

## EXPERTS, THE MEDIA & STIGMA

*by* Duncan Cameron

Schizy Inc, a local mental health arts outfit with an activist bent, says mental patients *"are tired of seeing schizophrenia misrepresented in the media. It's not acceptable for journalists to consistently associate serious criminal activity with a mental health diagnosis. Mental illness is never a public defence for crime"*. It's not ok for high profile clinicians and other 'experts' to publicly speculate about mental illness in relation to an alleged offender whom they've never met or reviewed.

**Example 1:** When people were run over and killed in Bourke street in 2017 there was much speculation and diagnosing of a potential mental illness in the driver of the car by clinicians and other 'experts' in the media. They exploited the situation to wax lyrical about how we need more resources for mental health services and the like. Later, after proper assessments had been done, the judge found the offender did not have a mental illness.

### ***Schizophrenics - 1, Experts - 0.***

**Example 2:** Psychiatrist makes public comment via letter to the newspaper that, in his opinion, the video footage of a murderer (whom he's never met or reviewed) attempting to stab people in the street is consistent with a person with a mental illness having some kind of episode. That may well be the case, but the footage is also consistent with someone running amok trying to kill people with a knife.

**Example 3:** High profile sportsman bashes his partner and it hits the media. Next day the club president comes out and announces the sportsman has been having "mental health issues" and the club is standing behind him. It seems the club considers the welfare of their member more important than the partner who has been bashed senseless. The president's behaviour reinforces in the public mind that persons with mental illness are violent and dangerous. This unfairly stigmatizes and tarnishes the reputations of people living with mental illness who manage their conditions responsibly and the many people for whom violence and aggression are not a symptom of their mental illness.

excerpted from a submission to the Mental Health Royal Commission 4/6/2019