Despite the importance of mental health matters for people’s well-being and the essential role of television to help spread medical issues, our study shows that the media coverage of this subject has been poor and somehow trivial during the so-called “pandemic fatigue” in Spain. This research focuses on the 24-hour television broadcast of five channels throughout 16 months, coding the content to identify trends and to know how media covered mental health topics all along seven days in January 2021. The analysis reveals a trivial representation of the topic, including irrelevant references to mental health that may not help make visible problems such as depression, anxiety, or stress. Instead, there seems to be a lack of rigorous analysis of the mental health conditions arising after the pandemic. We can infer that private broadcasters have a more suitable approach when presenting data, describing people involved or taking advice from mental health professionals. Effective information on mental health requires deep messaging and medical recommendations or statements, but from this research, it turns out that there is a touch of frivolity in the way television approaches mental health issues.

**Keywords:** mental health, pandemic fatigue, television, covid-19, content analysis.

In November 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) made known a series of recommendations for its European member states to hit back the so-called “pandemic fatigue” caused by COVID-19 (WHO, 2020), which was explained in terms of “demotivation to follow recommended protective beha-
viours, emerging gradually over time and affected by a number of emotions, experiences and perceptions."

The prolonged and somehow unpredictable progress of COVID-19 led to demotivation among the population, not only due to the disease itself but also to the various and changing issued standards to restrict mobility and interpersonal contact in each concerned country (Zhong et al., 2021). These restrictions had a serious impact on the daily life of citizens, so the WHO suggested taking action about it, providing some recommendations to help reduce the negative and mental health effects of pandemic fatigue.

These general recommendations included getting information from specific segments of the population, carrying out quantitative and qualitative studies to identify their needs, and preventing citizens’ discouragement by avoiding the use of confusing or negative messages. Likewise, special reference is made to the values related to the psychological capacity of individuals and their mental and self-care abilities.

The strategies followed by the Spanish Government to face pandemic fatigue included these WHO recommendations and paid special attention to the emotional well-being of workers from key sectors during the COVID-19 crisis (Interterritorial Council of the National Health System, 2020), such as health, education, public transport, or those from the food chain. The report refers to two official enquiries on the mental health of Spaniards during the pandemic. The first one deals with the outcome of fighting the disease (exhaustion, detachment from others, anxiety, irritability, insomnia, lack of concentration and indecision, deterioration of work performance, and reluctance to work). It emphasizes authorities’ concern regarding the effects on the mental health of Spaniards after the crisis, the months of lockdown, and the lasting application of restrictive measures, monitoring the attitudes of the population during COVID-19 crisis1.

The second is about their behaviour: mask use, taking preventive measures, information search, trust in authorities, etc.

In this context, prevention is essential to keep the health of citizens (Close Koenig et al., 2020), thus the Spanish population was reported by the media about hygiene measures, social distancing, and face mask use that helped to slow down the spread of the virus. Assuming that prevention and information are keys to health, we should wonder how much information was aimed at looking after Spaniards’ mental health, as well as to what extent action was taken to prevent mental illnesses caused by the pandemic or to take care of those with mental problems.

In this sense, the television turns out to be essential, since during lockdown 85% of the Spanish population used it as their favourite media to keep up to date. Especially in the early stages of the health crisis, it was the main source of information to get in touch with the general public from the authorities and

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1 Monitoring the behavior and attitudes of the population related to COVID-19 in Spain. https://portalcne.isciii.es/cosmo-spain/
government\(^2\). So, it was possible to get a quick, wide and efficient way to explain the official schedule issued to fight the crisis (Ayedee and Manocha, 2020). This media also reaches most of the population from any stage in the social scale, including those with lower digital skills, ensuring that both safe and efficient information reaches everyone. So it is relevant to find out how much TV could contribute to making mental health disorders visible and people aware of the consequences of COVID-19.

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Apart from being the most widespread mass media in Spain, television has accomplished its greatest growing stage (32%) during the lockdown period (from 14 March to 20 June 2020), reaching a historical record (Barlovento Comunicación, 2021).

This growing trend means having a powerful influence on public opinion, either to make it change or to give way to new ideas (Scheufele, 1999). It thus becomes essential to frame this research in the theoretical context of agenda setting (McCombs and Shaw, 1972; Edelstein, 1993; Goffman, 2006) because the information that is not dealt with by the media seems not to exist in viewers’ awareness. Studies regarding health issues communication are more frequently focused in newspapers than on television, largely due to the complexity of collecting and analysing such study material. Thence the contribution of this research, which scans 24 hours TV broadcasts over 16 months.

To approach communication on mental health, the framing theory must be taken into account (Berelson et al., 1954; Noëlle-Neumann, 1995; McQuail, 2005), since it studies how the media introduce and explain topics of public interest (Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007).

The adequate representation of mental health issues on television is also relevant. For instance, together with the study of the presence (or absence) of those topics is necessary to consider how it is contextualized and framed.

Framing theory, despite having evolved since its inception (Lazarsfeld et al., 2021; Noëlle-Neumann, 1995; McQuail, 2005; Entman, 1993), remains valid when applied for mental health representation in media studies (Cacciatore et al, 2016; Scheufele and Iyengar, 2014). Framing analyses how media presents topics of public interest and their interpretation (Binderkrantz, 2019; Crow and Lawlor, 2016), making it relevant to the present research. In this way, several authors studied the framing of mental health illness in the news and its possible social effects on stigma reduction (Cassilo, 2022; Vyncke and Gorp, 2018; Paterson, 2006).

Also, exemplification theories are relevant, showing that individual experiences reported in a specific way by means of personal stories or events are

digested by the audience to deduce role models (Nagler et al., 2016). However, there are only a few studies that consider the role of language or rhetorical tools for communicating health to the population, or neither about how and why proposed policies are supported, discarded or ignored (Koon et al., 2016). Regarding health communication, Villagonzalo et al. (2019) and McConnell et al. (2015) insist on the relevance of conveying information about stressor items in a time of crisis to preserve the mental health of the population and avoid confusion. Studies analysing the psychological effects of lockdown are relevant, such as those by Sameer et al. (2020); or the ones by Maxfield and Pituch (2020) on elderly’s mental health as a result of COVID-19. Also Rossi et al. (2020) works on health professionals fighting the pandemic on the frontline, as well as on the general population. In Spain, the study The Psychological Consequences of COVID-19 and Lockdown (Balluerka et al., 2020) especially stands out.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

The research methodology is based on the Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication (CERC) model, which suggests five stages in a public crisis (Meadows et al., 2019). This model can be applied to any type of crisis related to health, terrorism, or natural disasters. The stages are (1) pre-crisis, (2) initial event, (3) consolidation, (4) resolution, and (5) evaluation (Reynolds and Seeger, 2005). For this study, we consider that the so-called “pandemic fatigue” would be part of the consolidation stage. During this phase, it is appropriate to reduce uncertainty as far as possible, for which it is essential to keep means of communication available to viewers, preventing them from becoming fatigued or thinking the health crisis is over.

To rate the attention paid to mental health on television channels, we have scanned the 24-hour programming of the five Spanish open broadcasters having the highest share (Barlovento, 2021): La1 (the Spanish public channel), Cuatro, La Sexta, Antena 3, and Tele 5. So, our study is not only based on data taken out from the newscasts but also on fictional, entertainment or educational programs dealing with mental health affairs. In other words, broadcasting fictional content related to these topics helps to increase public awareness whether they are close to their immediate reality or not. All the contents were monitored throughout the whole of 2020 to identify terminology related to mental health and sort out those programs dealing with it.

To do that, we developed an experimental analysis technique for which we have the subtitles of a total of 24 hours of those five channels that are the object of study.

These subtitles are intended to integrate the population with hearing difficulties and are generated in an automated way in some channels and semi-automated in others (speech-to-text detection plus human review).

January 2021 has also been included as part of the analysis, as the so-called “third wave of COVID-19” hit Spain and gave way to local lockdown and new standards of restrictions. Whereas the first results from Centro de Investigaciones
Sociológicas (CIS) surveys regarding the mental health of Spaniards had already been released and the term “pandemic fatigue” and its effects were defined at the time. Moreover, with the help of the Nvivo software, we have kept track of those tags linked to mental health throughout April, May, and June 2019, since it turned out to be useful for research purposes. It helps to compare whether the number of these tags meant a growing or decreasing trend in the main television channels following the outbreak of the pandemic and the enactment of the state of emergency together with lockdown, which lasted from 14 March to 20 June 2020 in Spain. All the television programming from those 16 months was compiled, identifying and sorting out any time mental health was involved in some way using subtitles provided by the channels.

Taking the tags from the Spanish CIS survey on the psychological effects of the coronavirus, formerly mentioned in this article, our search corpus was marked off. Thus, these have been the most frequent tags searched for: “boredom” and “bored”, “exhaustion” and “exhausted”, “anxiety” and “anxious”, “depression” and “depressed”, “desperation” and “desperate”, “angry”, “stress” and “stressed”, “pandemic fatigue” and “fatigue due to the pandemic”, “frustration” and “frustrated”, “insomnia” and “insomniac”, “pessimism” and “pessimistic”, “worried” and “worry”, “loneliness”, “sad” and “sadness”. We measured the frequency of the 56 Spanish language terms (including their feminine and plural forms) over 16 months, implying 518 days or 62,160 hours of television broadcasts. During that time, 103,496 allusions to terms related to mental health were recorded, making it rather hard to go further in a deeper or more qualitative work, which is a requirement to get full results.

For this reason, once verified the use trend of these terms and the progress of the mentions when COVID-19 arose, the researchers focused on a qualitative content analysis only on January 2021, since the Spanish Government had already issued, in December, some standards to prevent pandemic fatigue. Thus, it turned out interesting to check if they had a relevant impact on television programming and the approach given to the subject. From that month on, only the terms “stress”, “anxiety”, “depression” (DASS-21 scale) were focused on, as they are a useful tool for psychologists to rate the mental health of the average population, and better specify and mark off all the relevant issues related (Lovibond and Lovibond, 1995). So, these three tags are key to concluding and their use trend on television proves content related to mental health.

According to the framing theory, it is also relevant to look into the way mental health shows on the main TV channels. In this way, the framing of media creates a portrayal of mental illness leading to reflective thoughts, positive attitudes and empathic feelings (Hecht et al., 2021).

To get it, the researchers simultaneously checked the contents broadcasted 24 hours a day in January, during which the terms “anxiety”, “depression”, and “stress” were mentioned more than 50 times. They also used an inductive coding of the content to identify the main and more relevant topics dealt with. When looking into the uses of these terms, any duplication of an allusion was removed from each area of analysis. This way, if the tags “depression”, “anxiety”, and “stress” were dealt with two or more times, those repetitions were deleted.
when they were related to a single unit of context. Otherwise, if the same unit of analysis referred to two different context units or issues about the same topic, they were registered separately.

Thus, 485 mentions were coded and sorted out in nine different areas: government politicians and mental health policies; health system break down and critical situations; reporting appropriate healthy behaviours; progress in medical research regarding vaccines and medications; exemplification with cases, testimonies, phone calls to patients’ relatives; professionals and experts appearance; allusions to the keywords, but without deeper content; descriptions of symptoms; and what COVID-19 may have to do with other diseases. The researchers also measured the length of each unit of analysis, and checked whether or not the content was related to the pandemic.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

This research seeks to answer a series of questions and hypotheses derived from the situation in Spain due to pandemic fatigue. Among them, it is worth mentioning the foreseeable increase in the appearance of topics related to mental health on television since the lockdown caused an unusual situation. That would be expected to trigger an increase in problems of anxiety, fear, depression, or loneliness among the population.

Therefore, this study addresses the following research hypotheses:

- H1. Lockdown increased the use of terms related to mental problems compared to the same period of the previous year.

Likewise, the evolution of the disease would lead one to think that, as its epidemiology came under control and mental health problems got worse due to months of lockdown, references would increase in media coverage. This thus leads us to the following research hypothesis:

- H2. As the pandemic evolved, mental health would be mentioned more on TV.

And again, the term “pandemic fatigue” should be expected to appear on TV more frequently. Regarding the framing of mental health issues on television channels, we propose:

- H3. The television channels dealt with mental health during the pandemic fatigue, providing figures or introducing survey results.

It will thus be possible to find out whether the information broadcasted by television channels helped the average population change their attitude or understand the possible symptoms of diseases related to mental health. This leads us to the following hypothesis:

- H4. TV channels emphasized the detection of mental health problems derived from the pandemic and offered information on symptoms and how to notice them.
RESULTS

Terminology Related to Mental Health on Television Trend

By 2020, 79,059 mentions of concepts related to mental health could be filed, averaging 216.6 a day, which means 43.32 per channel. This shows a recurring point on television. However, it should be noticed that, despite the critical impact of the pandemic on the Spanish population, there was no significant increase in mentions throughout the year.

Comparing the 56 mentions made to terms related to mental health during the months of April, May, and June of 2019 and 2020, although there was an increase, there was no growing pattern during the lockdown period (Table 1). However, there was an overall increase of 2,120 mentions in that 3-month period, corresponding to a new rise in April. This decreased as the lockdown was prolonged until reaching practically the same levels as in the previous year. Therefore, we cannot confirm hypothesis H1, since the trend is decreasing and does not grow as the lockdown spread over time in Spain.

Table 1. Total number of mentions of terms related to mental health during April, May, and June of 2019 and 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>5,810</td>
<td>7,547</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>6,259</td>
<td>6,639</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>5,796</td>
<td>5,799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>17,865</td>
<td>19,985</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own elaboration.

There was no uptrend if we look at its growth throughout 2020. Instead, it shows a significant decline by the time when “pandemic fatigue” was first mentioned. The first significant decrease in the number of mentions took place when authorities relaxed regulations and the required lockdown was over. The second one can be noticed at the beginning of the Christmas holiday time (Figure 1), suggesting a less frequent media coverage of the subject. These results disprove hypothesis H2.
Regarding the mentions of terms related to mental health, the growing frequency of “anxiety” (by 26%) and “stress” (by 22%) during March and April should be remarked, corresponding to the initial stage of the pandemic and lockdown. Meanwhile, the term “depression” remained with no great variations throughout the year, only showing a small increase in October and November (Table 2).

Table 2. Total mentions of terms related to mental health during 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Jan 20</th>
<th>Feb 20</th>
<th>Mar 20</th>
<th>Apr 20</th>
<th>May 20</th>
<th>Jun 20</th>
<th>Jul 20</th>
<th>Aug 20</th>
<th>Sep 20</th>
<th>Oct 20</th>
<th>Nov 20</th>
<th>Dec 20</th>
<th>Jan 21</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>493</td>
<td>449</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>753</td>
<td>615</td>
<td>418</td>
<td>387</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>541</td>
<td>414</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>519</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>759</td>
<td>463</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>461</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>473</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>397</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7,436</td>
<td>7,244</td>
<td>7,275</td>
<td>7,547</td>
<td>6,639</td>
<td>5,799</td>
<td>6,311</td>
<td>6,612</td>
<td>6,713</td>
<td>5,400</td>
<td>5,554</td>
<td>347</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results also evidence a new rise in the mentions of the three terms in January 2021, when a “third wave of the disease” was feared to happen and more restrictive regulations were being issued again. For this reason, the month of January becomes meaningful when it comes to the approach of television channels to mental health matters during that period.

**Mentions on TV Channels**

The data show that the mentions involving mental health were very similar in almost all the channels. The public channel La1 (TVE) achieved the highest number of references to terms related to these diseases. The mentions to mental
health on this channel reached 23.49% of the total. It was followed by La Sexta, accounting for 21.46% of the mentions; Tele 5, 21.01%; Antena 3, 20.22%; and finally Cuatro, 13.79% (Table 3).

### Table 3. Total mentions of terms related to mental health by channel during 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Jan 20</th>
<th>Feb 20</th>
<th>Mar 20</th>
<th>Apr 20</th>
<th>May 20</th>
<th>Jun 20</th>
<th>Jul 20</th>
<th>Aug 20</th>
<th>Sep 20</th>
<th>Oct 20</th>
<th>Nov 20</th>
<th>Dec 20</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>La1</td>
<td>1,652</td>
<td>1,729</td>
<td>1,682</td>
<td>1,581</td>
<td>1,400</td>
<td>1,707</td>
<td>1,712</td>
<td>1,441</td>
<td>1,514</td>
<td>1,279</td>
<td>1,378</td>
<td></td>
<td>18,573</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Sexta</td>
<td>1,601</td>
<td>1,493</td>
<td>1,598</td>
<td>1,823</td>
<td>1,514</td>
<td>1,398</td>
<td>1,419</td>
<td>1,257</td>
<td>1,403</td>
<td>1,408</td>
<td>1,048</td>
<td>1,011</td>
<td>16,973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tele 5</td>
<td>1,540</td>
<td>1,450</td>
<td>1,598</td>
<td>1,604</td>
<td>1,295</td>
<td>1,051</td>
<td>1,350</td>
<td>1,372</td>
<td>1,374</td>
<td>1,512</td>
<td>1,190</td>
<td>1,275</td>
<td>16,611</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antena 3</td>
<td>1,591</td>
<td>1,463</td>
<td>1,409</td>
<td>1,452</td>
<td>1,312</td>
<td>1,144</td>
<td>1,224</td>
<td>1,172</td>
<td>1,540</td>
<td>1,357</td>
<td>1,194</td>
<td>1,134</td>
<td>15,992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuatro</td>
<td>1,052</td>
<td>1,109</td>
<td>988</td>
<td>1,087</td>
<td>1,020</td>
<td>806</td>
<td>829</td>
<td>798</td>
<td>854</td>
<td>922</td>
<td>689</td>
<td>756</td>
<td>10,910</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own elaboration.

Therefore, the variation in the percentage of mentions relating to mental health when comparing the different channels wasn’t significant in this study, except for the private channel Cuatro, which shows the lowest figures.

Also, there was a very similar progression for all five broadcasters, revealing simultaneous drops in the figures over the months. The increase in April for La Sexta is remarkable, meeting the beginning of lockdown in Spain, as well as the rise of the percentage for La1 in August (Figure 2).

### Figure 2. Progress of mentions of terms related to mental health by television channel through 2020

Source: Own elaboration.
The Focus of the Television Channels on Mental Health

After reviewing the raw data on the frequency of TV mentions of items related to mental health, only “stress”, “anxiety”, and “depression” were chosen concerning pandemic fatigue. To achieve this, we studied the period from the month having the largest number of mentions since the WHO defined pandemic fatigue (i.e., November 2020) until the month when the quantitative work for this study comes to an end (i.e., January 2021). As there was an upward trend in January 2021 (Figure 3), it was chosen to analyze the coverage of mental health by the channels during this period.

Figure 3. Mentions of the terms “stress”, “anxiety”, and “depression” through 2020

For the research, we selected those days with more than 50 mentions since a high frequency indicates there is some TV content in which the subject was discussed in greater depth. We analysed the coverage of all the mentions of these terms on days 24 (127 mentions), 17 (89 mentions), 27 (58 mentions), 21 (51 mentions), 16 (53 mentions), 3 (52 mentions), and January 20 (51 mentions). These 485 references were classified into 334 units of analysis and coded into the nine topic areas formerly described. Unanimity, on which reliability relies concerning the filing process, reached 96.7%, with only 11 discrepancies between researchers.

Mentions of the Terms “Stress”, “Anxiety”, and “Depression” in January 2021

Over the seven days, the channels broadcasted a total of 4h:42m:37s on content related to mental health, an average of 8.07 minutes a day per channel.

La Sexta was found to have the highest number of mentions of these terms, as seen in Table 4, followed by Tele 5, Antena 3, La1, and Cuatro. The number of references by the public channel La1 is thus striking since it led this ranking throughout 2020.
Table 4. Days showing more than 50 mentions of the terms “stress”, “anxiety”, and “depression” in January 2021, on each channel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Antena 3</th>
<th>Cuatro</th>
<th>La 1</th>
<th>La Sexta</th>
<th>Tele 5</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24/01/2021</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17/01/2021</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27/01/2021</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21/01/2021</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16/01/2021</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03/01/2021</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20/01/2021</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>77</strong></td>
<td><strong>51</strong></td>
<td><strong>74</strong></td>
<td><strong>196</strong></td>
<td><strong>87</strong></td>
<td><strong>51</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own elaboration.

La Sexta broadcasted several slots about the mental health of medical workers during pandemic fatigue in its programming, increasing the time about this type of content compared to the other TV stations (1h:35m:08s). The attention paid to this subject by the other channels then decreased in the following order: Tele 5, with 57m:43s; Antena 3, with 50m:17s, Cuatro, with 39m:49s; and La1, which broadcasted 39 minutes and 40 seconds related to mental health.

From this content analysis and the coding of the units, it was noted that most of the mentions of stress, depression, or anxiety had a lack more in-depth discussion on the subject. Instead, they were dealt with as part of everyday speech. These mentions do not add value to the information on mental health, but they prove that the studied terms were frequently used in the media. Therefore, it may suggest that there is a certain triviality in the coverage of these issues, though they can help make them visible.

Table 5. Coverage of contents related to mental health during January 2021, by channel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of analysis units</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentions of the words but without deeper content</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>2h:43m:43s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contents showing health crisis and critical situations</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1h:02m:02s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions of symptoms and causes</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14m:54s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How COVID-19 affects other diseases</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16m:34s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions of appropriate healthy behaviours</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>06m:02s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results of medical research or new medicine development</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>06m:31s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting on individual cases, testimonies, or calls to the families of patients</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>07m:38s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals and experts appearance on TV</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>04m:41s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government representatives and politicians telling about mental health policies</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>334</strong></td>
<td><strong>04h:42m:42s</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own elaboration.
Among all the analysis units, 78 mentioned COVID-19 as a source of mental health problems or a cause of worsening them. Therefore, 23.35% of the content had the coronavirus pandemic as a backdrop, although only 29 of those analysis units directly mentioned the mental health crisis.

The data introduction or survey results were unusual on the different channels, even though much of the information was about fatigue, stress and depression problems suffered by health professionals in Spain at that time. Such surveys were only mentioned three times, which doesn’t support hypothesis H3.

The results show that the television channels frame mental health crises regarding the pandemic, offering information on how the lockdown had affected the average population and particularly the community health workers, explaining symptoms and giving advice on healthy lifestyle habits and behaviours that help reduce mental disease effects. Although it is not the most popular coding unit, the channels involved in this research also broadcasted content describing the symptoms and consequences of mental health problems, thus confirming hypothesis H4.

As a result of the previous background, these television channels did not echo the government standards to improve the situation, nor did they provide information on the availability of getting assistance from the health system or on the use of helplines.

It highlights references to stress in animals (mentioned in 39 units of analysis). This detection would not be particularly significant, but 22 of those mentions were on Cuatro; that is, 43.13% of the references to stress, anxiety, or depression by that channel were to raise awareness of mental health issues in animals.

CONCLUSIONS

Although mental health is a subject always present on Spanish TV stations, the health crisis derived from the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictive regulations issued by the government did not lead television channels to change their contents to make people more aware of this problem. Significantly, there was not a higher frequency of this issue compared to the previous year or the months of January and February 2020, when the pandemic was not aimed at in news coverage. It’s also striking the downward trend regarding attention paid to this issue as the lockdown went on and especially when the authorities relaxed the restrictive regulations, thus showing some kind of laxity in the coverage. Despite the WHO warnings regarding mental health problems and the promulgation of standards by the Spanish Government to attenuate their effects, this did not correspond to more frequent allusions to the topic on the different channels in November and December 2020.

From the content analysis of January 2021, it can be deduced that none of the five channels produced any special program focusing on mental health, and only La Sexta reported on health professionals in a program that lasted less than 20 minutes, also providing personal stories of the people involved and opinions of psychology experts.
Throughout the coverage of mental health by the channels, a large number of mentions without significant value stand out, with little or no focus on describing symptoms and possible medical treatments or telling the audience about healthy behaviours to improve their mental health. One may think that there is some frivolity in the way media coverage has dealt with the subject. Although their simple mention can help make such diseases more visible, a more thoughtful and deeper approach to prevention and identification of symptoms should be required.

FUTURE WORK AND LIMITATIONS

As an extension of this work, it would be proper to compare the approach of the media coverage to such content during the months before COVID-19 to that after January 2021, when pandemic fatigue helped intensify mental health problems. Also, a longer period of content analysis could be carried out to determine whether the coverage approach to this subject on TV has evolved into a more in-depth treatment of mental health.

Similarly, it would be interesting to check whether the coverage of mental health on television corresponds to the institutional health recommendations since this study suggests a trivialization of such content that may even be harmful.

Antonio Sanjuán. PhD in Information Sciences from the Complutense University of Madrid. He teaches at the University of A Coruña. He worked as a journalist and audiovisual producer for twenty years. He has published several books and articles, with topics ranging from crisis communication to journalism.

José Juan Videla. PhD in Information Sciences from the Complutense University of Madrid. He worked as a journalist for twenty years. He has published research articles on radio and television journalism and teaches as a professor at the University of A Coruña.

Teresa Nozal. PhD in Journalism at the University of Navarra, Spain. Professor at the University of A Coruña since 2003. Her research work focuses on the study and analysis of journalism through new media and mobile devices.

Sandra Martínez. Advertising and Public Relations PhD. Professor at the University of A Coruña since 2004. She teaches about filmmaking, cinematography and montage. Her research focuses on the use of product placement and advertising in new media, augmented reality and video games.
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