

Health in Nepalese Media

Kumal AB,¹ Ghimire J,¹ Mishra A,² Joshi P,³ Risal P,⁴ KC R⁴

¹Save the Children, ²Kantipur Daily, ³Annapurna Post Daily, ⁴Britain Nepal Medical Trust.

ABSTRACT

Background: Coverage of health in Nepali print media is quite a recent phenomenon despite readers' ample appetite for it. Dominated by politics, Nepal's print media has been marginally publishing news pieces, features, editorials and op-ed articles, photographs and cartoons on health, though marginally. But the media did not wake up to the issues of human resources for health until lately.

Methods: We content analysed the coverage of health issues including, human resources for health in select Nepali print media Kantipur, Nagarik and Annapurna Post of select three months in 2012 April, August and December. News pieces and their placements, Op-eds, editorials, features, letters to the editor, photos and cartoons were subjected to analysis.

Results: Over the study period, the papers covered 544 health news pieces, 44% of political news pieces. Health workforce news pieces contributed 24% to it. However, only 10% of the health news made to the front pages. Coverage of health in editorials, features, Op-eds, photographs, cartoons and letters to the editor is even more meager. For example, only 7% of the editorials are relating to health.

Conclusions: Health is prioritized far less by the print media than politics despite the reader's appetite for it. Print media should give health a top priority, particularly in those areas that relate to health systems like human resources for health, for their massive impact on the lives of the people.

Keywords: Content Analysis; Coverage; Health; Human Resources for Health; Major Dailies.

INTRODUCTION

Nepal's human resources for health (HRH) is in crisis. Nepal is among 59 countries with a critical shortage of human resources in health: health service professional ratio to 10,000 population is 7, a lot less than the minimum requirement of 23 recommended by the WHO.¹

Moreover, Nepal's health workforce is plagued by inequitable distribution, brain drain, poor retention, rampant absenteeism and imbalance in the production and consumption.^{2,3}

This problem has been festering for long as this could not be a public agenda. Given that media plays an important role in setting the public agenda,⁴ looking at its content could give an idea where the issue stands.

Thus the purpose of the study was to explore where health in general and HRH in particular stood in Nepal's agenda-setting dailies against politics.

METHODS

We analyzed the content to look into the coverage of health issues including, human resources for health in selected Nepali language mainstream dailies Kantipur, Nagarik and Annapurna Post. The papers were selected on the basis of their circulation and their ability to set the agenda. These dailies are the top selling in Nepal. We did not only analyze the content of these three papers over three months in 2012 - April, August and

Correspondence: Arjun Bahadur Kumal, Save the Children, Kathmandu, Nepal.
Email: arjunkumal@hotmail.com, Phone: 9841446999.

December- selected purposively at the interval of three months but also interviewed government officials and journalists to make a comparative study of the coverage of health issues, including human resources for health, in the Nepali print media against political coverage.

We looked into news pieces, the places they were accorded in the newspapers, Op-ed articles, features, editorials and cartoons, photos and letters to the editor to see how the papers have treated the health news. We then quantified these for comparison.

RESULTS

In three months spread over the year in 2012, Nepal's three major dailies published in Kathmandu - Kantipur, Nagarik and Annapurna Post covered 544 health news pieces against the political news pieces of 1,235. Zeroing down on human resources for health, these papers published 131 news pieces - 24% of total health news. Though the health news pieces fare quite well against the political news in terms of quantity, the importance accorded these news pieces is far too low as compared with the political news. Nearly 11% of the health news makes to the front pages and HRH news pieces have a contribution of 3% to it. This is far below the political front pagers. And there is hardly any day when the political news does not make to the front page. More than 87% the news pieces relating to health are pushed to the second, third and the inner pages of the papers - a bulk of these goes to the inner pages which are less likely to be seen and read.

Comparing Kantipur, Annapurna Post and Nagarik, we find that Annapurna Post is the most friendly among them to news related to health - 41% against 32% of Kantipur and 27% of Nagarik. In terms of prioritization of the news in the paper, Annapurna post has more health related news in front page (11%) and Nagarik has more HRH news in front page. Kantipur prioritizes health related news in the least: 91% pieces make to the second/third page and the inner pages. Interestingly though, it is Annapurna Post that is ahead of others in political reporting - 66.8% against of 16% of Kantipur and 16.7% of Nagarik (Table 1).

Looking at the reporting sites of the health related news at the national dailies, the result revealed that more than 60% of the health related news was from outside the Kathmandu valley. Looking at the individual national dailies, Kantipur and Nagarik covered more health news from outside the valley. This study also showed that 65% of health news pieces published were negative in nature whereas 35% of them were positive (Table 2). Nagarik is one of the dailies reporting more positive news compared to other (Table 2).

Table 1. The coverage of news in major dailies.

Content	Annapurna Post	Kantipur	Nagarik	Total
News coverage				
Political News	825	203	207	1235
Health News	221	176	147	544
HRH News	53	48	30	131
Total	1099	427	384	1910
Health news as a percentage of total news (Politics and health)	20.11	41.22	38.28	28.48
HRH news as a percentage of total Health news	23.98	27.27	20.41	24.08
Prioritization of News				
Political news in Front Page	248	288	258	794
Health news in Front Page	27	11	16	54
HRH news in Front Page	6	6	6	18
Health news in 2/3rd Page	88	67	21	176
Health news in inner page	115	104	115	334
Total Health News	236	188	158	582
% of Health News in Front page	11.44	5.85	10.13	9.28
% of HRH news in front page	2.54	3.19	3.80	3.09
% of health news in 2/3rd and inner pages	86.02	90.96	86.08	87.63

Table 2. Site and nature of health news.

Content	Annapurna Post	Kantipur	Nagarik	Total
Sites of Health News				
Health News related to Kathmandu valley	98 (41.53)	71 (37.77)	60 (37.35)	229 (39.35)
Health News outside the valley	138 (58.47)	117 (62.23)	98 (62.03)	353 (60.65)
Nature of Health News				
Positive	77 (32.63)	62 (32.98)	64 (40.51)	203 (34.88)
Negative	159 (67.37)	126 (67.02)	94 (59.49)	379 (65.12)

In comparison to news pieces, other genres - editorials, Op-eds, features, photographs, cartoons and letters to the editor - on health fare less well against political issues. For example, only 5% of the editorials are relating to health and only 2% of editorials were related to HRH whereas 70% of editorials are about political issues. Similarly, out of total other forms of health contents, Op-ed articles relating to health covers 11%. Op-ed on HRH was nil over the study period. In case of feature articles, 84 (27%) of them were published on health. There were 125 (40.19%) photos, most of them with features, 5 cartoons and 46 letters to the editors over the study period.

Editorials are important indicators of agenda-setting in public. There were more editorials in health in Annapurna post while in features, Kantipur is by far the best (33%). It was found that health related cartoons are less common in national dailies.

Table 3. Other forms of Health contents in Media.

Content	Annapurna Post	Kantipur	Nagarik	Total
Editorials	7 (9.59)	4 (2.99)	5 (4.81)	16 (5.14)
Op-ed articles	10 (13.70)	8 (5.97)	17 (16.35)	35 (11.25)
Features	18 (24.66)	44 (32.84)	22 (21.15)	84 (27.01)
Photos	24 (32.88)	56 (41.79)	45 (43.27)	125 (40.19)
Cartoons	1 (1.73)	1 (0.75)	3 (2.88)	5 (1.61)
Letter to Editor	13 (17.81)	21 (15.67)	12 (11.54)	46 (14.79)
Total	73	134	104	311

DISCUSSION

Given the huge importance of health to the people and interest of people in reading about it, our findings showed that health is a less prioritized issue in the coverage by print media. While political issues are widely covered as news pieces despite the non-relevance of them to majority of population, health falls far behind it despite its relevance to all people.⁵ This study shows politics is covered more than twice as much as health as news pieces and while most political pieces make to the front pages, more than 85% of health news pieces are pushed to second, third and the inner pages. This could have direct bearings to the letters to the editors which is pretty low just 46 of them on health. Letters to the editor are usually readers' responses to news pieces and op-eds.

Looking at the study findings, all the papers focused on the negative news. These sorts of news might have negative impact in the health system, as the popular media have far-reaching influence. Negative information do not usually strengthen the health system but rather politicize health related issues.⁶

Newspapers set the public agenda with As much as coverage or volume of space given and the placement of news pieces in the paper.⁷ Editorials speak volumes about what agenda they want to set, for they reflect their view and are meant to set the agenda of the state.⁸ 7% of editorials on health in this study clearly show that health is not a priority for papers studied.

Other newspaper genres - letters to the editor, photos and cartoons - are not as important indicators as news pieces, Op-eds, editorials and placement of news pieces are to show whether papers have accorded importance to a certain issue. Nevertheless, they reflect whether the paper is specific-issue friendly which can be judged by the number of letters to the editors published; whether the paper has taken extra-care to make its content interesting by using photos along with the article or whether an issue has been singled out as important with the cartoon representation. This study showed that health issue fared badly on the genres of letters to the editor, photos and cartoons.

As can be seen from the overall struggle health issues face in stealing the limelight in the print media, its sub-issues like human resources for health or for that matter any other single issue of health will not see the coverage their advocates will want no matter how important the issues may be. Human Resources for Health issues took the back seat in all the newspaper genres. For example, the HRH made only 2% of the editorials; it could not make it to the Op-ed articles at all, let alone cartoons and letters to the editor.

Journalism's propensity to negativity was evident in the news regarding health issues as well.⁹ More than 65% of the total health news pieces were watch-dog type whereas 35% of news pieces were about positive aspects of health. Probably these sentences should make another paragraph.

Among the three papers - Annapurna Post, Nagarik and Kantipur-we can't say one is doing better than the other. There are rooms for improvement in all the papers as the coverage of health is less compared to other issues like politics. Papers would do well if they prioritized health to contribute to health system building and to enhance knowledge of general population to promote their health.¹⁰

CONCLUSION

Health is prioritized far less by the print media than politics despite the reader's appetite for it. Print media should give health a top priority, particularly in those areas that relate to health systems like human resources for health, for the change in the system will have massive impact on the lives of the people. Moreover, greater coverage of health in the media sinks well with the news value of "mass appeal."

While Annapurna Post is most friendly to health issues, it has not been able to do away with the pre-dominant presence of politics in its coverage. Kantipur does fine with features but in news and editorials it needs to pull its socks both in terms of quantity and placements of health news.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We are grateful to HRH Project of BNMT funded by the European Union for supporting this research.

The views expressed herein are of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of BNMT, Save the Children, the European Union, Kantipur and Annapurna Post.

REFERENCES

1. World Health Organization. The World Health Report 2006: working together for health. Geneva, Switzerland: WHO2006 [cited 2012 jul 27]. Available from: http://www.who.int/whr/2006/whr06_en.pdf
2. Dahal. D, Ghimire. J, Acharya. SP, Mahato. RK, Gupta. R, Khanal. KR, et al. National Situation Analysis on Human Resource for Health Kathmandu: Ministry of Health and Population, Save the Children. 2013.
3. Ministry of Health and Population, Save the Children Nepal. National Situation Analysis on Human Resource for Health 2011-2012. Kathmandu: MoHP, Save the Children Nepal. 2012.
4. Macnamara. J. Media content analysis: Its uses; benefits and Best Practice Methodology. *Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal*. 2005;6(1):1-23.
5. Gupta. A, Sinha. AK. Health Coverage in Mass Media: A Content Analysis. *Journal of Communication*. 2010;1(1):19-25.
6. Kline KN. A decade of research on health content in the media: the focus on health challenges and sociocultural context and attendant informational and ideological problems. *J Health Commun*. 2006;11(1):43-59.
7. McCombs. M. The Agenda setting function of the press. In: Overholser. G, Jamieson. KH, editors. New York: Oxford University Press; Inc.; 2005. p. 156-68.
8. Davidson AE, Wallack L. A content analysis of sexually transmitted diseases in the print news media. *J Health Commun*. 2004 Mar-Apr;9(2):111-7.
9. McQuail D. *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*. 4th ed. London: SAGE Publications Inc.; 2000.
10. Johnson S A. Public Health Advocacy. *Healthy Public Policy Discussion Paper*. Edmonton, Alberta: Alberta Health Services. 2009. p. 1-7.