

## Research Article

# Online News Media Portrayal of ADHD on the Websites of BBC and CNN International during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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*Purpose.* Individuals with attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) have experienced exacerbated symptoms and negative effects during the pandemic on both physical and mental health. However, the leading global news websites did not cover the vulnerabilities and special needs of individuals with ADHD in the context of the neurodiversity approach. I argue that both [cnn.com](http://cnn.com) and [bbc.com](http://bbc.com) did not incorporate the neurodiversity approach aiming to increase acceptance and inclusion of the differences without viewing them as deficits. *Methods.* The present study explores online news media portrayal of ADHD during the COVID-19 pandemic through content analysis between March 2020 and October 2022. The news articles mentioning ADHD (64 from [bbc.com](http://bbc.com) and 56 from [cnn.com](http://cnn.com)) were analyzed. *Results.* Findings show that ADHD was dominantly framed as a medical issue, far from the neurodiversity perspective. Only 13 news articles among 64 (approximately 20%) on [bbc.com](http://bbc.com) and 4 among 56 (less than 10%) on [cnn.com](http://cnn.com) incorporated the neurodiversity approach that would benefit both individuals with ADHD and the whole society during the pandemic. *Practice Implications.* The findings show a need for more awareness of neurodiversity in the news media and a broader coverage of ADHD-related neurodiversity during the pandemic.

## 1. Introduction

The Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) started in December 2019 in Wuhan, China, and it has turned into a global pandemic since March 2020, causing severe health issues. Many countries introduced measures such as lockdowns, quarantines, and social isolation policies with the effect on individuals' mental health to fight the pandemic outbreak [1]. Increased feelings of anxiety, depression, and poor mental well-being have been associated with these pandemic conditions. Psychological distress related to COVID-19 hospitalizations also affected the mental health of patients and family members [2]. Persons with mental disorders have been exposed to a greater risk of severe infection and hospitalization [3], and the increased risk of death in patients with COVID-19 compared to nonpsychiatric patients has been 1.5-fold during the pandemic [4].

Attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), one of the most prevalent mental disorders, is characterized by pervasive and persistent symptoms of inattention,

hyperactivity, and impulsivity [5, 6]. Individuals with ADHD have faced severe problems during the COVID-19 pandemic [7–9]. Increased adverse outcomes of the infection, higher rates of hospitalization, and mortality from COVID-19 have been associated with ADHD [10]. ADHD as a potential risk factor for COVID-19 infection [11] has been analyzed particularly in terms of the cross-influence of ADHD and COVID-19, negative effects, and exacerbated symptoms [12–15]. Another study revealed the effects of digital media use on children and adolescents with ADHD on the core symptoms, worse attention, oppositional defiant behavior and emotional problems, and more self-reported anxiety and depression [16]. However, media representation of ADHD has not been discussed in the context of ADHD-related neurodiversity aiming to increase acceptance and inclusion of the neurological, developmental, or learning differences without considering them deficits. The neurodiversity approach, which refrains from disabling and negative attributions such as stigma and incapability, focuses on meeting special needs and supporting strengths. As the

neurodiversity approach may contribute to the well-being of individuals with ADHD, the neurodiversity movement, and public policy-making process, it is important to analyze news media portrayals. This study aimed to reveal news media representation of ADHD on the websites of the top news outlets, namely, BBC and CNN International, through content analysis between March 2020 and October 2022 during the pandemic. In this context, the representation of mental health in the media will be elucidated. Second, previous ADHD media portrayals will be presented, and third, there will be a discussion on news media representation of ADHD on the websites of the top news outlets.

*1.1. Mental Health in the Media.* News media are the primary source of information on mental health issues and mental disorders [17–19]. Media coverage of mental disorders can influence the way people conceive the illness [20], reorient behaviors, and increase awareness [21]. News media transform expert knowledge into lay knowledge, often creating the first contact with a health issue through the news media or through other persons who transmit health-related news [22]. The public relies on news media for health-related information because of a lack of direct experience with many health issues and sufficient health knowledge [23]. Moreover, news media provide a discussion on the latest scientific research and transmit complex health information to the public [24]. News media can influence public health policies by increasing public awareness, amplifying voices, applying pressure, and mobilizing decision-makers for policy change [25–27]. As framing theory posits, media frames construct meaning and affect the audience [28]. Media frames of mental health news influence public support for policy solutions [29]. Since mental health policy frameworks are affected by media representations of mental disorders [30–32], moral judgments of mental health issues can be evoked, and public policies of mental disorders can be impacted by news frames [33].

Media representations of health issues have certain impacts on the social reality and the perspectives of the citizens [34, 35]. Media portrayals are one of the most important sources of social representations, which contribute to contemporary reconstructions of socially shared knowledge of mental disorders [36–39]. Social representations of mental health and mental illness create a public image of disorders [40, 41] and affect the ideas and understandings of the everyday world in societies [22, 42, 43]. As priming and cognitive accessibility theories put forward, media consumption creates mental shortcuts to judge numerous topics and social groups [44, 45]. Even a single exposure to a mediated stereotype can activate the cognitive link between a particular social group and a stereotypical feature [46–48]. Thus, media priming and stereotypical portrayals may cause cognitive, attitudinal, or behavioral decisions [49]. When media exposure is chronic, cultivated effects of stereotypical representations may lead to negative judgments about issues and social groups. Since cultivation theory puts forward, cultivation generates long-term effects in constructing social reality, taking a particular stance

toward public issues, and supporting or questioning specific policies [49]. In a similar vein, agenda-setting theory suggests [50], media salience of issues affects public agenda and public opinion. Therefore, the growing media interest and promotion of certain media discourse on mental health issues can have significant implications. Media representations may cause policy blindness, neglect, and distraction, leading to particular social, political, and policy responses driven by media reports [51].

Media depictions of mental illness have been historically stereotypical and marked by misrepresentation [52] (Johnson and Olson 2021). Linking mental disorders with the cause of crime, using stigmatizing language by referring to people as “mentally ill,” and oversimplification of complex manifestation of symptoms are among salient media depictions of mental disorders. Structural stigma and discrimination in the negative newspapers frames [53] (Corrigan et al. 2005), dramatic and distorted images of mental disorders such as being violent, dangerous, unpredictable, and criminal [54] have dominated media portrayals. Moreover, negative portrayals of people with mental illnesses exacerbate negative attitudes and social stigma toward them, decreasing beneficial public policy support for mental disorders [55]. In the following section, the media portrayal of ADHD will be elaborated.

*1.2. ADHD in the Media.* ADHD is globally estimated to affect approximately 3–5% of children and adolescents, and 2.8% of adults, with a range between 1.4–3.6% [56, 57]. As ADHD has turned into one of the most common disorders of childhood that often continues into adulthood and old age [58], it has received more scholarly and media attention. The debates on the social construction of ADHD as behavior and performance of children and adults that are not aligned with cultural expectations also attracted media attention [59]. Thereby, ADHD as a historically popular topic of discussion in the media has been explored by scholars, particularly in terms of media representation.

Norris and Llyold [60] analyzed national British press coverage of ADHD between 1991 and 1997 and explicated media discourse contributing to defining ADHD. They explored that newspaper articles provided a forum for changing relations with medical experts by giving a voice to parents and developing consumerism in having a right to drugs. With the rapid increase in the number of children with ADHD, the role of the media in the rise of ADHD was also examined [61]. According to that study, media medicalization of ADHD was affected by drug companies and high diagnosis and prescription rates. ADHD has been historically conceptualized as a disruptive behavior disorder [62] and it has been emblematic of the medicalization of child behavior [63, 64]. On the other hand, medical diagnostic criteria penetrated discursive practices and challenged media medicalization [65].

Another study revealed representation of ADHD over a ten-year period, 1988–1997, in popular magazine and journal articles, identifying popular understandings of ADHD [66]. Researchers concluded that biological and

genetic perceptions of causes of ADHD, a prevailing image of young white boys being the most likely ones having ADHD, and the priority of symptoms of hyperactivity rather than inattention were the primary media frames.

Horton-Salway [67] examined the UK national newspapers between 2000 and 2009 and presented biological and psychosocial media frames in which children with ADHD and their parents were mostly negatively represented. Harwood et al. [63] analyzed Australian newspaper media between 1999 and 2009 and pointed out that metaphors in media reports had a medicalizing effect while describing and constructing the realities of ADHD. Ray and Hinnant [68] explored ADHD coverage in magazines from 1985 to 2008 and expressed that magazines helped to normalize ADHD by creating a better-informed and empathetic audience. News stories mentioning taking ADHD medication put ADHD on par with other health problems, and pejorative terminology was rarely used, not contributing to stigmatizing ADHD. However, danger terminology perpetuated the stigma of violence and mental disorders. Overall, ADHD turned into a “normal” part of the culture while the medicalization of ADHD and marginalization of persons with ADHD persisted in some of the news stories.

Moreover, it has been revealed that ADHD has been widely represented through gender stereotypes, neglecting the diversity and complexity of both male and female experiences in ADHD [69]. According to Clarke [70], the portrayal of ADHD in North American magazines published between 1988 and 2008 contained pervasive skepticism about the true existence of ADHD. As England Kennedy [71] revealed that societal doubts about the validity of the diagnosis of ADHD and negative stereotypes prevailed in media depictions and the US television series. Ponnou and Gonon [72] examined major French national newspapers between 1995 and 2015 and revealed prevailing explanations of ADHD, mostly covering the biomedical model of ADHD. ADHD appeared as a real syndrome that might require medication with other therapeutic methods, but not as a neurological illness in most French newspapers. Although the studies mentioned above exhibited the change in media representations of ADHD over the years, ADHD-related neurodiversity has not been elaborated with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the following, ADHD will be discussed in terms of neurodiversity during the pandemic.

*1.3. ADHD-Related Neurodiversity during the COVID-19 Pandemic.* The concept of neurodiversity explains neurological differences without resorting to terms such as disorder, deficit, impairment, or disability, which are considered dismissive [73]. Neurodiversity refers to recognizing, respecting, embracing, and celebrating neurological variance as any other human variation. After the term was coined by sociologist, Judy Singer [74], denoting Autism and Asperger’s Syndrome, the neurodiversity movement has grown gradually to encompass other neurological or neurodevelopmental disorders beyond autism spectrum disorder, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, and Tourette’s syndrome related to civil rights and nondiscrimination [75].

Destigmatizing neurodivergent individuals and empowerment are one of the main aims of the neurodiversity movement [76]. It focuses on the strengths, special talents, and different perspectives of neurodivergent individuals [77].

Although ADHD is marked by inattentiveness, inconsistent focus, inconvenient hyperactivity, and impulsivity, causing impairment to academic achievement, social relations, or vocational situations, ADHD is associated with creativity, divergent, and unconstrained thinking as well [78–80]. Hyperfocus [81] and entrepreneurship [82, 83] are other prominent positive traits of ADHD according to the neurodiversity perspective. Numerous studies revealed that coping strategies, unique thinking styles, and diverse life experiences of neurodivergent individuals, including individuals with ADHD, could bring a competitive/strategic advantage to organizations, public agencies, civil services, or businesses [76]. However, there is limited achievement in the recognition and acceptance of neurodivergent individuals, particularly in neoliberal times in which services such as health, education, and care are regarded as commodities, not rights [84].

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health and well-being of individuals with ADHD has been adverse [85]. Increased risk of contracting COVID-19, worsening of symptoms, cooccurring mental health difficulties, mental ill health, and significant levels of distress of individuals with ADHD have been reported [86]. Young people with ADHD and their families experienced exacerbated difficulties [8], children with ADHD suffered from worsening symptoms [87], and individual employees with ADHD faced difficulties in remote working conditions [88]. Moreover, due to lockdowns and quarantine restrictions, individuals with ADHD faced numerous challenges. Social isolation, distance education problems, lack of motivation, and boredom were the most common top problems among adolescents and young adults with ADHD during the pandemic [89]. People with ADHD, one of the neurodiverse populations, have had more severe emotional, depressive, and anxious symptoms and a higher level of COVID-19-related fear, concern, and stress during the pandemic [90]. In this context, lack of public policies to eliminate health disparities between neurodiverse and neurotypical populations, but prioritizing self-help, self-sufficiency, and individual responsibility over social policies may exacerbate the overall well-being of ADHD populations, particularly during the pandemic. Given that the neurodiversity paradigm incorporates meeting the special needs of neurodivergent individuals, creating inclusive environments, achieving social justice, and the struggle for civil rights, exploring the portrayal of ADHD would indicate the extent of incorporation of the neurodiversity perspective in the news media.

## 2. Method

In this study, content analysis aiming to achieve replicable and valid inferences through the systematic classification process of coding, quantifying, and identifying themes and

patterns of the texts was conducted [91]. The leading global news websites of BBC and CNN International were analyzed because they are among the most visited news sites worldwide [92]. Health-related information on the Internet is one of the most frequently searched information [93] and the Internet is an ADHD source of information [94]. Moreover, the global growth of ADHD points to the usage of the Internet for ADHD-related information [95] and access through the Internet to the news media is getting increasingly pervasive [96]. Moreover, the public has a higher level of trust in the news media to gather health information [23].

*2.1. Sampling and Data Analysis.* To reach a systematic and transparent analysis, the news articles containing the keywords “ADHD,” “attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder,” “ADD” and “attention deficit disorder” on the websites of BBC and CNN International were collected and recorded. 64 news articles on the BBC website and 56 news articles on the CNN International website mentioning ADHD were yielded between March 2020 and October 2022. The news stories dealt with ADHD in the UK and the USA during the pandemic.

After recording news articles from *bbc.com* and *cnn.com*, coding categories were derived inductively to explore dominant frames. Based on the representation of ADHD, three frames through a qualitative study were formed and coded each article mentioning ADHD for its overall portrayal. An external coder recoded the dataset for validation check as well. If an article primarily depicted ADHD as violent, dangerous, or a cause of crime, it was classified as *stigmatizing frame*. An article was classified as a *medical issue frame* if it portrayed the medical features of ADHD, such as symptoms or difficulties, mental health challenges during the pandemic, helpful practices, recommendations, or the latest research on ADHD. An article was classified as a *neurodiversity frame* if ADHD was not portrayed as a deficiency or impairment but more as a difference, diversity of human variance, and valuation of gifts and special needs of individuals with ADHD. The news articles from neurodiversity frames were analyzed under 2 categories, and each was coded with a bullet point (●).

- (i) If an article incorporated neurodiversity terms such as neurodiverse, neurodivergent, or neurodiversity, indicating diversity
- (ii) If an article highlighted the strength, achievement, or success story of an individual with ADHD

Two of these measures were combined into neurodiversity measures scores ranging from 1 to 2 bullet points to assess the level of the neurodiversity frame.

### 3. Results

Most of the news stories on both *bbc.com* and *cnn.com* represented ADHD as a medical issue, not a difference or human variance. ADHD was dominantly framed as a mental

illness that must be cured on *bbc.com* and *cnn.com*. Medical features of ADHD and mental health problems of individuals with ADHD were overwhelmingly portrayed. Table 1 indicates the dominant news frames on the websites.

After the outbreak of the pandemic, *bbc.com* featured 64 news articles and 29 of them dealt with ADHD as the main issue during the pandemic. The remaining 35 news articles mentioned ADHD as a secondary condition, such as autism, dyslexia, and anxiety. *Cnn.com* featured more news articles mentioning ADHD than *bbc.com* in 2020 and 2021 but published fewer news articles in 2022. However, only 5 of 56 news articles dealt with ADHD as the main topic after the start of the pandemic, between March 2020 and October 2022 on *cnn.com*. The remaining 51 news articles just mentioned ADHD in the mental health news stories related to other topics such as autism, learning disabilities, and online distance education programs. The extract below demonstrates an example of a medical issue news frame on *bbc.com*.

Extract 1: Why women may wait decades for an ADHD diagnosis

Gender bias is leaving many women with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder undiagnosed, leading psychologists are warning

The prevailing stereotype ADHD affects only “naughty boys” means at least tens of thousands in the UK, it is estimated, are unaware they have the condition and not receiving the help they need

“I used to tell doctors and therapists all the time, “You’ve got to make this constant noise in my head stop. I can’t think. I can’t sleep. I can’t get any peace,” but this was always dismissed as anxiety or women’s problems,” Hester says (. . .) [97].”

Extract 1 describes prevailing symptoms of ADHD in women and criticizes gender inequality, which causes fewer diagnoses in women. Misdiagnosis with women, gender bias that causes underdiagnoses, and waiting for a long time for women’s first assessments were some prevailing themes about ADHD in women in the news stories on *bbc.com*.

The extract below, as an example of a medical issue frame from *cnn.com*, addresses the special difficulties children with ADHD experienced during the pandemic. The mental health of children, the effect of the pandemic on children’s well-being and educational problems, the symptoms of ADHD, and helpful practices for improvement were the common themes about ADHD in children in the news stories on both *cnn.com* and *bbc.com*.

Extract 2: How to help children with ADHD thrive in a virtual schoolhouse

When schools shut down because of the coronavirus, some parents of children with ADHD found themselves in a stressful predicament.

TABLE 1: Number of news articles in stigmatizing, neurodiversity, and mental illness frames cnn.com and bbc.com dataset.

	Stigmatizing frame	Medical issue frame	Neurodiversity frame	Total
cnn.com	0	52	4	56
bbc.com	1	50	13	64

Homeschooling is hard for any parent who’s never done so before, but parents of children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder face special challenges.

It means parents who are likely ill-equipped are dealing with learning and behavioral differences that their children’s school professionals may have been trained to manage. (...)

A neurodevelopmental disorder commonly diagnosed in childhood that often lasts into adulthood, ADHD stems from underdeveloped or impaired executive function and self-regulation skills, according to Harvard University’s Center on the Developing Child. Those skills help us to plan, focus attention, remember instructions and multitask (...) [98].

As Table 1 indicates, bbc.com featured only 13 neurodiversity news stories among 64 news articles, which was approximately 20% of all news articles. Bbc.com mentioned neurodiversity terms only in 5 articles; however, two of them depicted neurodiversity as a medical issue, rather than diversity. Table 2 shows the assessment of the neurodiversity frame on bbc.com.

Table 2 shows the neurodiversity scores on bbc.com. Each news article was quantified in terms of incorporating the neurodiversity terms and strength, achievement, or success story of individuals with ADHD. As the extract below demonstrates, neurodiversity was mentioned and explained on bbc.com as difference, not a mental illness.

Extract 3: Stunning 150 umbrella neurodiversity project in Stoke-on-Trent

A vibrant display of 150 colorful umbrellas has been put up in Stoke-on-Trent to highlight neurodiversity

The Neurodiversity Umbrella Project was designed to celebrate and raise awareness of cognitive and learning differences such as autism and dyspraxia. (...)

The uplifting national scheme has been designed to represent one in five people who are neurodiverse and recognize the strengths and abilities that come with learning and thinking differently

What is Neurodiversity?

The term was first introduced in the 1980s by Judy Singer, an Australian sociologist who spent many years studying cognitive behavior

It describes a range of neurological differences, including dyslexia, dyspraxia (also called developmental coordination disorder or DCD), dyscalculia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and autism spectrum condition (ASC).

These conditions often co-occur, and many symptoms may overlap [99]

On the other hand, cnn.com featured only 1 news article from the neurodiversity frame that highlighted the strengths and success stories of individuals with ADHD. Despite featuring 5 articles regarding neurodiversity, the news stories (4) depicted differences as a manifestation of medical disorders along with strengths and achievements of neurodivergent individuals. Table 3 shows the neurodiversity assessment on cnn.com (See Table 3).

The following extract 4, as an example of medical issue frame, illustrates the usage of the term neurodivergent as a deficit, not as a difference, on cnn.com.

Extract 4: 5 ways parents can support their tweens when a friendship ends (...)

Tweens and teens need exposure to lots of new things to figure out who they are, including experiences and people. More chances to try new things and meet new people naturally increase your child’s odds of finding their fit. Neurodivergent children, such as those with ADHD or who are on the autism spectrum, in particular, find adolescent friendships uniquely challenging.

In a small study, ADHD teen participants revealed in 2020 that while middle school was the hardest time for friendship, moving up to the high school where they had more chances to meet more people, take more classes and participate in more extracurriculars made it much easier to make and keep friends (...) [100].

As it was shown in the extract, the term neurodivergent was used interchangeably with mental illness without any explanation. Overall, cnn.com less covered ADHD-related neurodiversity compared to bbc.com as its total neurodiversity score (5) is far less than bbc.com’s (14). On the other hand, although bbc.com incorporated more neurodiversity frames, it rarely featured the neurodiversity terms such as *neurodiverse* or *neurodivergent*. Furthermore, both websites mentioned the neurodiversity terms that were not congruent with the scope of the term, as if it was another type of mental illness. They could not provide a public debate on the needs of the individuals with ADHD such as inclusive policies, support for special educational needs, occupational support, or social support. Besides, bbc.com featured a stigmatizing news story, which forged a link between ADHD and violence. The individuals with ADHD were dominantly the murderers in the crime stories (in 4 of the 5 stories) on bbc.com. On cnn.com, individuals with ADHD appeared in crime stories as criminals with intellectual or invisible disabilities and behavioral or psychological disorders. Both websites did not address the increased risk of individuals with ADHD contracting COVID-19, as well as the increased adverse outcomes of the infection, higher rates of hospitalization, and mortality from COVID-19.

TABLE 2: Neurodiversity measures the bbc.com dataset.

Article no	Neurodiversity terms, indicating diversity	Strength, achievement, or success story	Score
a.1		●	1
a.2	●	●	2
a.3		●	1
a.4		●	1
a.5		●	1
a.6		●	1
a.7		●	1
a.8		●	1
a.9	●		1
a.10		●	1
a.11		●	1
a.12	●		1
a.13		●	1
Total = 13 articles	Total score = 3	Total score = 11	Total score = 14

TABLE 3: Neurodiversity measures, cnn.com dataset.

Number of articles	Neurodiversity terms, indicating diversity	Strength, achievement, or success story	Score
b.1		●	1
b.2		●	1
b.3		●	1
b.4	●	●	2
Total = 4 articles	Total score = 1	Total score = 4	Total score = 5

Nevertheless, the news media featured mental health problems and difficulties exacerbated by the pandemic.

#### 4. Discussion

The study aimed to reveal the portrayal of ADHD during the COVID-19 pandemic on *bbc.com* and *cnn.com*. The analysis indicated that online news media did not embrace the neurodiversity approach. ADHD was portrayed as a medical issue rather than a difference or diversity of human variance. Success stories, strengths, special talents, or unique perspectives of individuals with ADHD received limited coverage. Stereotypical deficit and disability depictions persisted in some news stories, which linked ADHD to committing crimes. As discussed before, media depictions affect public perceptions of mental health issues, and misrepresentations are likely to cause an increase in stigmas, ostracism, harassment, and victimization. As stereotypical representations possibly increase stigmatizing attitudes towards people with mental disorders [101], stereotypical media depictions may cause adverse effects for individuals with ADHD during the pandemic. News depictions may discourage ADHD populations from seeking help and decrease support-seeking behaviors and access to mental health services. Moreover, individuals with ADHD are at high risk of being stigmatized, affecting the underestimation of risk factors, the public's skepticism toward the reliability of an ADHD diagnosis, treatment adherence, treatment efficacy, and well-being of individuals with ADHD [102].

News portrayals of ADHD lacked information on the health risks and vulnerabilities of individuals with ADHD

associated with COVID-19. Since ADHD is a potential risk factor for COVID-19 infection, and individuals with ADHD have been exposed to adverse effects, mental health problems, and severe challenges during the pandemic, news media representation of ADHD raised the need for broader coverage.

As the current study revealed once again, the neuro-normative perspective dominated mainstream news media. Therefore, the representation of ADHD on *bbc.com* and *cnn.com* needs to be criticized for causing more inequality over neurodiversity and privileging neurotypicality during the pandemic. Since ADHD already has a long history of media medicalization and misrepresentations, the invisibility of ADHD-related neurodiversity in the media may have caused a lack of recognition and/or awareness of the special needs and support for individuals with ADHD during the pandemic.

The results indicated a need for more awareness of neurodiversity among the newsmakers, as well. Given that the visibility of neurodiversity narratives that amplify the voices of neurodivergent individuals in the media would help combat deficit-based perspectives, it can increase the perceived importance of the need to support individuals with ADHD and the neurodiversity approach. Given that the media salience of ADHD-related neurodiversity can affect public agenda and public opinion, more coverage of ADHD-related neurodiversity may shape media and public discourse. Neurodiversity frames can become more effective through greater media coverage. As government mental health policies can be shaped or affected by news media representations, the visibility of health inequalities in the

media can increase proneurodiversity support. Neglected groups such as individuals with ADHD or other neurodivergent populations need more media attention, especially during the health crisis and pandemics, enhancing both individual and community well-being.

The *neurodiversity paradigm* may gain momentum with growing media interest as adverse global health impacts of hegemonic neuronormative approaches can be exposed by news media. Moreover, clinical practices are likely to be impacted, and the *pathology paradigm* based on the normal/abnormal divide may be challenged with accurate news media representations. As health communication affects clinical trials and competence [103] (Schiavo 2013), news media can influence and encourage ADHD-related neurodiversity perspectives.

My study presents some limitations. The data used in this study were collected from two popular websites of the global media. However, there are many other news websites, social media platforms, or diverse online environments besides other news media outlets such as print newspapers and TV broadcasts. Nevertheless, both CNN International and BBC are prestigious and long-established news outlets. Analysis of other news outlets, such as tabloids, may reveal misrepresentation of ADHD and indicate a greater need for the neurodiversity approach.

## 5. Conclusion

This study revealed that dominant global news outlets ignored the neurodiversity approach that would benefit both individuals with ADHD and the whole society during the pandemic. Individuals with ADHD seek better support mechanisms, recognition, inclusion, and greater understanding from society. Since the neurodiversity approach incorporates highlighting the special needs of neurodivergent individuals, creating inclusive environments, and achieving social justice, the incorporation of the neurodiversity approach in the news media during the pandemic would help significantly alleviate deterioration in many areas of life, including familial, social, educational, and occupational experiences of individuals with ADHD. It would also contribute to the mental and physical well-being of individuals with ADHD. Not to whitewash lived experiences or challenges that individuals with ADHD often have, but to underpin positive traits such as creativity, unique perspectives, talents, strengths, and entrepreneurial mindset with the special needs of the individuals with ADHD in the news media would positively impact the public policy-making process as well. Inclusive policies such as meeting special educational needs would particularly help children and families. As the pandemic exacerbated inequity in education, supporting neurominorities such as the students with ADHD would decrease the inequalities. Moreover, news media could contribute to the encouragement of the workplace adjustments and management strategies to support neurodivergent employees.

I consequently call for a neurodiversity approach in the news media coverage of ADHD, especially during the health crises, such as pandemics, to achieve equal opportunities,

treatment, and understanding of the neurodiversity approach. Rather than portraying ADHD as a form of medical pathology and framing it with a pure medical discourse, addressing the strengths, achievements and special needs of people with ADHD should be narrated more by using everyday language. This would bring out substantial well-being and societal implications. Finally, it would enhance public understanding of ADHD, appreciate the neurocognitive diversity of human beings, ensure recognition, reduce stigmas, and increase the motivation of neurominorities to seek support from healthcare professionals.

## Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available in [bbc.com](http://bbc.com) and [cnn.com](http://cnn.com) and are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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