FATAL REACTION: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE NATURE AND CONTEXT OF MENTAL ILLNESS PORTRAYALS ON TELEVISION
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Previous research has explored the etiology of learned negative attitude towards mental illness by analyzing its portrayal on children’s programs and evaluating how other characters responded (Hanrahan, Karl, Lasher, Swaye, & Wahl, 2017). The Center for Research on the Effects of Television (CRETV) has an extensive archive of live-recorded content from 14 television program types. A representative sample (2011-2016) of content from this archive was analyzed in order to gather information about how mental illness (including suicide and addiction) is portrayed, drawing from both fiction and nonfiction programs. The current longitudinal study is a replication and expansion of a previous study by Leary and Warren (2017) with a larger sample of more than 1,450 incidents in 689 programs. The analysis looked at the type of mental illness portrayed, the context (humorous/serious; positive/negative/neutral) and the reactions of the person with the mental illness and the people in the scene towards the person with the mental illness (e.g., laugh track or laughter; providing or seeking help/support; being in denial or defensive; showing distress, frustration or fear; engaging in blame or accusation). The nature and context of the mental illness portrayals was also compared across character demographics and program types.