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COVERAGE OF HEALTH ISSUES IN NEWSPAPERS AN OBSERVATIONAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Research Question: What are the contents and coverage of health issues published in News paper.

Objective: To analyze contents & priorities given to the health issues published in news paper.

Design: Observational

Study period: 6 months from 1.05.2003 to 31.10.2003

Sources of Data: National Newspaper viz., Times of India & Hindu. Regional Newspapers viz., Vijay Karnataka & Prajavani.

Statistical analysis: content analysis and percentage.

Results: More focus was on reporting injuries & death due the various cause (66.15%) report on recent advances (6.02%) quackery & malpractice only (3.56%).

Conclusions: Priority should be given widely to preventive measure. Media has to be Liaison between policy makers, Administrative staff & common man to formulate need based health policy. Thus the multifaceted powerful, economically handy weapon like news paper can play a vital role in health care.

INTRODUCTION

Influence of most common communication media like newspapers are nowadays inseparable part of living. The ability of the printed word to influence both the ordinary newspaper reader & the attitude of the policy maker cannot be underestimated. Life without communication cannot be imagined. It is well known fact that communication medias act as back bone of human society. It is as old as man kind and also communication medias are very active catalyst of social change.

News paper is one of the communication media though the newspaper is commercial publication it is also a powerful, popular, economical, handy, weapon to bring social change to achieve national development.

A developing country like India's, hurdles of development are burning social problems like poverty, illiteracy, ignorance, conservatism, unemployment, gender bias such social, political and cultural factors have led to a number of

multifaceted and complex problems of vicious nature.

Among all the developmental issues health care, health promotion has to be given a special priority. A popular quote "Health is Wealth" and ancient¹ Chinese quote which stands ever green.

"If the National plan is one year – Grow Rice

If it is for 25 years – Grow Trees

If it is for 100 years- Do Health Education"

Significance of Study: The birds view of health scenario is alarming, health needs are more demanding, the goal which aims at ²"Health for all" by 2000 A.D, which was initiated during 1977 (30th May 1977) by World Health Assembly. WHA decided to launch social, global target "Health for all by 2000 A.D" defined as attainment by all the people of the world, a level of health, which will enable or permit every individual to lead socially and economically a productive life" is tough task which is striving

very hard to achieve the goal. As the health of the Indians is in the pangs complex causes which are inter-related these factors make the task more difficult but not an impossible one. Unless we go for the scientifically effective & affordable strategies, it becomes a distant dream.

To have the proper strategies community participation is a must. This can be achieved by creating awareness regarding health problems ways to alleviate them & chanelize the efforts. In this contest the news papers play a major role.

The present study intends to observe, classify and focus on the contents of the health issues published in mass media like news papers & its contribution towards creating health awareness among general public and also it can influence policy makers and Health care providers attitude to go for innovative, need based approach to tackle health care issues there by leading to national development.

OBJECTIVES

1. To find out the kind of health issues published in the news papers.
2. To observe the priority given to type of contents of health issues in news papers.

MATERIALS and METHODOLOGY

1. Type of study – Observational
2. Duration of the study - Six months from: 1.5.2003 to 31.10.2003.
3. Sample and Universe - National and Regional News-paper are our Universe of Study 184 issues of each National news-

papers viz Times of India and The Hindu 184 issues of each Regional newspapers viz Vijay Karnataka & Prajavani. The Criteria in the selection of daily news papers for the study were prominence as reflected in circulation and availability at Bijapur.

4. Sources of Data - All published items in 536 issues pertaining to health where included in the study.
5. Statistical application - Content analysis and percentage where used.
6. Technique of Data collection- The data was analyzed in terms of frequency and Percentage of type of item published. Based on content Analysis. ³ Berelson (1948) defined content analysis as a research technique for the objective, systematic quantitative description of the manifest content of communication. Based on the pilot study the published items were categorized on the basis of contents of communications.

Category

- I. Report on morbidity & mortality
- II Preventive aspect
- III Recent advances
- IV Indigenous system
- V Sensational news
- VI Malpractice & quackery
- VII Policy & programmes.

OBSERVATIONS

Table - 1 Category wise distribution of health issues published in four different news papers.

PAPER	I Health Disease	II Preventive Aspect	III Recent advances	IV Indigenous System	V Sensational News	VI Malpractice Quackery	VII Policy & Prog.	TOTAL
Times of India	410	57	91	24	23	45	74	724
The Hindu	488	19	87	21	19	22	105	761
Vijay Karnataka	749	53	19	34	35	31	207	1128
Prajavani	610	42	09	11	20	24	86	802
Total	2257 (66.15%)	171 (5%)	206 (6.02%)	90 (2.63%)	97 (2.83%)	122 (3.56%)	472 (138%)	3418

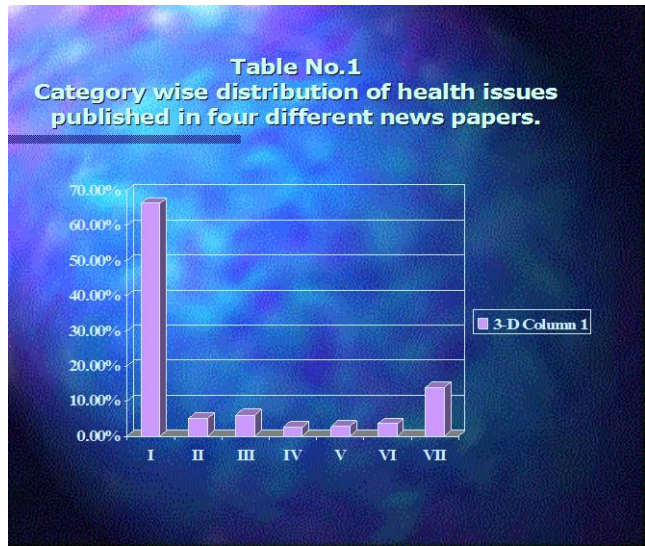
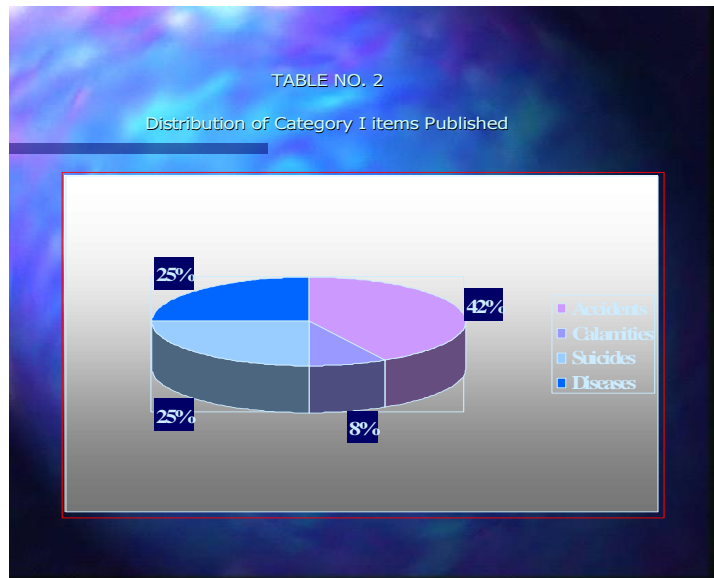


Table - 2 : Distribution of Category – I Items Published

Papers	Accidents	Natural calamities	Suicides	Diseases	Total
Times of India	104	21	110	175	410
The Hindu	226	41	123	98	488
Vijay Karnataka	315	54	175	205	749
Prajavani	305	70	154	81	610
Total	950 (42%)	186 (8%)	562 (25%)	559 (25%)	2257



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table No-1

Category - I. Which covers general description of Morbidity (status of illness) and mortality (death) due to various diseases, out break of diseases in community description on death due to various diseases or accidents has lion share (Table No.-I) of the total 3418 items related to health issues were 2257 (66%) were belonging to category – 1. and further Cat-1 subcategorized under the heading like Accidents, Natural calamities Suicides and Diseases.

Category – II. Deals with preventive aspects. Stitch in time saves nine stands true for ever by taking care of simple preventive aspects like drinking safe water washing hands before handling food and immunizing children etc., Though prevention is better than cure only 171 (5%) items were published on this important aspect of health information by encouraging publisher to publish more items on preventive aspect we can bring better changes in health habits of public.

Category – III. Deals with recent advances Inventions in the health care field were put under this category like newer generation of drugs, vaccines, sophisticated instrument and innovative techniques finding reveals that only 206 (6.02%) items were published on recent advances. In this present era of hitech medical advances, media should focus more on disseminating information regarding recent advances.

Category- IV. Revels about the coverage of indigenous system of health care.

Only 90 (2.6%) of the items were on different indigenous system. As our country is known for its unique, health care system like Ayurvedic, Naturopathy Sidda, Unani and Home remedies, etc., in fact these days Indian systems are gaining popularity world wide especially in developed countries, the ancient Indian system of health care should be encouraged as it is very much safe & suitable for economy, climate & culture of Indians

therefore media should play a major role in disseminating more information.

Category –V. Deals with sensational News about health and Diseases.

Sensational news attract the readers, most of the time such news are focused with special photograph like birth of triplets or quadruplets, unusual surgeries, abnormal growth of tumors, birth or separation of Siamese, over weight or under weight individuals, very Tall or Short persons etc., It is found 97 (2%) items were Published

Category – VI. Deals with Malpractice and quackery Due to various personal, Social, sociological, and economical causes easy money making trend is intruding in almost all professions. It is true even with the Nobel profession like health care viz., unnecessary investigations surgeries or drugs. Observation revealed

122 (3.56%) items were published on malpractice & quackery media needs to give more of such news to alert public to take care while selecting health care providers & also media has to initiate public to shoulder the responsibility to curb such illegal & unethical medical practice as they are harmful to the health of the public.

Category – VII. Deals with the news about National health policy, Health legislation and National health programmes and their plan and implementation. It is found 472 (13.8%) items were reports on health camps proposed & arranged, News about National health programmes planned and implemented, new schemes introduced time to time were also reported.

OBSERVATIONS OF TABLE No-2

An attempt has been made to further subcategorisation of category -1. It has maximum 2257 (66 %) of the total 3418 items related to Morbidity and Mortality.

1. **Accidents-** Maximum focus was on Accidents 950 (42%). It proves that accidents due to various causes are also major public health problem. It needs a special attention by policy

makers to formulate & implement, public health safety measure at all levels of life.

2. **Natural Calamities**- Reports on injuries & death due to natural calamity were found 186 (8%). As Natural calamities can be predicted but can't be prevented. More focus was on injuries & deaths due to different calamities negligible importance was given to publish disaster management.
3. **Suicides** - Suicide reports were 562 (25%). It is shocking that increase in suicides indicate disorganized social system. Increase in the number of disappointed indicates insecurity in life, due to various Psychosocial & economic reasons; media has to bring awareness among the health care providers & also general public to give the priority for the mental health care also.
4. **Diseases** - Only 559 (25%) items were published on morbidity & mortality due to various communicable and non-communicable diseases.

CONCLUSION

It was observed that more focus was on reporting injuries & deaths due to various causes, like-Accidents, Suicides or illness due to disease, rather than the root cause of such injury or death or infection, no informative instructions on possible preventive measures to curb the rate of injuries, infections & deaths.

Very few Report on recent advances were Published. Indigenous system & its utility value were not focused, efforts to enlighten the cruel practices like quackery, & malpractice is very much less. No innovative policy to tackle public health problem was reported.

The news paper can be a very good platform for policy makers, general public, health care professionals and administrative personnel to sort out the hurdles related to health care services.

Suggestions

Our observations made us to suggest following recommendations to make the following as permanent & regular feature of daily news papers.

- 1) First page coverage should include health information & health education.
- 2) Priority should be given to publish preventive measures to curb communicable & non communicable diseases.
- 3) Alternative and affordable new technique to tackle health problems should be initiated
- 4) Media has to be liaison between policy makers & public to formulate need based health policy.
- 5) News Paper has to play a vital role to encourage and to adopt indigenous system of health care.

Thus the multifaceted, powerful, economical handy weapon like newspapers can be utilized as a catalyst to create social action to fight the battle health for all leading to social welfare.

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