
STIGMATIZATION OF SCHIZOPHRENIA IN FLEMISH NEWSPAPERS

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BACKGROUND A considerable social stigma is attached to psychiatric disorders in general. However, research also shows differences between psychiatric disorders related to stigma. There are indications that the portrayal of schizophrenia in the media is particularly negative.

AIM: To compare the coverage of autism and schizophrenia in the Flemish newspapers regarding stigma.

METHOD On the websites of the seven Flemish newspapers all articles published between 2008 and 2012 were screened for the keywords autism/autistic and schizophrenia/schizophrenic. The collected articles (N=4,181) were then graded to stigmatizing content.

RESULTS In the collected articles the coverage of autism was mostly positive and the coverage of schizophrenia was predominantly negative. The contrast is very substantial ($p < 0.0001$) and the negative coverage of both disorders increased over time.

CONCLUSION The social stigma that rests on schizophrenia is poignantly reflected in the Flemish newspapers. The observation that a somewhat similar disorder such as autism is covered in a clearly more favorable way indicates that a more positive image of schizophrenia is not only desirable but also possible.