How French media have portrayed ADHD to the lay public and to social workers.

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Abstract

Two models of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) coexist: the biomedical and the psychosocial. We identified in nine French newspapers 159 articles giving facts and opinions about ADHD from 1995 to 2015. We classified them according to the model they mainly supported and on the basis of what argument. Two-thirds (104/159) mainly supported the biomedical model. The others either defended the psychodynamic understanding of ADHD or voiced both models. Neurological dysfunctions and genetic risk factors were mentioned in support of the biomedical model in only 26 and eight articles, respectively. These biological arguments were less frequent in the most recent years. There were fewer articles mentioning medication other than asserting that medication must be combined with psychosocial interventions (14 versus 57 articles). Only 11/159 articles claimed that medication protects from school failure. These results were compared to those of our two previous studies. Thus, both French newspapers and the specialized press read by social workers mainly defended either the psychodynamic understanding of ADHD or a nuanced version of the biomedical model. In contrast, most French TV programmes described ADHD as an inherited neurological disease whose consequences on school failure can be counteracted by a very effective medication.