Abstract

Recent research has shown high rates of comorbidity between attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and difficulties regarding differential diagnosis. Unlike those in Western countries, the Japanese ADHD prevalence rate is lower relative to that of ASD. This inconsistency could have occurred because of cultural diversities among professionals such as physicians. However, little is known about attitudes toward ADHD and ASD in non-Western cultural contexts. We conducted two experiments to identify biases in ASD and ADHD assessment. In Study 1, we examined attitudes toward these disorders in medical doctors and mental health professionals, using a web-based questionnaire. In Study 2, medical doctors and clinical psychologists assessed four fictional cases based on criteria for ADHD, ASD, oppositional defiant disorder, and disinhibited social engagement disorder (DSED). Diagnosis of ASD was considered more difficult relative to that of ADHD. Most participants assessed the fictional DSED case as ASD, rather than DSED or ADHD. The results provide evidence that Japanese professionals are more likely to attribute children's behavioral problems to ASD, relative to other disorders. Therefore, Japanese therapists could be more sensitive to and likely to diagnose ASD, relative to therapists in other countries. These findings suggest that cultural biases could influence clinicians' diagnosis of ADHD and ASD.