Lead poisoning in children and press discourse

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Objectives: This study evaluates media coverage on smoke pollution caused by an accumulator factory in a residential district of Bauru, Sao Paulo, Brazil.

Methodology: Articles on environmental accidents and lead poisoning, their impact on the population, and social impact were selected from three Brazilian journals, taking the sequence of events presented into account. A total of 66 articles published between April and December 2002 were selected. A discourse analysis in three dimensions—the impact of the text discourse, interaction and social practice—was performed using qualitative tools. The article discusses the impact on child health, and government initiatives taken to tackle this public health problem.

Results: The analysis generated three categories; what happened (social impact), what was discovered (medical or epidemiological diagnosis), and what was done (environmental interventions).

The eminently descriptive role of the press and the series of events according to the media are presented. The press interpreted the clinical-epidemiological and environmental diagnoses, acting as a mediator between different sectors of society.

Conclusions: This study contributes to the development of educational programs focused on caring for the environment and their impact on public health.