

Poster

📅 Fri. Sep 26, 2025 2:00 PM - 3:10 PM JST | Fri. Sep 26, 2025 5:00 AM - 6:10 AM UTC 🏛️ Poster Session (6F Meeting Room 4-6)

Poster 35

[P-35-05] From Comic Panels to Psychiatric Labels: A Psychiatric Review of The Joker and the Public Perception of Mental Illness

*Tejbir Singh Deol¹, Arun Thakur¹, Saif Toubasey¹, Ella Marie Bauwens¹, Madhusudan Dalvi^{1,2} (1. King's College London (UK), 2. Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust (UK))

Keywords : Cultural Psychiatry, Psychiatry, Media, Social perceptions, Comic books

Background:

The Joker, an iconic comic book figure symbolising chaos and madness, is associated with various psychiatric conditions and mental health disorders due to his unpredictable and violent behaviour. Over the decades, his character has had a significant cultural impact on public attitudes toward mental health and the stigma surrounding psychiatric illness.

Aims:

This review examines how The Joker has influenced public perceptions of mental illness. It explores his character's evolution through a psychiatric lens to identify key themes and their impact on mental health stigma and cultural ideas about mental illness in society.

Methods:

A hybrid approach combined qualitative thematic analysis of key Joker comic storylines with a narrative literature review of the media's role in shaping mental health perceptions. Primary texts were analysed for psychiatric themes, while secondary literature assessed media driven stigma and evolving portrayals.

Results:

Four main psychiatric themes emerged: (1) early depictions of the Joker as a "dangerous madman" reflecting psychosis and antisocial traits; (2) associations between severe mental illness and violent criminality, often framed through trauma informed narratives; (3) psychiatric institutional failure and stigma, symbolised by Arkham Asylum's portrayal; and (4) contemporary complexity highlighting trauma, dissociation, and identity fragmentation, reflecting diagnoses like dissociative identity disorder. The literature review confirmed that the media frequently exaggerate violence linked to mental illness, reinforcing stigma and impeding public understanding of recovery. Although recent narratives show greater psychological nuance, the Joker remains predominantly characterised as untreatable and dangerous.

Conclusions:

The Joker serves as a reflection and a representation of societal views on mental illness. This review highlights the pressing need for collaboration between mental health professionals and media creators to promote accurate portrayals. Enhancing mental health literacy through responsible storytelling can reduce stigma. The Joker's evolving portrayal offers a critical lens on the intersection of psychiatry, media, and culture.