Let's jumpstart: Isn't it clear that using a disease to criticize, belittle, or insult another person is wrong? Perhaps when we ask this question, the obvious answer will be 'yes,' but behaviors may actually be saying 'no': Two articles in the current issue of the Journal present an analysis of Turkish Twitter (x) messages that include ‘schizophrenia’ and ‘psychosis’ (Bademli et al., 2023; Dikeç et al., 2023). Less than 10% of the messages have positive content, and the messages often use the words schizophrenia and psychosis for the purpose of insult, mockery, or ridicule. The word schizophrenia accompany curses; psychosis is used to describe personal or societal wrongdoing. It is similar in French, English, and Greek tweets; schizophrenia is misused (Delanys et al., 2022; Joseph et al., 2015; Athanasopoulou and Sakellari 2016). In social media where there is intense interaction, there is a high risk of the spread of these slogan-like negative uses.

This problem - the problem is obvious, isn't it? - is not limited to mental illnesses. Stigmatization and discrimination is in everyday speech, especially when it comes to diseases or conditions associated with societal norms. Examples of negative use exist in different regions, cultures, and languages, from East to West, from North to South. Patients with dementia can be called ‘witches’; those with HIV can be called ‘zombies,’ and those without can be ‘clean’; people with mental disorders can be described as ‘missing a screw’ or a ‘loose nail’ (Mkhonto and Hanssen, 2018; Mupenda et al., 2014; Rose et al., 2007; The Well Project, 2022). Some of these terms are literal while others are figurative, but all of them are hurtful.

Professional organizations and patient associations are making efforts to overcome stigmatization related to mental illnesses. The Stigmatization Working Group within the Psychiatric Association of Turkey contributes to the effort on psychiatric illnesses. Articles addressing stigmatization have also been published in our Journal (Kamış et al., 2019; Kuş Saillard, 2010; Üstündağ and Kesebir, 2013). We see that research in our country is mostly aimed at describing the current situation. Effective initiatives are needed to cleanse language.

In Turkish there is an idiom, “No mistakes in similes”. This saying is used to keep the speech safe, as there are no limits in figurative speech, that every word out of the mouth is acceptable within the context. The truth is ‘Make no mistakes in similes’. While describing our negative experiences, when we get furious, when we protest the wrongdoings, we should not hurt people living with illness.

Stay clean.

REFERENCES


Dikeç G, Oban V, Usta MB (2023) Qualitative and Artificial Intelligence-Based Sentiment Analysis of Turkish Tweets Related to Schizophrenia. Turkish Journal of Psychiatry 34: 143-50. https://doi.org/10.5080/u26402


