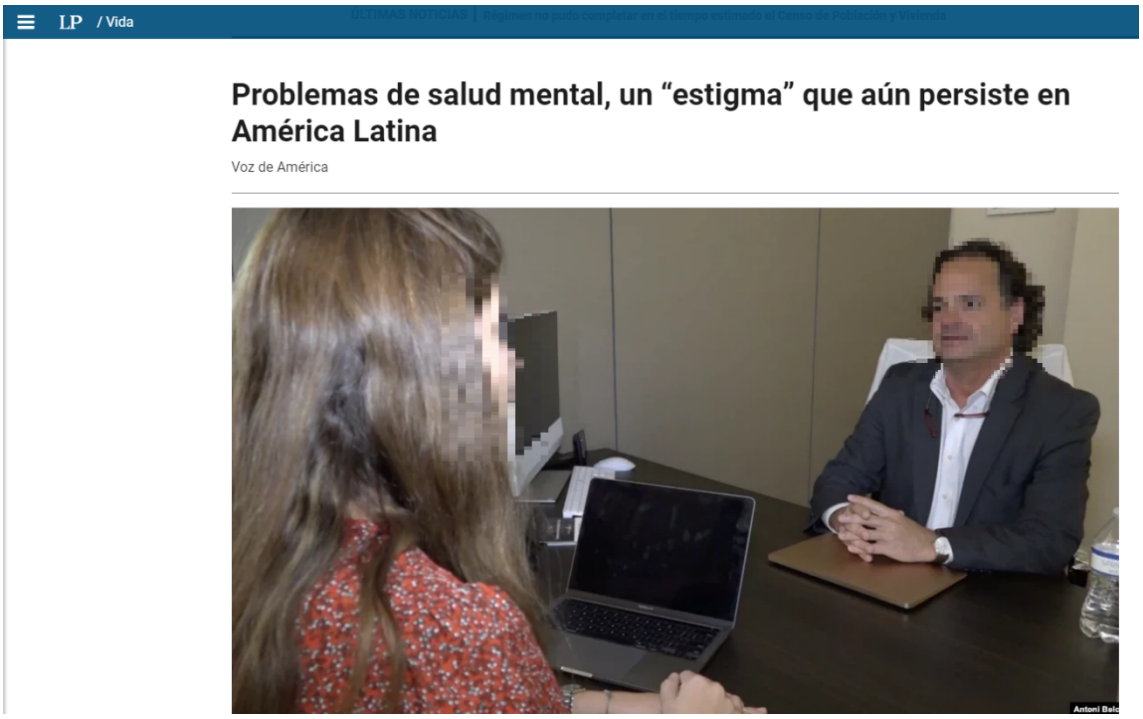


Figure 10. *La Prensa* (Nicaragua) October 25, 2023. “Mental health problems, a "stigma" that still persists in Latin America” (https://www.laprensani.com/2023/10/25/vida/3226826-problemas-de-salud-mental-un-estigma-que-aun-persiste-en-america-latina)

Along the same lines, the Colombian newspaper *El Tiempo* presents a headline that connects the suspect of shooting with mental problems. This syntactic and semantic structure in a thematic area marked by the murder of 22 people inevitably leads to the establishment of a cause-and-effect relationship between the situation, in terms of mental illness, of the potential murderer and the 22 victims of the event (Figure 11). This example highlights the difficulty of constructing headline elements on this type of issue and, at the same time, underlines the importance of sensitizing journalists to the negative effects that this type of narrative can generate among readers.



Figure 11. *El Tiempo* (Colombia), October 26, 2023. "He is Robert Card, U.S. shooting suspect: Ex-military and with mental problems" (https://www.eltiempo.com/mundo/eeuu-y-canada/masacre-en-ee-uu-avanza-la-busqueda-del-sospechoso-esto-se-sabe-819875)

Simplistic links are another high-risk aspect of news coverage related to mental health. In this sense, the news piece in the Chilean newspaper *La Tercera* presents a headline that exposes stress and anxiety as disorders that negatively affect people's longevity (Figure 12). Therefore, it is necessary to emphasize the importance of presenting these issues using a more rigorous and less generalist approach. Although the title, owing to aspects related to the economy of language, entails these risks in all thematic areas, journalistic work should denote a more solid commitment and deontological rigor when it comes to information on aspects related to health. Without ignoring the risks and negative consequences of these mental health-related ailments, the milestone is focused on being able to articulate narrative proposals that arouse interest in knowing, avoid generalizations based on stigma and prejudice, and help raise awareness among the general public.

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Figure 12. *La Tercera* (Chile) July 20, 2023. "Stress and anxiety can take years off your life: Here's what they do to your body" (https://www.latercera.com/tendencias/noticia/el-estres-y-la-ansiedad-pueden-quitarte-anos-de-vida-esto-es-lo-que-provocan-en-tu-cuerpo/GJOPHC64IRDWHC5RBXX4KQSCH4/)

These simplistic links are also observed in the piece in the newspaper *El Comercio* of Ecuador, which presents therapeutic reading as an "alternative" to "heal" and "teach". In this case, however, a more constructive purpose is evident in the content approach, although, once again, the obligation to present succinct content leads to propositions that, from a simple and general perspective, offer improvable approaches that do not contribute to sensitizing users to the nuances and particularities of the subject (Figure 13). As in the previously selected examples, in this case it is important to point out that, according to several reports and studies, many readers read only the headline elements of some news items. Therefore, the writing process must focus on the importance of rigor, context, and association of ideas, among other aspects.



Figure 13. *El Comercio* (Ecuador) April 25, 2023. (https://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/la-lectura-terapeutica-gran-alternativa-para-sanar-y-ensenar.html)

Discussion

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In the last decade, different sectors have made efforts to normalize the presence of mental illnesses in society. In this sense, the present study, in contrast to the postulates of Nairn [6] and Romero-Rodríguez et al. [7], shows that journalistic work presents a coverage of mental illness that goes beyond the framing centered on conceptions based on the social construction of insanity. In this regard, this study reinforces the results obtained by Carrasco et al. ~~[10]~~ [15] and Grandón et al. ~~[11]~~ [16] that highlight a more sensitive coverage of these issues and a more rigorous commitment to the multiplicity of cases, stories, and scenarios.

Although not entirely positive, media coverage of mental health in Ibero-America is predominantly presented in a neutral tone, with negative framing being comparatively residual. Although aggregate findings show neutrality as the predominant tone, nuances emerged in conditions such as conduct disorder or substance use, which exhibited higher levels of negative representation, suggesting potential disorder-specific patterns. This resonates with international research showing that while common conditions such as depression or anxiety are increasingly framed in sympathetic or recovery-oriented terms, severe disorders like schizophrenia or bipolar disorder remain strongly associated with violence and crime coverage [14–16]. Such contrasts highlight the importance of interpreting neutrality with caution, as aggregated analyses may under-represent the persistence of stigma in specific diagnostic categories.

Overall, positive coverage exceeded negative coverage by roughly ten percentage points (27% vs. 17%), yet aggregate neutrality warrants caution given disorder-specific nuances. In this sense, it is confirmed that the Ibero-American media has a better approach to mental health issues than those of other countries where the person suffering from mental disorders or illnesses is stigmatized [4-8]. Although not entirely positive, the information is presented in a neutral tone, with the negative approach being very residual, in line with Mascayano et al. [14]. However, it should be noted that the results presented in this study on negative tone coverage are superior to those found by Carrasco et al. [15] and Grandón et al. [16], so there could be a possible upward trend in the negative approach.

Although depression and anxiety were often presented neutrally, evidence from other contexts suggests that psychosis and schizophrenia continue to be strongly linked with violence and crime coverage [14, 15, 16]. Our aggregated analysis may therefore under-represent disorder-specific stigma. As Nairn [6] emphasizes, portrayals of ‘madness’ are not objective reflections but socially constructed categories, and our findings demonstrate that while

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neutrality dominates, certain severe conditions continue to be represented through stigmatizing frames

On the other hand, current research, such as that of Gu and Ding [9], shows that media coverage of mental disorders responded mostly to negative approaches that were presented in connection with sociodemographic indicators. However, in the present study, the representation of mental health in the analyzed media responded to a neutral tone. Thus, negative inertia is questioned and, at the same time, an interesting reflection on the value of approaching these phenomena from approaches that connect proximity with globality is inaugurated.

In this way, it will be possible to identify particular scenarios, as well as trends or dynamics of a broader spectrum, an aspect that connects with the findings of Mascayano et al. [14], which highlighted the differences in the representation of mental health in the Ibero-American media and in other enclaves. Furthermore, although these studies have pointed out the role of social networks as decisive platforms in mental health communication, it would be appropriate to promote research that reflects on the type of formats, dynamics of dissemination, and interactive, multimedia, or transmedia components as aspects that could play an important role in improving journalistic coverage of these issues.

Finally, the study supports the results of the Global Health Data Exchange [3], which identifies anxiety, depression, and attention deficit disorders, among others, as the most common ailments in the news units analyzed. However, this study showed that hyperactivity, which has been mentioned in several studies and reports as one of the most prominent disorders, does not have a major presence in media coverage in Ibero-America.

This study is not without limitations. First, by aggregating a wide range of mental health conditions into a single analytical framework, our findings may dilute disorder-specific patterns of stigma. Prior research shows that severe conditions such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or addictions are often disproportionately linked with crime and violence in the media [10–12], whereas more common conditions like depression or anxiety may receive more sympathetic coverage [13]. Our overall neutral findings may therefore mask these important nuances.

Second, our unit of analysis was the news article as a whole, which does not capture micro-framings between headlines and body text, where stigma can be more pronounced. Third, we did not systematically disaggregate intersections between mental illness and crime reporting, which remains a key site of stigmatization identified

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in previous European and North American studies [10, 12]. Addressing these issues in future research would allow for a more fine-grained understanding of disorder-specific portrayals and their social implications.

Fourth, our findings of predominantly neutral portrayals should be interpreted with caution when contrasted with evidence from European and North American contexts, where neutral coverage often masks highly stigmatizing reporting of severe mental illnesses, particularly in relation to crime and violence [10–12]. This highlights the need for future research to conduct disorder-specific analyses that go beyond aggregated categories, as stigma may operate differently across cultural settings and diagnoses.

Conclusions

The study of the representation of mental diseases and disorders in the Ibero-American media context offers a series of conclusions of interest both in the field of research and in the dynamics of transfer, information, and awareness raising among the citizenry as a whole. In this line, the study identifies the need and, at the same time, the relevance of promoting informative coverage that develops the contextualization of this type of issue and also connects with life stories that facilitate the understanding, comprehension, and empathetic exercise of readers or users who consult this type of content.

Regarding the previous point, and according to the results derived from the research, it is important to point out that the predominance of a neutral representation of mental health in the media should not be considered, in all cases, as a positive aspect. In this regard, it is important to promote a more proactive approach that focuses on the specific aspects and details of each situation without articulating homogeneous or generalizing narratives. The fact that more than half of the information units do not present a positive or negative bias in the information on mental health issues invites us to reflect on the formative and sensitizing role of the media, especially in contexts marked by misinformation and digital noise.

On the other hand, the study concluded that negative perceptions (around 17% of the sample) connect this topic with delinquency, drug abuse problems, and stigmatization of diseases or disorders. This component inaugurates an interesting line of research that delves into the connections between these issues at the narrative level projected from the media ecosystem itself.

In addition, although the study did not identify significant differences according to the type of disease or disorder, "conduct disorder", although infrequent, had the highest negative/pessimistic

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representation. This aspect emphasizes the importance of promoting research that, in a more specific way, analyzes the type of general storytelling that the media develops about this ailment. In addition, it is important to understand the motivations that lead journalists and users to build coverage from this type of approach.

The study also shows that in the coverage of these topics, news articles are directed towards both genders (men and women). However, in a context marked by the emergence of new and diverse sexualities, it would be opportune to carry out work that connects the coverage and information on mental illnesses with the specificities that, from the point of view of sexuality, have been consolidated in the global panorama. In particular, it would be opportune to connect this type of study with the LGTBIQ+ movement and, in this way, delve into the presence, on the one hand, and the conception, on the other hand, of this thematic issue.

Among the diseases most frequently mentioned in media coverage, depression, anxiety, suicide, addiction, and neurocognitive disorders stand out. However, it would be interesting to connect this descriptive work with a hybrid or qualitative approach that would identify and explain the possible motivations for the prominent presence of some ailments over others. Along the same lines, problems such as Down syndrome, smoking, posttraumatic stress disorder, and narcissism present negligible coverage. In this case, this study opens the possibility of investigating whys and wherefores, on the one hand, and the type and focus of these pieces focused on a less prominent group of mental health-related ailments in the media.

This research indicates that diseases, conditions, or disorders have a higher incidence in adults (18–65 years old), while diseases such as Anxiety, Depression and Suicide also show a significant number for children and adolescents, as well as for the general public. In relation to this point, by way of conclusion, it is important to reflect on the type of narratives deployed around this type of stories and, in this sense, the possibility of proposing coverage or stories that go beyond the segmentation by age, giving issues related to mental illnesses a more holistic, transversal and global scope.

Finally, to the extent that this research identifies connections between the object of study and aspects such as the abuse of social networks and social issues such as poverty or social exclusion, it would be valuable to reflect on the possible interactions between disciplines and methodological approaches to thread how the use or abuse of screens connected to cyberspace is represented in journalistic coverage. In addition, it is important to identify whether journalistic pieces are limited to descriptive work or present an adequate contextualization

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from a propositional approach that connects with the journalism of solutions.

Furthermore, this conclusion is directly linked to the relevance of amplifying the presence of these issues in the curricula of journalism and communication careers (in their different specialties) to confer competencies and skills to professionals in this field to inform, train, and raise awareness of solvency, rigor, and ethics on this set of topics.

List of abbreviations

LMICs: Low- and Middle-income Countries.

WHO: World Health Organization.

Declarations

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Ethics Approval

Approval by an ethics committee was not necessary because the present study was of a documental nature.

Consent to participate

Not applicable.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Availability of data and materials

The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Author’s Contributions

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Study conception and design: LMRR, ST; collection of data: JM, DR, BCA; statistical analysis: LMRR, ST, BCA; interpretation of data/results: ST, BCA; manuscript drafting: LMRR, ST, JM, DR, BCA. All the authors have read and approved the manuscript for submission.

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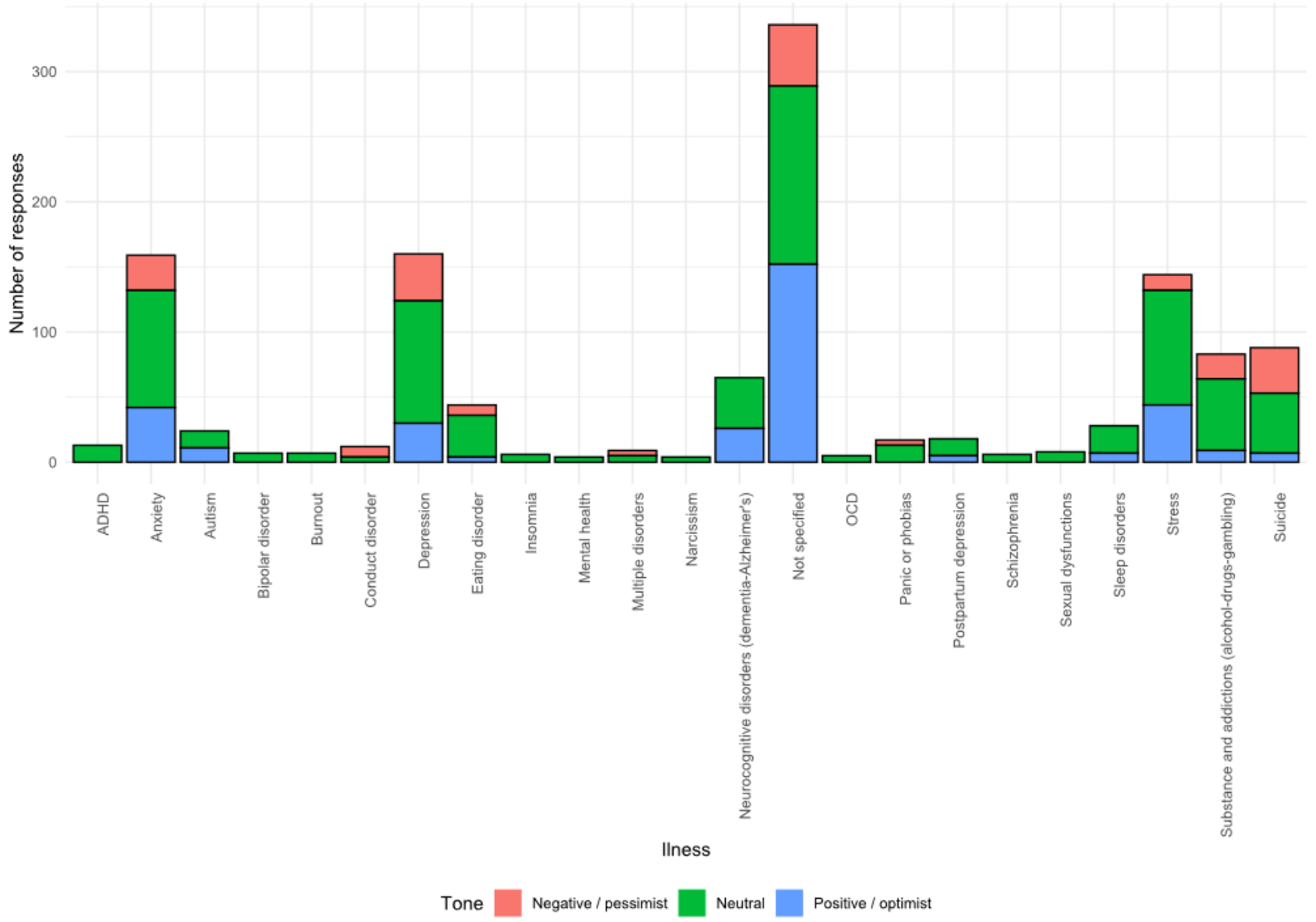
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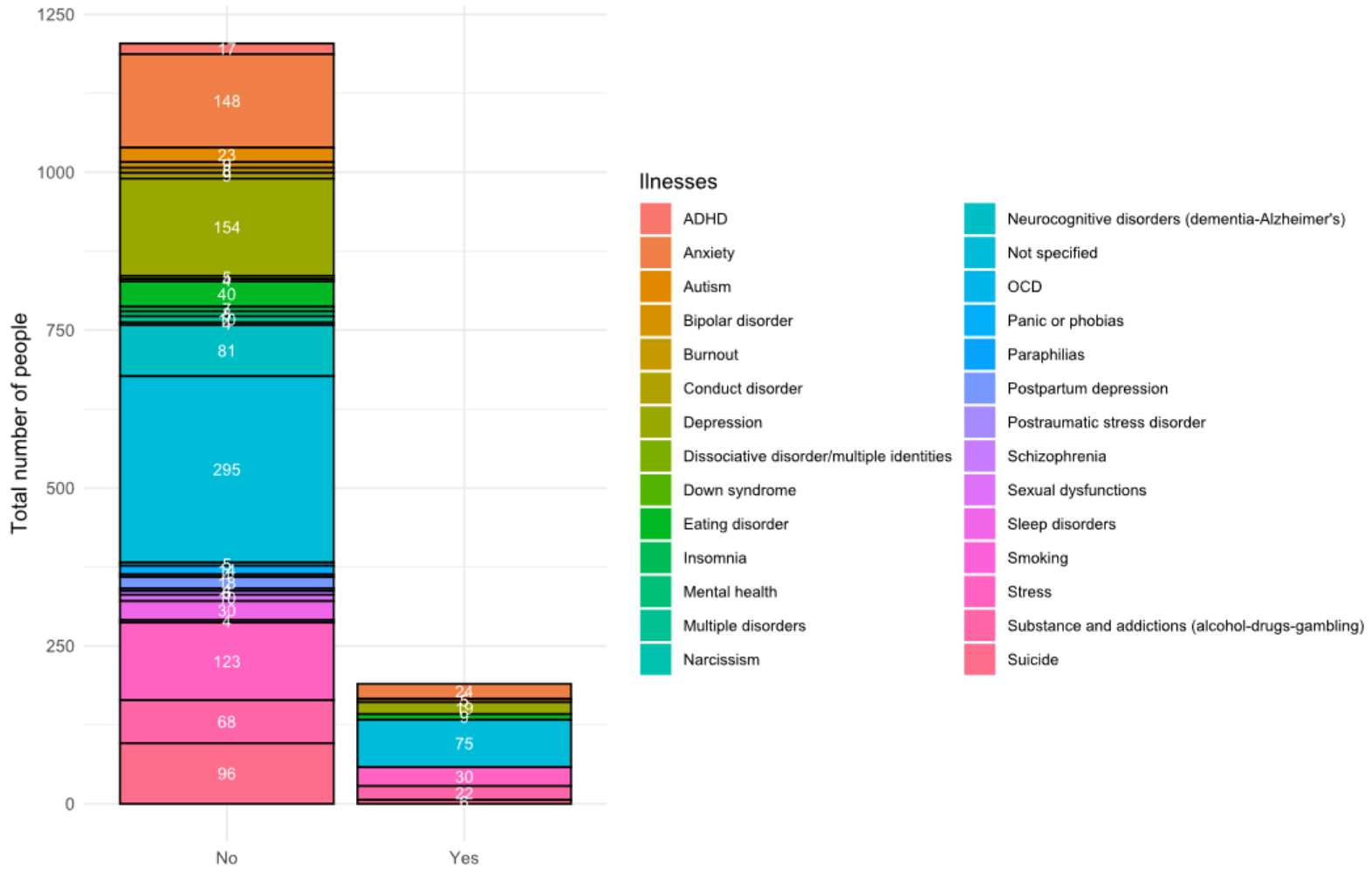
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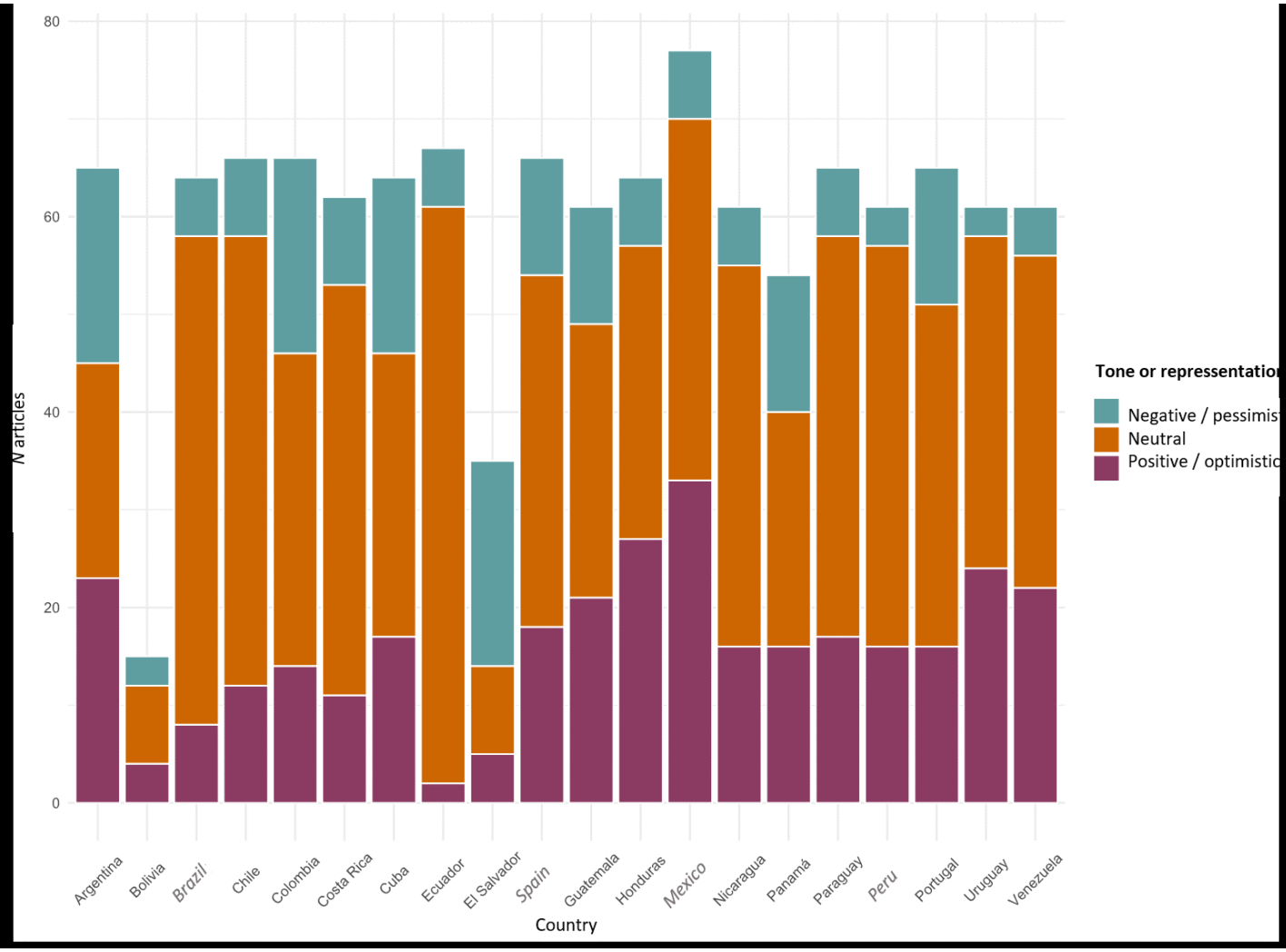
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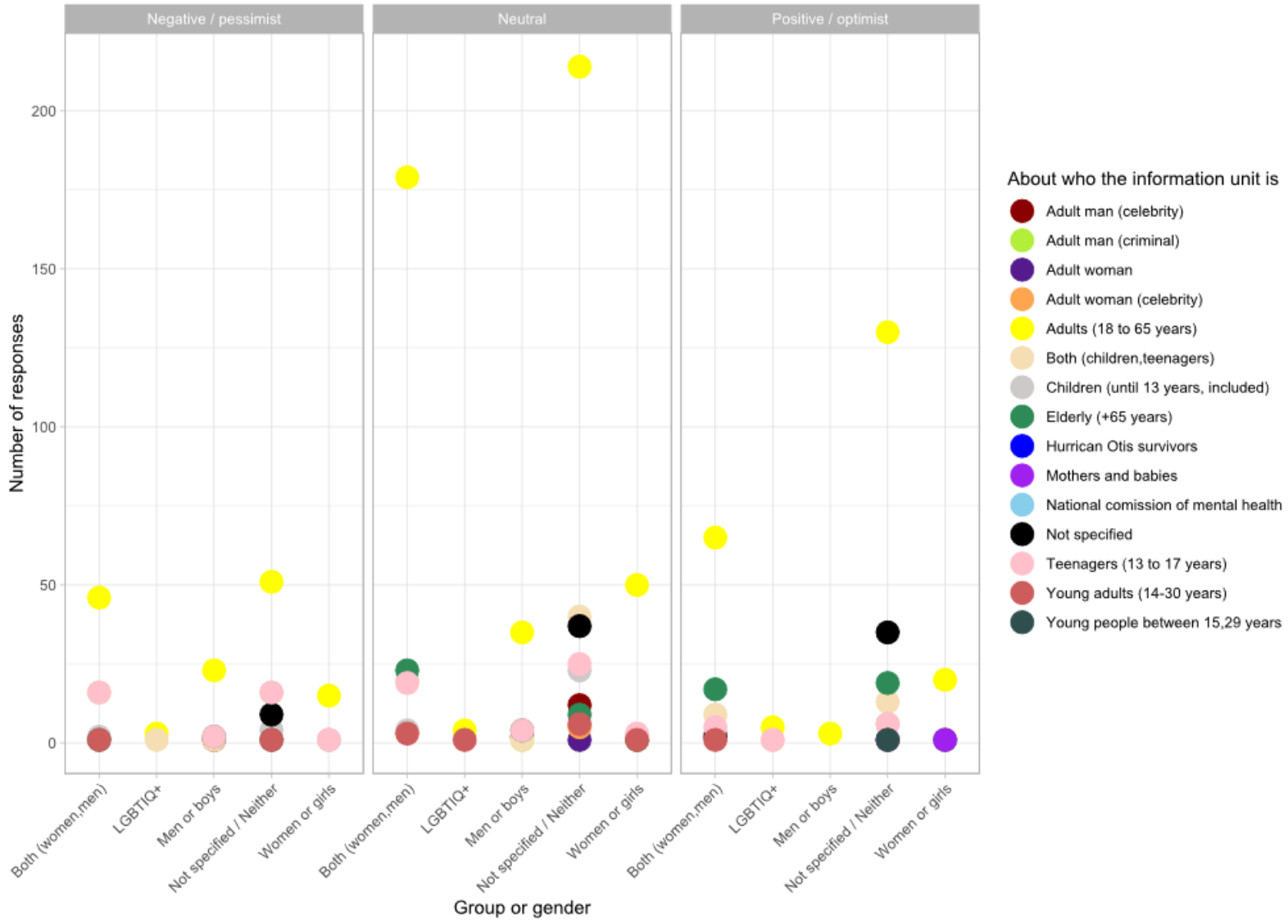
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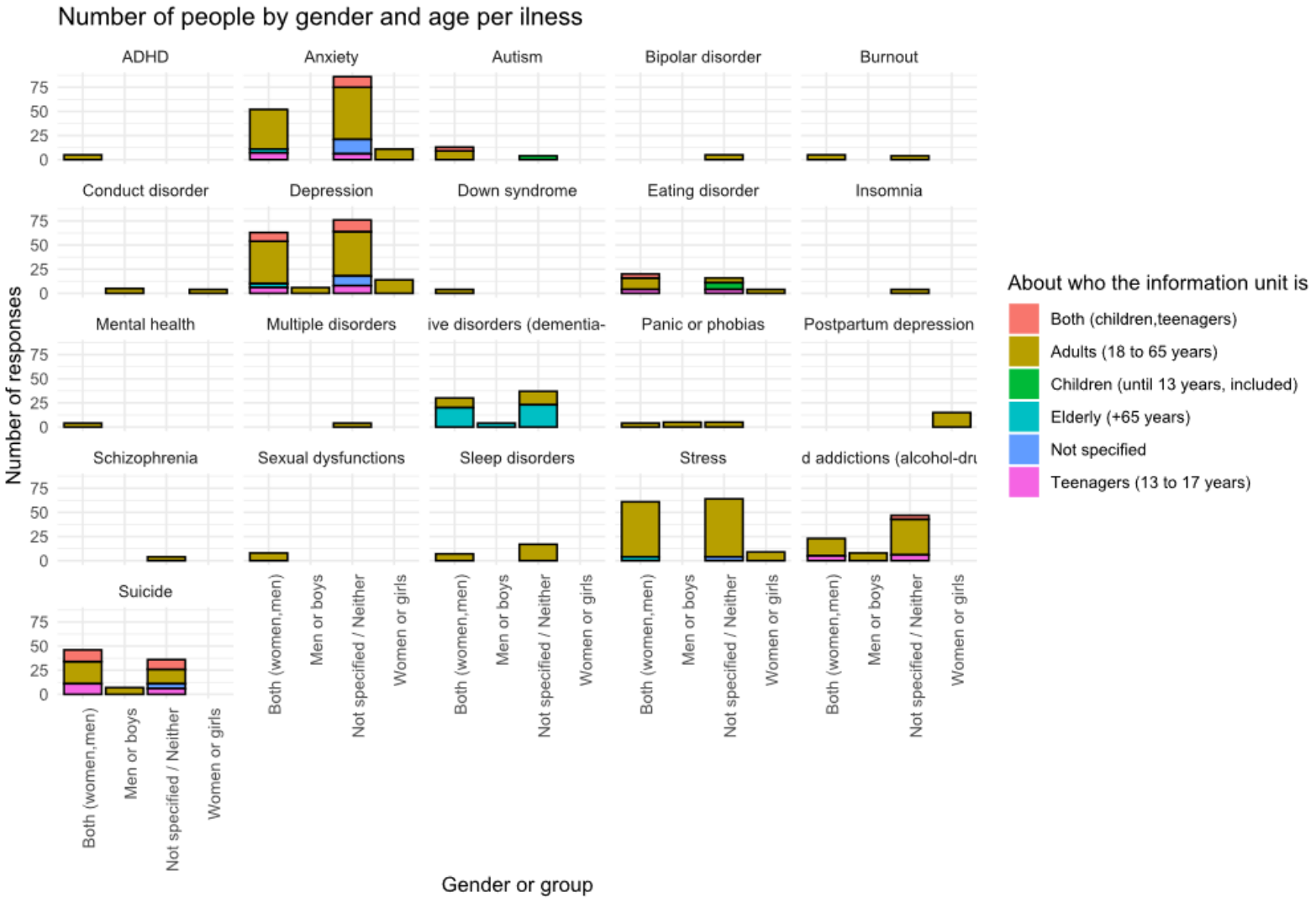

Number of responses
300
200
100
0
ADHD
Anxiety
Autism
Bipolar disorder
Burnout
Conduct disorder
Depression
Eating disorder
Insomnia
Mental health
Multiple disorders
Narcissism
Neurocognitive disorders (dementia-Alzheimer's)
Not specified
OCD
Panic or phobias
Postpartum depression
Schizophrenia
Sexual dysfunctions
Sleep disorders
Stress
Substance and addictions (alcohol-drugs-gambling)
Suicide
Illness
Tone
Negative / pessimist
Neutral
Positive / optimist

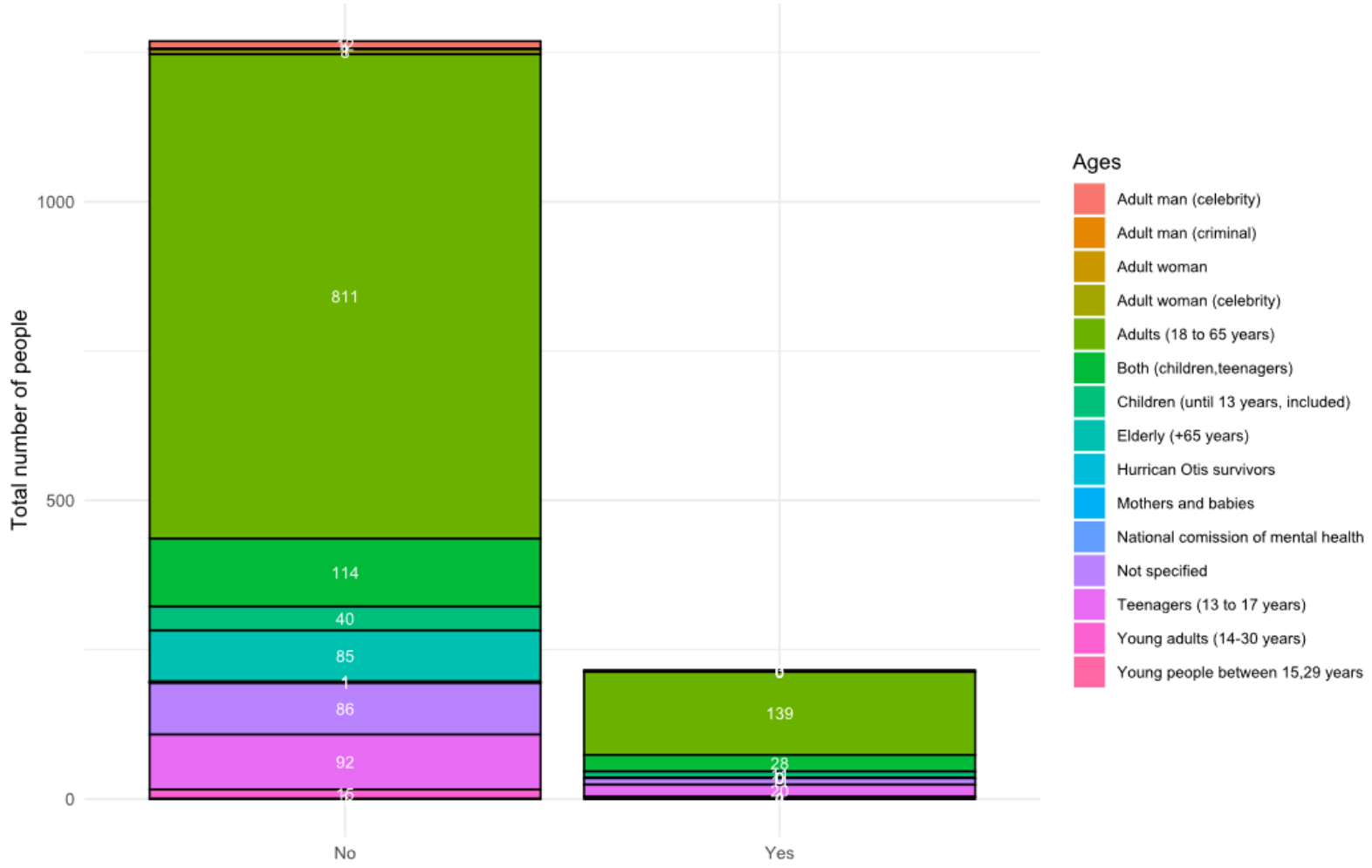

Illness
Suicide 88
Substance and addictions (alcohol-drugs-gambling) 83
Stress 144
Smoking 4
Sleep disorders 31
Sexual dysfunctions 13
Schizophrenia 7
Postraumatic stress disorder 4
Postpartum depression 18
Panic or phobias 17
OCD 5
Not specified 336
Neurocognitive disorders (dementia-Alzheimer's) 68
Narcissism 4
Multiple disorders 10
Mental health 9
Insomnia 7
Eating disorder 44
Down syndrome 4
Dissociative disorder/multiple identities 5
Depression 160
Conduct disorder 12
Burnout 10
Bipolar disorder 9
Autism 24
Anxiety 159
ADHD 14

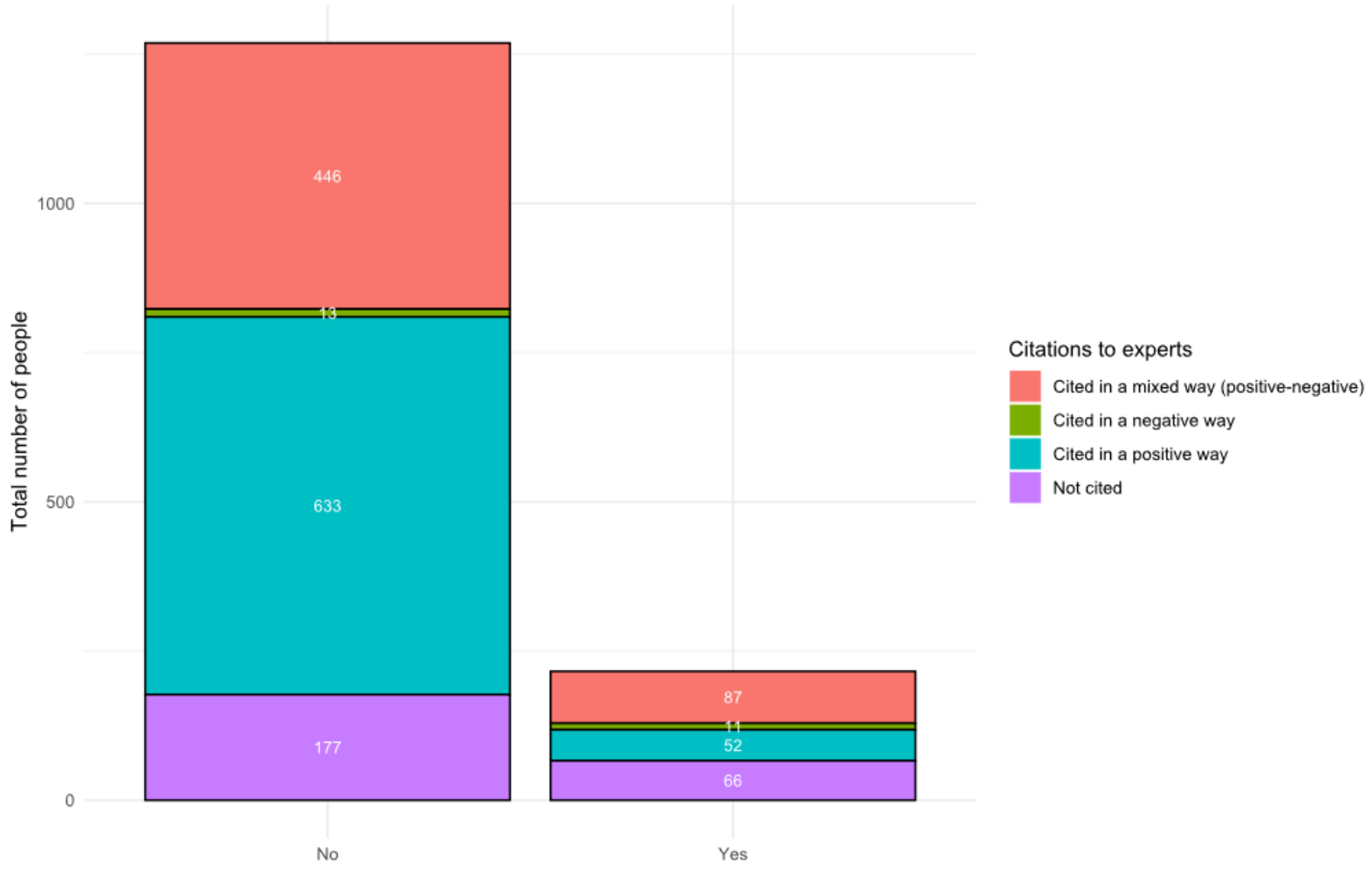

1250
1000
750
500
250
0
Total number of people
No
Yes
17
148
23
154
40
81
295
30
123
68
96
24
75
30
Illnesses
ADHD
Anxiety
Autism
Bipolar disorder
Burnout
Conduct disorder
Depression
Dissociative disorder/multiple identities
Down syndrome
Eating disorder
Insomnia
Mental health
Multiple disorders
Narcissism
Neurocognitive disorders (dementia-Alzheimer's)
Not specified
OCD
Panic or phobias
Paraphilias
Postpartum depression
Postraumatic stress disorder
Schizophrenia
Sexual dysfunctions
Sleep disorders
Smoking
Stress
Substance and addictions (alcohol-drugs-gambling)
Suicide


80
60
40
20
0
N articles
Argentina
Bolivia
Brazil
Chile
Colombia
Costa Rica
Cuba
Ecuador
El Salvador
Spain
Guatemala
Honduras
Mexico
Nicaragua
Panamá
Paraguay
Peru
Portugal
Uruguay
Venezuela
Country
Tone or representation
Negative / pessimis
Neutral
Positive / optimistic


Negative / pessimist
Neutral
Positive / optimist
Number of responses
200
150
100
50
0
Both (women,men)
LGBTIQ+
Men or boys
Not specified / Neither
Women or girls
Group or gender
About who the information unit is
Adult man (celebrity)
Adult man (criminal)
Adult woman
Adult woman (celebrity)
Adults (18 to 65 years)
Both (children,teenagers)
Children (until 13 years, included)
Elderly (+65 years)
Hurrican Otis survivors
Mothers and babies
National comission of mental health
Not specified
Teenagers (13 to 17 years)
Young adults (14-30 years)
Young people between 15,29 years


Number of people by gender and age per ilness
ADHD
Anxiety
Autism
Bipolar disorder
Burnout
Conduct disorder
Depression
Down syndrome
Eating disorder
Insomnia
Mental health
Multiple disorders
ive disorders (dementia-
Panic or phobias
Postpartum depression
Schizophrenia
Sexual dysfunctions
Sleep disorders
Stress
d addictions (alcohol-dru
Suicide
Number of responses
0
25
50
75
Both (women,men)
Men or boys
Not specified / Neither
Women or girls
Gender or group
About who the information unit is
Both (children,teenagers)
Adults (18 to 65 years)
Children (until 13 years, included)
Elderly (+65 years)
Not specified
Teenagers (13 to 17 years)


Total number of people
1000
500
0
811
114
40
85
1
86
92
15
139
28
No
Yes
Ages
Adult man (celebrity)
Adult man (criminal)
Adult woman
Adult woman (celebrity)
Adults (18 to 65 years)
Both (children,teenagers)
Children (until 13 years, included)
Elderly (+65 years)
Hurrican Otis survivors
Mothers and babies
National comission of mental health
Not specified
Teenagers (13 to 17 years)
Young adults (14-30 years)
Young people between 15,29 years


Total number of people
1000
500
0
446
13
633
177
87
11
52
66
No
Yes
Citations to experts
Cited in a mixed way (positive-negative)
Cited in a negative way
Cited in a positive way
Not cited

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La lectura terapéutica, gran alternativa para sanar y enseñar

La lectura terapéutica usa el poder de la historias para sanar temores, emociones y enseña a enfrentar diversas situaciones .

25 de abril de 2023 - 19:34



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Solicitud - PDF - lromero2021@ | Estos pasatiempos le ayudarán

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INICIO › SALUD Y FAMILIA

SALUD Y FAMILIA

Estos pasatiempos le ayudarán a su salud mental (su importancia y cómo elegirlos)

Las actividades que realizamos en nuestro tiempo libre ayudan al bienestar emocional, como disminuir el estrés y ansiedad, ser más creativos y pacientes.

Andrea Jumique Castillo
6 de abril de 2023 | 08:00h

Compartir



Buscar

6:41
05/06/2024

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ÚLTIMAS NOTICIAS | Régimen no pudo completar en el tiempo estimado el Censo de Población y Vivienda

Problemas de salud mental, un “estigma” que aún persiste en América Latina

Voz de América



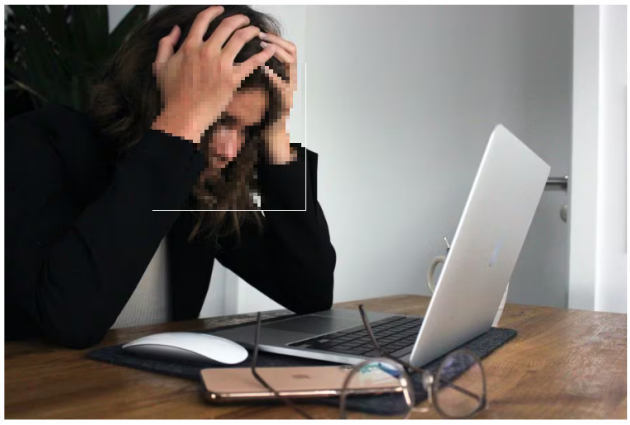
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publicidad

TENDENCIAS Salud Psicología ...

El estrés y la ansiedad pueden quitarte años de vida: esto es lo que provocan en tu cuerpo

Las repercusiones negativas a nivel físico y emocional de estos trastornos son bastantes. Una de ellas, es el envejecimiento prematuro.



Nicole Iporre **20 JUL 2023** 01:16 PM Tiempo de lectura: 2 minutos

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EL TIEMPO

EEUU

Él es Robert Card, sospechoso de tiroteo en EE. UU.: exmilitar y con problemas mentales

