

## No news is good news?

Psychiatric assessment. These are two words that we routinely hear and read in the media, usually used in connection to serious – often violent – crime.

All one has to do is Google this term and look at the news articles mentioning it, and most paint a disturbing picture indeed.

Our legal system requires that people who are accused of committing a crime are confirmed to be mentally fit to stand trial. They must also be deemed to have been in a state of mind to be fully responsible for their actions at the time of their offence.

Although the process of psychiatric assessment is standard practice, it is still something that features prominently in the way the media reports on crime.

Perhaps too prominently; does something that is performed as a matter of course really warrant a place in the headline of an article, or mention in the first paragraph?

### Murder accused remanded for psychiatric assessment

### Psychiatric assessment ordered in police stabbing case

### Oscar Pistorius' psychiatric assessment is 'crucial' to trial - lawyer

Progress has been made on the way mental health is discussed, with a movement towards using “people first language.”

Rather than using labels - such as “the mentally ill” – we are encouraged to use more sensitive terms to describe people with lived experience of mental illness.

However, the media still appears to have a habit of “illness first” reporting. Or should that be “potential illness”, because not everyone who undergoes psychiatric assessment is confirmed to have any such condition?

What does the subject of mental health look like from the outside, to those who have not experienced mental illness and instead draw their knowledge

from the media?

The saying “no news is good news” is as true today as ever, because positive events predominately go unreported.

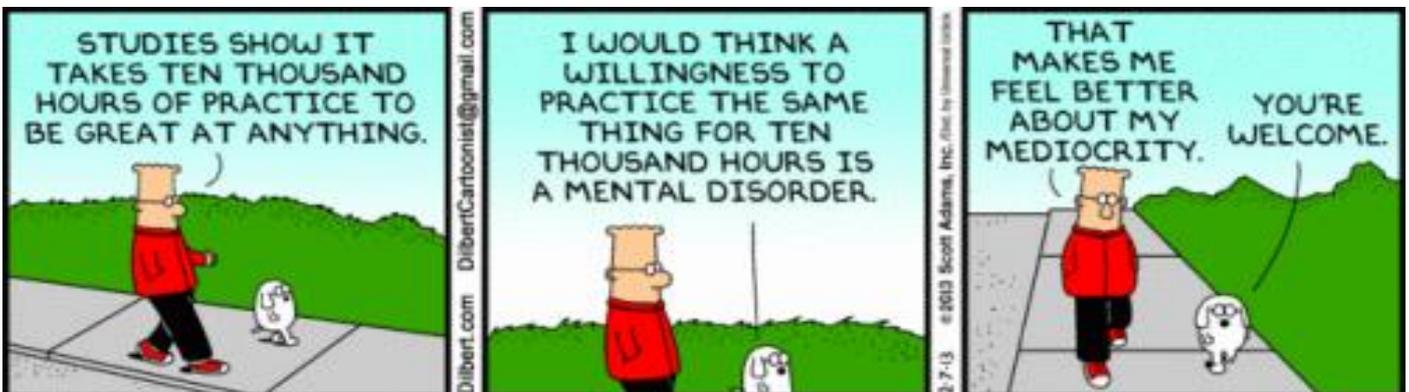
Research has shown that the stereotypical link between mental illness and violent behaviour is indeed false. People with mental illness are in fact more likely to be the victims of crime than the perpetrators.

According to the Mental Health Foundation, one in two or fifty percent of people in New Zealand will experience some form of mental distress at some point in their lives.

Perhaps due to the common, stigmatising perception reinforced by the media, it is believed that less than half of these people will seek help for their condition.

It is said that the negative impact of stigma and discrimination linked with mental illnesses can have a greater adverse effect on our quality of life than the conditions themselves.

Tony Spencer



This month's "Korero Mai" and "What's On" are edited by Stephanie Mapley and "Whakaaro Pai" by Tony Spencer— from Like Minds Taranaki. Your news and views are eagerly sought. Like Minds Taranaki, PO Box 5015, New Plymouth, 3rd Floor, Brougham House, 50 Devon Street West, NP, ph. 06-759-0966 [mental.health@xtra.co.nz](mailto:mental.health@xtra.co.nz). [www.likemindstaranaki.org.nz](http://www.likemindstaranaki.org.nz)

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