Study books on ADHD genetics: balanced or biased?

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Abstract

Academic study books are essential assets for disseminating knowledge about ADHD to future healthcare professionals. This study examined if they are balanced with regard to genetics. We selected and analyzed study books (N=43) used in (pre) master’s programs at 10 universities in the Netherlands. Because the mere behaviourally informed quantitative genetics give a much higher effect size of the genetic involvement in ADHD, it is important that study books contrast these findings with molecular genetics’ outcomes. The latter studies use real genetic data, and their low effect sizes expose the potential weaknesses of quantitative genetics, like underestimating the involvement of the environment. Only a quarter of books mention both effect sizes and contrast these findings, while another quarter does not discuss any effect size. Most importantly, however, roughly half of the books in our sample mention only the effect sizes from quantitative genetic studies without addressing the low explained variance of molecular genetic studies. This may confuse readers by suggesting that the weakly associated genes support the quite spectacular, but potentially flawed estimates of twin, family and adoption studies, while they actually contradict them.