Mental Health in Library and Information Science Research: Preliminary Results of a Literature Review Focusing on Information Behavior

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ABSTRACT
Worldwide, mental illnesses are extremely prevalent and costly. Help-seeking and recovery may be facilitated by information and online resources. The aim of this literature review is to examine interest in mental health within Library and Information Science empirical research, published from 2000 onward, with a focus on information behavior. In this preliminary phase, we performed a qualitative content analysis on 51 relevant articles. Results show that mental health is not only examined as a topic, but also as a personal state (illness or state to maintain) and as a professionally-related activity. Studies investigating information behavior mainly focus on the use of the Internet or online resources, with very few exploring the purposes for which these resources are used. Research opportunities for this field of inquiry are further discussed.

KEYWORDS
Mental health, Information behavior, Library and information science.

INTRODUCTION
The worldwide prevalence of mental disorders is extremely high, and the leading cause of disability is depression (World Health Organization, 2008, pp. 35-37). Mental illnesses are associated with considerable socio-economic costs (Stephens & Joubert, 2001) and suicide (Bertolote, Fleischmann, De Leo, & Wasserman, 2004). Researchers have shown that many help-seeking barriers prevail (Gulliver, Griffiths, & Christensen, 2010; Vogel, Wester, & Larson, 2007), some of which directly relate to information and knowledge, such as poor mental health (MH) literacy and lack of knowledge concerning available services. However, some researchers have found that seeking MH related information is associated with greater odds of accessing health services (Reavley, Cvetkovski, & Jorm, 2011). Furthermore, online resources are considered more and more as a promising way to reach people with MH problems, as they may reshape social and information boundaries. Library and information science (LIS) and its various areas of research – especially information behavior (IB) – could shed light on certain aspects of the aforementioned problem. These aspects include evaluating MH literacy and information skills, systems development, and understanding the interaction between IB and MH.

The aim of this literature review was to examine how LIS empirical research has examined MH in recent years and to explore the trends pertaining to research investigating IB.

METHODS
In this review, LIS empirical research and MH were operationalized according to conceptual definitions: Borko’s (1968) and the World Health Organization’s (2013) respectively. A very inclusive definition of IB was adopted, in order to include aspects such as information sharing (Pettigrew, Fidel, & Bruce, 2001, p. 44; Wilson, 2000).

To focus on LIS research, searches were conducted in early June 2013 in two databases: Library and Information Science Abstracts (LISA) and the Web of Science subset of “Information Science & Library Science” research (hereafter WOS). To retrieve literature relevant to MH, various keywords were used, combining psych* or mental* with health, healthcare, illness*, ill, condition*, symptom*, problem*, distress, and well-being. In both databases, keywords were searched in the title field, and, in LISA, the subject term “Mental Health” was also included (WOS does not include subject terms). Because our information environment has dramatically changed in the last decades, only literature published from 2000 onward was included. All the abstracts and/or complete articles were examined to eliminate the articles that met the exclusion criteria. Exclusion criteria were as follows: 1) articles not reporting empirical research (such as book reviews or anecdotal articles), and 2) off-topic articles (that strictly related only to MH or only to LIS, or to neither). After eliminating

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duplicates and articles in neither English nor French, the sample consisted of 208 references, of which 159 were excluded (31 off-topic and 128 not empirical), resulting in a final sample of 49 articles.

Qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2012) was conducted on each of the articles to explore: 1) how MH is examined (as a topic/subject, profession, or personal state), 2) if IB is explored in the study, and 3) to which area of LIS research the study relates. Analysis was data- and concept-driven, and the codes and coding frame were discussed throughout the process. Inter-coder reliability was tested with a subset of the data (19%), yielding an overall 87% agreement rate. In the subset of articles examining IB, the principal investigator thematically analyzed emerging trends in the research.

RESULTS
The results show that MH is mainly considered as a personal state and that IB is mostly investigated within studies examining MH as a personal state (e.g., mental wellbeing) or as a profession (e.g., MH practitioners) (see Table 1).

Studies concerned with MH as a personal state mainly related to IB as an LIS research area, whereas studies concerned with MH as a topic/subject mainly related to bibliometrics/citation analysis or analysis/evaluation of information sources (e.g., comparison of bibliographic databases) (see Table 1).

Trends in IB-Related Research
Studies examining IB adopted qualitative approaches as much as quantitative ones, with a few adopting both (respectively 9, 8, and 4 studies). All the studies were cross-sectional, with one exception (Bessiere, Kiesler, Kraut, & Boneva, 2008). The majority of the studies were published from 2008 onward (17/21).

In the studies investigating the IB of lay people or patients, an important trend concerned online resources and new technologies. A first set of studies examined how the Internet or online resources may affect positively or negatively the MH state of people (Bessiere et al., 2008; Drentea, Goldner, Cotten, & Hale, 2008; Peebles et al., 2012; Setoyama, Yamazaki, & Namayama, 2011; Wong et al., 2013). Another set of studies assumed, to a certain degree, the benefits of new technologies and online resources, and aimed at exploring how the latter may support people in relation to their MH (Chang, 2009; Ellis et al., 2012; Neal, Campbell, Williams, Liu, & Nussbaumer, 2011; Tsai & Rosenheck, 2012) or the people they care for (Elf, Skarsater, & Krevers, 2011). One study was found to examine how people suffering from mental illnesses evaluated the quality of MH websites (Marton, 2010). Another trend involved studies examining the interaction between beliefs/conceptualizations or self- or social representations and the use of media or information sources (Fredrickson & Harrison, 2003; Kealey & Berkman, 2010; Krause, 2002; Oliphant, 2009). Finally, two studies investigated the information needs of mental health service users and the delivery of information from health professionals (Pollock, Grime, Baker, & Mantala, 2004) or in the form of bibliography (Fanner & Urquhart, 2008).

Studies focusing on health or MH professionals mostly aimed at examining aspects of their IB in order to develop or improve information services they use or might use (Barley, Murray, & Churchill, 2009; Blackburn, 2001; Kostagiolas, Samioti, Alexias, Korfiatis, & Niakas, 2012; Raghavendra & Venkatesha, 2012). Finally, one study

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<tr>
<th>LIS Area of research</th>
<th>Interest in MH</th>
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<td>Personal state</td>
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<td></td>
<td>An illness</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Information Behavior*</td>
<td>9 (7 + 2*)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interface/System Design and creation*</td>
<td>5 (4 + 1*)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Library and information services*</td>
<td>2 (1 + 1*)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bibliometrics/Citation analysis</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>Organization of information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analysis/Evaluation of Information Sources</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24</td>
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* Studies counted in two areas of research.

Table 1. Studies’ area of LIS research according to interest in MH
examined how counselors prepare for and use bibliotherapy in their practice (Pehrsson & McMillen, 2010).

**DISCUSSION**

Within LIS research, MH is definitely examined in a variety of ways and in various areas of the field. However, additional research opportunities emerged following this review. For example, studies related to library and information services seem to focus on professionals rather than lay people or MH service users. Furthermore, research investigating the IB of lay people or service users, in relation to online resources, mostly focuses on “Internet use” or preferences for MH-related online resources. Very few studies explore for what purposes the Internet or online resources are used (Bessiere et al., 2008; Setoyama et al., 2011). In many ways, MH-related online resources may push back some access boundaries, but many factors impact how we actually use information. Going beyond Internet use, and examining the impact of – and interaction with – other information sources, such as friends and family, or the impact of other factors, such as how mental illnesses are conceptualized, may lead to a better contribution of LIS research. For example, there is some evidence that how patients and professionals conceptualize the causes of a MH illness will impact their use of information in regards to decision-making (Berens, Witteman, & van de Ven, 2011; Oliphant, 2009). Finally, longitudinal data is scarce, leaving much unknown in regards to dynamic processes.

The preliminary findings of the research are limited by the analysis of only two databases. Future research will expand the analysis to additional databases such as PsycINFO.

**CONCLUSION**

This review has identified trends in how MH is considered in LIS research, and explored directions taken in IB-related studies. Future work will expand the breadth and depth of this analysis, and particularly continue to examine the relationship between MH and IB.

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To obtain a list of the relevant articles, please contact the first author.

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