

## FRAMING OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF WOMEN'S MAGAZINES IN MALAYSIA

SHARIFAH SHAHNAZ SYED BAHARUDDIN & HAMIDAH ABD HAMID

School of Communication, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia

### ABSTRACT

This article reports a qualitative content analysis study that examined how mental health issues were portrayed in Malaysian women's magazines. It identified the frames and sources of mental health issues used in three most popular English language women magazines. Thirty-six issues of *Cleo*, *Female and Her World*, were analyzed and 18 mental health related articles were identified and were subjected to a detailed framing analysis. The main findings revealed that issues of mental health were generally positively framed. The mental health articles provided definitions of the issue and explained further about its nature, causes, symptoms, consequences, coping mechanisms and societal relevance in a positive and encouraging manner. A positive frame that was absent in earlier reviewed studies, the notion of hope, was also found. Negative frames such as "criminally insane killer or lunatic-on-the loose" were not apparent in the portrayal.

**KEYWORDS:** Media Framing, Mental Health Issues, Magazine Portrayals of Women

### INTRODUCTION

Women play different roles in life. They have to face a multitude of challenges as mothers, wives, professionals, daughters and caregivers. To fulfill these roles, women need to know how to cope with these responsibilities physically as well as mentally. Women's magazines can serve a public education function through health or risk communication. The published mental health related articles can contain useful information such as managing time well to avoid stress, being positive about challenges in life or facing fears by acknowledging them.

The Third Malaysian National Health Morbidity Survey 2006 by the Ministry of Health, Malaysia showed that 11.2 percent of Malaysians suffered from mental health problems. In 2004, the Ministry of Health found that depression was the second most common problem among Malaysian women while anxiety was ranked at number seven (<http://www.moh.gov.my>). Noor (1999), in her study of Malaysian women's roles and their well-being had identified certain patterns. Women were happy in their spouse-role due to the support from their spouses but in some instances they suffered from strained relationships with their spouses.

The same was reported for work-roles. Although the work-role was generally found to be rewarding, it also had its problems. These experiences influenced their well-being because when work problems intrude into family life, women were more emotionally unstable and agitated with their family. Single women were more affected by work experience and married women were more affected by family relationships.

The findings above show that women are exposed to various psychosocial factors that threaten their mental well-being. Therefore, it is crucial that women be given information on how to protect themselves from being mentally unhealthy and how to deal with situations related to mental health. It will not only benefit the women but also people within their care and around them. How magazines portray mental health in their articles would potentially influence women's perception and behavior towards the issue. Positive frames would encourage more women to understand the nature of mental health and the behaviors and attitudes that should be adopted in order to be mentally healthy. Negative

frames may build negative perceptions of mentally unhealthy people and may deter them from seeking assistance from the appropriate authorities. Our study seeks to answer three main questions:

- **How do Top Malaysian Women Magazines Frame Mental Health Issues?**

There are three possibilities of framing mental health issues either positively, as neutral or negatively. Positive frames would mean referring to the nature of mental health issues, its causes, treatments, effects and the mentally unhealthy in a positive light without presenting the message in a threatening manner. Negative frames would mean presenting information of mental health issues and people affected by them in depreciating, dangerous and threatening manner with the usage of words with negative connotations such as lunatics, insane, crazy, violent killer and paranoid schizophrenic. Neutral frames refer to frame which convey messages that would not benefit the reader or portray mental health issues in depreciating, dangerous and threatening manner. Thus our study sought to find out the kind of portrayals women's magazines give to mental health issues.

- **What are the Frames Used Other than those Identified in Past Studies?**

Past studies by Blood (2002) and Sieff (2003) have identified negative frames of mental health issues in the media such as, "mental illness make people violent", "mental illness make people more likely to be criminals" "people with mental illness are incapable of taking care of themselves", "people with mental illness should be jailed", "mentally ill is unkempt, mumbles", "depressed people are dangerous", "criminally insane killer" so on and so forth. Overall, they carry the message of danger, fear, violent and dependence. Besides investigating whether the same frames are used in mental health articles in Malaysian women's magazines our study also attempted to see if there are other frames dissimilar from the above mentioned.

- **What are the Sources Quoted in the Mental Health Related Articles?**

Sources quoted in the mental health articles would be identified to see whether the magazines refer to psychologists, psychiatrist or other mental health professionals such as life coaches and motivators or normal people to provide views or opinions on mental health issues. It would be interesting to see what the sources in our women's magazines say with regard to issues in mental health.

### **The Content Analysis Study**

Altogether, 36 issues of *Cleo*, *Female* and *Her World* published in 2006 were analyzed. There were 12 issues published by each magazines throughout the year. Articles in the three most popular magazines were considered to be mental health related if they mention about mental health issues; stress/anxiety, mood disorders, gender identity disorder, cognitive disorder, motivation/emotion, violence/abuse, substance abuse/addiction, personality disorders, psychotic disorders or eating disorders. This was inclusive of coverage of nature, causes, symptoms, coping mechanisms or coping strategies.

Excluded from this study were articles of personal stories which relates to only one person's experience with no discussion of the nature of the mental health issues or establishment of causal relationship. These articles were excluded because they were very limited and confined to only one person's experience.

After the selection of relevant articles, each article was read several times to determine the emerging frame and a coding protocol was used to guide the analysis. The categories in the protocol were opening paragraphs, definition, causes, signs and symptoms, consequences, coping mechanisms, source and societal relevance. Data were then recorded and analyzed accordingly based on the nature of portrayal, structure, elements and functions of frames.

## Media Framing Theory

Framing is defined by scholars as a process of selecting some aspects of perceived reality and making them more salient in communication text. According to Entman (1993), the four general functions of framing are problem definition (determine what a causal agent is doing with what costs and benefits), problem diagnosis (identify the forces creating the problem), moral judgments (evaluate causal agents and effects) and remedies to the problem (offer and justify treatments for the problems and predict their likely effect). These four functions can coexist in the same media presentation, and all four may not be present in every frame (Sieff, 2003:263).

According to Pan and Kosicki (1993) there are two ways of structuring the frames; either by using syntactical structures (usage of particular words or phrase on the headlines) as in news stories or thematic structures (hypotheses or causal sequences) as in feature stories. Some elements that can be observed in the syntactical and thematic structures are metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, depictions and visual images (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, as cited in Sieff, 2003).

Metaphors refer to symbols used to describe something. Sieff (2003) described an example of a metaphor in a newspaper report that refers to a schizophrenia, Goldstein, who pushed a stranger in front of an incoming subway train in New York as a "ticking time bomb". According to Sieff, exemplars are historical examples from which lessons are drawn. Goldstein became an example of the violent and untreated people with schizophrenia. Catchphrases are terms often used like a tag to label something. Sieff (2003) found the term "subway pusher" was used to describe Goldstein in headlines and lead paragraphs while depictions often used for Goldstein were "unkempt", "shuffling" and "mumbling". Visual images are like icons used to represent something. Kendra Webdale, the victim, was portrayed as young, attractive and smiling (Sieff, 2003).

Past studies have identified both positive and negative frames of mental health (Blood, 2002, Corrigan et. al., 2005, Sieff, 2003). Examples of positive frames are "There are solutions/help available", "Not all schizophrenics are criminals", and "Mental illness is not caused by genes alone", whereas examples for negative frames are "Mentally ill people pose as danger to the community", "Mental illness causes criminal acts", "Mentally ill people are a public nuisance", "People who are mentally unstable are unsociable" and "Mental illness is in the genes". In this study, mental health issues was conceptualized as the issues related to the well being of the mind of an individual which translates into healthy behaviors that do not pose as risks either to himself or the people around him. Mental health does not merely mean the absence of mental illness. Being mentally healthy means being able to have a positive outlook in life and being able to function to a person's fullest potential.

## Analysis of Articles

Mental health related articles were analyzed based on a coding protocol of 10 categories. They were titles of articles, opening paragraphs, definitions, causes, signs and symptoms, consequences, coping mechanisms, sources, societal relevance and others

- **Titles of Articles:** Are the first communications to the readers about the article's focus. Articles' titles were considered positive if they mention about mental health issues in a positive light without threatening the reader. Negative portrayal of the articles titles include messages which would terrify or threaten the readers by giving negative description of a mental health issue. Articles' titles with neutral portrayal are those which did not present encourage, threaten or look down on mental health conditions.
- **Opening Paragraphs:** Are the first few paragraphs of an article that attracts the readers' attention to the focus of

the article. It usually starts with an anecdote, a statistic, a question or a direct statement of the mental health issue. Positive portrayals in opening paragraphs include stating mental health issues in the form of stories which showed that there are people out there who are in the same position as the reader or encouraging the reader to take a look at their current situation and further improve it. Negative portrayals in opening paragraphs include introducing the topic in threatening or negative manner. Neutral portrayals of opening paragraphs refer to the first few paragraphs which showed no positive or negative description of mental health issues.

- **Definition:** Of a mental health issue is not necessarily found in the earlier part of the article, it could also be in the middle of an article. Definition refers to words used to describe the nature of a mental health issue or answer the question of ‘what’. Positive portrayal of mental health issues refer to the presence of definitions in the article which explains the nature of mental health issues. Negative portrayal of definitions would be words used to describe mental health issues that connote negative meaning.
- **Causes:** Are reasons attributed to a mental health condition or related issues. It could be attributed to biological factors such as inherited condition through the genes, brain damage, or hormonal imbalances. At the same time there could also be reasons given based on things or events that happen around an individual. For example peer pressure, losing a job or being diagnosed with a terminal illness. Causes are considered positively portrayed when the articles give attribution to the actual causes without stating that there is nothing that could be done about it. Negative portrayal of causes refer to articles’ attribution to a particular cause and then stating that it is impossible to do anything about it.
- **Signs and Symptoms:** Refer to the description of conditions of a person with mental health issue either of physical nature or emotional. Positive portrayal of signs and symptoms involves describing the signs and symptoms as they are. Negative portrayal of signs and symptoms refer to describing the condition and looking down on people associated with it.
- **Consequences:** Refer to the effects of a mental health issue. It described what could possibly happen due to a particular state of mental health. Positive portrayal of consequences refer to stating the consequences in a non-threatening manner. Negative portrayal of consequences refer to presenting the consequences in such a way that it amplifies the magnitude of mental health effects.
- **Coping Mechanisms:** Refer to remedies or solutions of mental health issues. For example, “The three steps to happiness are...” It suggests ways of how to overcome the problem and achieve better peace of mind and happiness. Such a portrayal is considered positive. However, if the coping mechanism stated that in order to be mentally healthy, a person has to go for self-destructing rituals or seek advice from uncertified healers, then it is considered as a negative portrayal.
- **Source:** Refers to whom or where the articles’ writers go to or who is quoted in order to obtain information regarding mental health issues. The source could be psychiatrists, psychologists, life coaches, motivators or just laypeople. As far as the source is concern, information from certified mental health professional is considered positive. However, what is said by the source could be coded either positively, negatively or neutral. Neutral portrayal refers to statements of sources that were neither positive nor negative. If the information given by the source contributes towards encouraging, educating and increasing mental health awareness of readers, then it is considered positive. If an article’s source gives information which could lead to aversive interpretation (intimidating or discouraging) of mental health issues on the part of the reader, then it is considered negative.

- **Societal Relevance:** Refer to information in the articles regarding what relevance the society has to mental health issue, how mental health issue is affected by or affecting the society. What can the society contribute to improve the quality of mental health of the society members? Positive portrayal refers to emphasis on society's role in improving individuals' mental health. Negative portrayal refers to the helplessness of society in doing anything to help improve the quality of mental health. Neutral portrayal refers to the irrelevance of society in mental health issues.
- **Others:** Refer to any other frame that emerged that are not apparent in previous studied reviewed.

### Overall Findings

There were eighteen mental health related articles found in 36 issues of *Cleo*, *Female* and *Her World* published in 2006. Out of the eighteen articles, seven articles were from *Cleo*, five articles were from *Female* and six articles were from *Her World*.

### Positive Frames

Our study found a frame that was not apparent in any of the studies reviewed before, that is the notion of hope. The mental health articles analyzed which presented the notion hope not only discussed about the nature of a particular mental health issue, the causes or consequences but most importantly the articles also mentioned that it is possible to improve the conditions and there is hope in attaining good mental health. This is considered a positive frame because it informs the reader that all is not necessarily lost.

Six articles from the women magazines expressed hope and positive outlook towards mental health issues either in the earlier part of the articles or towards the end. It shows that there is hope for the mentally unhealthy to be mentally healthy. For examples:

**Article 1:** "With proper treatment ... OCD can be controlled and normal life resumed." (*Cleo*, March 2006: 111)

**Article 5:** "Get with the slow movement, get successful, get real: The era of fake stress is over  
(*Cleo*, September 2006: 175)

**Article 8:** "The good news is, when feelings of resentment are identified, people can begin seeking help."

Article 11: "It's alright to be vulnerable, to express fear or self-doubt." (*Female*, December 2006:98)

**Article 15:** "There are ways to push the boundaries of our genetic set-point, and it involves knowing the difference between the three paths to happiness: the pleasant life, the good life and the meaningful life."  
(*Her World*, May 2006: 138)

**Article 18:** "Addiction is a lifelong problem, but recovery possible." *Her World*, October 2006: 133)

**Article 8:** "The good news is, when feelings of resentment are identified, people can begin seeking help".  
(*Female*, May 2006, p 70)

Although in the earlier part of article 8, it was mentioned that feeling angry and keeping it inside would affect your health, the article did not stop there. Instead, towards the end of the article, it was mentioned that once you are aware of such feelings, it is possible to come out of it and improve your mental health.

### **Besides that, Other Positive Frames Were also Found in the Mental Health Articles**

#### **Informational**

The articles provide useful information regarding the nature, causes, symptoms, consequences and coping mechanisms in a positive way with the purpose of educating readers and improving their choices concerning mental health. For example:

**Article 7:** “Two things must happen for anyone to start living in the now – the past must be cut loose and the future must be left alone.” (*Cleo*, December 2006, p 246)

#### **Encouraging**

The articles encourage readers to make decisions in life that would help change their mental conditions and improve their quality of life. The messages conveyed through these articles were intended to urge readers to be optimistic lead them to taking actions that would prevent them from being mentally unhealthy. For example:

**Article 6:** “Acknowledge your fear, share your concern with someone, and approach fear in small steps.” (*Cleo*, September 2006, p 175)

#### **Proactive-Steps/Solution Oriented**

The articles listed out to the readers the steps to be taken in order to overcome their mental health problem or to improve the quality of their mental health. For example:

**Article 1:** “Don’t be ashamed and understand that your obsessions are the results of a real disorder. See your GP to get referral to a psychiatrist. Face your fears and try to take action.” (*Cleo*, March 2006, p 111)

#### **Socially Relevant**

The articles included the role of society in contributing towards improving the mental health of people. Importance of society in helping in terms of providing support to individual’s mental health was given emphasis. For example:

**Article 18:** “If your addiction is not severe, if you genuinely want to quit, if you have a supportive environment, then it is possible.” (*Her World*, October 2006, p 133)

#### **Warning-Oriented**

Messages that were conveyed in these articles also included risks that were involved in mental health issues. The purpose of the messages was to educate the readers of the importance of being mentally healthy and beware of risks that could affect their mental health stability. For example:

**Article 11:** “Unresolved fear can result in an anxiety disorder.” (*Female*, December 2006, p 98)

**Negative frames** identified in this study were:

#### **Debilitating**

The articles conveyed the message that mental health issues can be devastating and weakening to an individual. For example:

**Article 1:** “...for people with OCD, these thoughts and behavioral patterns occur so frequently and cause such a high level of anxiety that they significantly interfere with normal life.” (*Cleo*, March 2006, p 111)

### Paralyzing

The articles mentioned that a person would not be able to be a fully functioning individual when he is affected by mental health problems. For example:

**Article 2:** "It can burst upon you in the open street, paralyse you across a crowded room. But unlike the panic you feel when a huge spider scuttles around your bathroom, a true panic attack wells up out of nowhere and drowns you in the sea of sheer terror for no obvious reason." (*Cleo*, April 2006, p128)

### Helplessness

The articles conveyed the message that when a person is affected by a mental health condition, he would lose control of his life and his daily activities would also be affected. For example:

**Article 1:** "Several years ago, Jane, 29, used to spend most of her evenings worrying about whether or not the oven is switched off. After she had cooked dinner, she would put her hands behind her back and stare from a distance to make sure she hadn't turn it on again. Finally she would go watch TV – but more often than not she would start thinking about the oven and the checking routine would begin again." (*Cleo*, March 2006, p 111)

### Magnitude Amplifying

Articles which amplify the magnitude of mental health effects would terrify the readers of possibilities related to being mentally unhealthy. It would drive them away from seeking solution or helping people who are affected by it. For example:

**Article 3:** "The consequence (of Superwoman Syndrome) : we are having a massive identity crisis." (*Cleo*, April 2006, p 169)

### Intimidating

Articles which intimidate readers were articles that describe the mental health issues and its solution in such a way that people who might want to seek help would feel that it is an uphill task. For example:

**Article 11:** "According to Webb, this step is scary because you may think you can't survive the frightening outcome, either emotionally or physically." (*Female*, December 2006, p 98)

There were also messages which were framed neutrally with no direction either towards educating and improving mental health or depreciating and demeaning mental health issues. For example:

**Article 8:** "Sarah and Leonie were college roommates who graduated from the same faculty with business degrees in the same year. Outgoing Sarah immediately landed a job of her dreams. With a package that offered broad career prospects, Sarah was thrilled. Six months later, Sarah recommended Leonie, who was still job-hunting, for a position that opened up in her company." (*Female*, May 2006, p 70)

### Due to Space Constraints, we would like to Focus Just on the Portrayals of a Few Categories: The Opening Paragraphs and Consequences

Out of the 18 opening paragraphs analyzed, the study found positive frames in five articles, negative frames in eight articles, and neutral frames in six articles. Frames which portrayed mental health positively mainly talked about the importance of mental well-being by highlighting the conditions that could contribute to a person's mental health. The articles also encouraged readers to take positive steps towards improving their mental health.

Examples of positive frames are;

“If you can’t stomach **failure, you are not alone...**” (*Female*, Dec 2006, p102)

“I asked a friend of mine during a drink-a-thon at her house. It was a simple enough question, or so I thought. Considering that she had recently married her boyfriend of nine years after after a rocky courtship, I thought the quick answer would be “yes”.”Instead...she mused: “If you were to count the number of things I am unhappy about, it would probably outweigh the number of things I’m happy about. But does that make me an unhappy person? Honestly, I don’t know. But I can tell you that my **mood has improved since I got married.**” (*Her World*, May 2006, p138)

Examples of the negative frames are:

“Some say PMS stands for **Psychotic Mood Swings** or **Permissible Men Slaughter**...others call it **Punish My Spouse**...That’s how **badly Pre-Menstrual Syndrome (PMS) affect us.**” (*Female*, September 2006, p 86)

“Depression is a condition one generally associates with an adult who is **overworked, highly stressed, deeply despondent due to work pressure or marital problems or having suicide tendencies.** Alarmingly however, more and more children are getting comfortable on their shrinks’ couches and statistically, the **numbers paint a rather bleak picture.**” (*Her World*, February 2006, p 154)

One article was considered positive as well as negative because both portrayals were found within the opening paragraph;

“It is hard to believe that such a little word could cause such massive angst, but **fear can be totally debilitating.** Here’s how to **get past it and max your potential** starting now.” (*Cleo*, September 2006, p175)

Other opening paragraphs were considered neutral as they did not show any particular direction of mental health portrayal.

Elements of metaphors such as ‘sea of sheer terror’ and ‘hooked on drugs’ were found in negative portrayals. Catchphrases were found in negative portrayals as well for example phrases used to describe the effects of Pre-Menstrual Syndrome, such as ‘Psychotic Mood Swings’ or ‘Permissible Men Slaughter’ or ‘Punish My Spouse’. These were tags attached to the syndrome and they were meant to describe the way women behave towards their spouses during this period. However, catchphrases were also found in positive portrayals such as ‘happiness is a choice you make’. Depictions of mental health were normally used in negative portrayals such as ‘worrying’, ‘self-doubt’, ‘burst upon’ and ‘uncertain’.

Generally, we concluded that the first few sentences of the opening paragraphs were more of asking and coaxing readers to continue reading the whole story instead of introducing the issue in a disaster-waiting-to-happen style, unlike the “killer was a allowed to roam free” frame found by Blood (2002).

**Coping mechanisms** are what we can do in order to eliminate the problem or improve a situation. Solutions given in the articles analyzed involved taking medication for a particular mental illness or unhealthy mental state such as extreme sadness, or taking positive outlook in life and acknowledge and rationally assess problems. Articles which provided solutions or suggestions of how to deal with a particular mental illness or negative mental state focused on not only acknowledging the problems’ existence but more importantly the articles encourage readers to take proactive steps in improving their mental health. All portrayals of coping mechanisms in the articles were considered positive because readers were encouraged to take actions in order to overcome their mental health problems. For example:



**Article 1:** “**Don't be ashamed** and understand that your obsessions are the results of a real disorder. See your GP to get referral to a psychiatrist. Face your fears and try to take action” (*Cleo*, March 2006, p 111)

**Article 3:** “The most often used (coping with panic disorder) – and least desirable – are tranquilizers and alcohol. Others include shopper's relaxation, potential escape and positive thinking.” (*Cleo*, April 2006, p 169)

**Article 12:** “**Change your perspective**; see your glass as half full, not half empty.” (*Female*, December 2006, p.102)

Three dominant frames can be seen in the articles. The coping mechanisms provided were ‘encouraging’, ‘informational’ and urging the readers towards taking ‘proactive steps’ to overcome their mental problems or to improve their mental health. Most of the articles focused on self-coping of mental health issues. Others encouraged friends and family to provide support as well.

Negative portrayals of coping mechanism such as asking the person to stay at home and hide, or saying that there is no way a particular mental condition can be changed or healed, were not found in the articles.

This is a major difference between news articles, where a problem is left ‘hanging’ (risks and dangers are highlighted without providing solution) as found by Blood (2002), and feature articles analyzed in this study where problems are identified and solutions provided.

## DISCUSSIONS

### How did Malaysian Women's Magazines Frame Mental Health Issues?

After analyzing all 18 articles of mental health issues in Malaysian women's magazines (*Cleo*, *Female* and *Her World*), it is found that the feature articles were generally framed positively and provided information that was sufficient and extensive. The articles covered mental health issues in terms of nature, causes, symptoms, consequences, coping mechanisms, sources and societal relevance with additional information on future hopes or possibilities. The contents of the message sent across to the readers through mental health related articles in Malaysian women's magazines were **positive, encouraging, balanced and hopeful**. This is because feature articles usually provide whole description of mental health issues in hypothetical style or by showing causal relationships.

Frames of positive portrayals that emerged from the analysis of all 18 articles were informational, encouraging, proactive-steps/solution oriented, hopeful, socially relevant and warning-oriented. Frames of negative portrayal were of debilitating, paralyzing, helpless, magnitude amplifying, intimidating in nature. Elements most commonly used in the articles were metaphors, catchphrases and depictions. The study did not find other elements mentioned by Sieff (2003), namely exemplars and visual images.

Based on the overall impression after reading each mental health article, it was found that none of the mental health issues were portrayed negatively as a whole. The negative frames found were just at certain parts of the articles and in certain categories of the coding protocol. Although these negative frames were present in certain part of the articles, it was not to the extent that the whole theme or meaning conveyed in the article became negatively portrayed.

The mental health articles analyzed in this study provided definitions of the issue and explained further about its nature, causes, symptoms and consequences. This is consistent with the findings from Wahl (2000) about Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD). According to Wahl (2000), within articles that deal explicitly with OCD, readers can find accurate information about the demographics, symptoms, causes, and treatments of the disorder.

Apart from that, the information of coping strategy can be found in mental health articles in magazines because feature articles are different from news articles. Feature articles, as indicated by this study, are more thematic in nature where an issue is discussed to cover a wider scope and more complete. News articles, as found by Blood (2002) on the other hand, are concerned with reporting of what had happened and it is left at that. Renzulli, Mebane and Sieff (2006) also found that a majority of news reports about the 11 September attacks in the US hardly mention mental health issues. They found that when mental health was mentioned, information that could assist in coping with the psychological aftermath of the attacks was lacking.

Glaringly absent from our study's findings were negative frames such as "criminally insane killer, ticking time-bomb, killer or lunatic on the loose," that were the stereotyped, stigmatizing portrayals of mentally unhealthy people found in earlier studies. However, negative frames which are debilitating, paralyzing, helpless, magnitude amplifying, intimidating and conditional were found in certain parts of the articles. These frames were commonly found in opening paragraphs and consequences categories. Out of the 10 categories used to analyze the mental health articles, positive portrayals were found in all categories but less so in the titles category. Neutral frames were only found in titles and opening paragraphs categories.

#### **What were the Frames Used Other than those Identified in Past Studies?**

Our study found a frame that was not apparent in the findings of studies reviewed before, that is **the notion of hope given** to people who have problems with their mental health. Although some of the issues especially involving mental illnesses are serious and have high risks in affecting the mental health of a person, the articles did not frame it as a dead end. It emphasized on the possibilities of recovering, improving the quality of life or at least making the situations a little less bad. It encouraged the readers to see beyond the problem, build confidence and 'lead' them to overcome the hurdle. This very positive frame should always be adapted in portrayal of issues of mental health. It is because having a positive outlook and something to look forward to help jumpstart the journey towards achieving a healthy mind (Nevid et al., 2000).

#### **What are the Sources Quoted in the Mental Health Related Articles?**

As for the source of information of mental health issues in Malaysian women's magazines, it is not very different from source used in other media. Experts in the field of mental health were quoted in the articles to provide information about nature of mental health issues, its causes, coping mechanisms, symptoms and consequences. This is beneficial for the readers as the source is a specialist in the field of mental health. Referring to experts is also a good approach to writing about mental health because it improves the framing of mental health issues (Nairn, 1999).

Our study found that the majority of articles (15 out of 17 that had used sources) were considered positive because after warning the readers' of potential danger or risk of a particular issue, advice will be also be given to encourage people with mental health problems to seek help. The purpose of including or highlighting experts' views in the articles was not to terrify the readers of effects of mental health issues but to share facts and provide reliable advice.

Experts were quoted as source of such statistics or statement to give it more credential as readers find it more convincing and reliable when it comes from experts and not just a man on the street. Quoting and presenting information from experts in a proper manner does not only serves the public education role of magazines, but also achieves the aim of World Health Organisation (2002) in improving women's mental health by using the media as an information dissemination tool.

## CONCLUSIONS

Media must exercise extreme care in portraying mental health issues. Although magazines, as found in this study, portray mental health in more positive frames than negative ones, the writers of magazine articles must try to avoid using, or in fact eliminate negative frames altogether. The positive frames already identified in this study should be used by all media particularly magazines to ensure that the people are given proper and reliable information of mental health issues. In order to improve the quality of mental health reporting in news articles, the positive frames found in magazine feature articles could also be used so that there will not be misunderstandings of mental health issues among the public which might lead to stigmatization of people with mental illnesses or who are mentally unhealthy. It is also hoped that this study would provide an insight on the framing of mental health issues in Malaysian women's magazines.

## REFERENCES

1. Blood, R. W., (2002). "A Qualitative Analysis of the Reporting and Portrayal of Mental Illness in the *Courier Mail* and *Sunday Mail*, December 2001 to February 2002". *Report Prepared for Public Advocates Office*. Queensland
2. Corrigan, P. W., Watson, A. C., Gracia, G. and Slopen, N. (2005). "Newspaper Stories as Measures of Structural Stigma". *Psychiatric Services*. Vol. 56/ 5. May. p 551-566
3. Entman, R. M., (1993). "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm". *Journal of Communication*. Vol. 43/ 4. Autumn. p. 51-58
4. Fortunato, J. A., (2005). *Making Media Content*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
5. Institute for Public Health (IPH). The Third National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMSIII) 2006, Vol 2. Kuala Lumpur: Ministry of Health Malaysia; 2008.
6. Malaysian Mental Health Association. (2003). *what is Mental Health?* Petaling Jaya: Malaysian Mental Health Association
7. Nairn, R., (1999). "Does the Use of Psychiatrists as Sources of Information Improve Media Depiction of Mental Illness?" *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*. Vol 33/4. p. 583-589
8. Nevid, J. S., Rathus, S. A. & Greene, B. (2000). *Abnormal Psychology in a Changing World*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall
9. Noor, M. N. (1999). "Roles and Women's Well-Being: Some Preliminary Findings from Malaysia". *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*. Vol. 41/3, p. 123-147
10. Renzulli, D. R., Mebane, F., and Sieff, E. (2006). "Brief Report: News Coverage Analyses of Mental Health Services Immediately After September 11, 2001". *Psychiatric Services*. Vol. 57/9. p. 1339-1346
11. Scheufele, D., (1999). "Framing as a Theory of Media Effects". *Journal of Communication*. Vol 49/1, Winter. p. 103-122
12. Sieff, E., (2003). "Media Frames of Mental Illnesses: The Potential Impact of Negative Frames". *Journal of Mental Health*. Vol 12/3. p. 259-269

13. Wahl, O. F., (2000). "Brief Report: Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder In Popular Magazines". *Community Mental Health Journal*. Vol.36/ 3. p. 307-312
14. World Health Organization. (2002). *Nations For Mental Health: A Focus on Women*. World health Organization

## APPENDICES

Table 1 Shows the titles of mental health related articles, name of magazines, month of publication and page number on which the article appeared.

**Table 1: Titles of Mental Health Related Articles Published in Women's Magazines (2006)**

No.	Title of Articles	Magazine	Issue / Page No
1	My Obsession Ruled My Life	<i>Cleo</i>	March, p 111
2	Anything You Can Do, I Can Do Better. Are You Having A Superwoman Syndrome?	<i>Cleo</i>	April, p 128
3	Relax! You Are Having A Panic Attack.	<i>Cleo</i>	April, p 169
4	The 6 Secrets of Well-Being	<i>Cleo</i>	August, p137
5	Is Fear Limiting Your Life?	<i>Cleo</i>	September, p 130
6	Stress – Are You Faking It?	<i>Cleo</i>	September, p 175
7	Are You Living In The Now?	<i>Cleo</i>	December, p 246
8	Got A Grudge Against Someone?	<i>Female</i>	May, p. 70
9	How PMS Kills Relationships.	<i>Female</i>	September, p 86
10	Three Steps to Happiness.	<i>Female</i>	September, p 90
11	Overcome Your Fears.	<i>Female</i>	December, p 98
12	I Can't Take Rejection.	<i>Female</i>	December, p102
13	Pills from Hell.	<i>Her World</i>	February, p 142
14	The Depressed Child	<i>Her World</i>	February, p 154
15	Happy Ever After...Are You?	<i>Her World</i>	May, p 138
16	Deep in Depression	<i>Her World</i>	September, p139
17	Pressed (& Stressed) For Time?	<i>Her World</i>	October, p 128
18	Is Your Love Hooked?	<i>Her World</i>	October, p 133