

# Mental illness and suicide on screen: a screenwriter's perspective

**Authentic and sensitive portrayals of people living with mental illness in television programmes has been praised for promoting public understanding and help-seeking behaviour among vulnerable people, a recent media study found.**

Researchers at the Glasgow Media Group found that television portrayals of mental ill-health such as depression and bipolar disorder are becoming more authentic and have led to a positive change in public attitude towards mental illness.

The study has praised shows such as *Homeland*, *Coronation Street*, *EastEnders*, *Holby City*, *Hollyoaks*, *My Mad Fat Diary*, and *Orange is the New Black*, for promoting positive and authentic portrayals of mental illness on screen.

The study found that between January and March 2014, portrayals attempted to 'normalise' mental health problems and addressed previous stereotypes such as the "violent lunatic" or "mad genius".

Fifty-four percent of the 2,004 people surveyed said seeing a character with mental health problems improved their understanding. Forty-eight per cent said a show had changed their views about the type of person who can experience a mental health problem, while thirty-one per cent said it encouraged them to talk to loved ones or colleagues about mental health.

The 2014 study credited the increase of positive depictions of mental health issues to a new-found realism and sensitivity among TV writers in general.

## ***Mindframe* for stage and screen**

*Mindframe* for stage and screen resources were developed with the assistance of screenwriters, the Australian Writers' Guild and the Department of Health. The free resources assist scriptwriters, playwrights and television story departments with truthful and authentic portrayals of mental illness.

*Mindframe* workshops are conducted through the Australian Writers' Guild and provide scriptwriters, playwrights and television story departments with accurate information based on research. *Mindframe* workshops can also provide scriptwriters, playwrights and television story departments with access to spokespeople with lived experience.

For more information on *Mindframe* for stage and screen and free downloadable resources, go to: <http://www.mindframe.org.au> or contact *Mindframe* at 4924 6900.