The Story Behind the Headlines –HIV/AIDS in a Leading
South African Newspaper

""A murual in Durban, designed to increase awareness about HIV/AIDS in Africa"

Photo credit : Ketan Joshi/M/MC Photoshare

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Abstract

This content analysis examined HIV/AIDS in headlines and lead paragraphs in a major South African newspaper, the Mail&Gardian, between June 1998 and May 2002. It was found that articles that deal with HIIV/AIDS predominantly portray the disease as a social, political and health issue. There was clear evidence that secondary themes had changed over time, with more articles focusing on the pandemic from a political perspective. Comparing articles that focused on HIV/AIDS as a local issue to those that portray it as an international issue, it was found that local articles were 74% less likely to portray HIV/AIDS from a medical perspective. Finally, the majority of the articles that mentioned the President referred to HIV/AIDS as a political issue and cast the President in a negative light.

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1. Introduction

HIV/AIDS has rapidly become the main cause of death in many countries in Southern Africa and of all the countries in this region South Africa is the one that holds the dubious distinction of having the highest rate of infection in the World. The rapid progression of this pandemic has put an enormous strain on societies all around the world and on the people who are directly affected by HIV/AIDS.

The media play a play an influential role in setting the stage for important issues and events in society and have a considerable influence on shaping public opinion and people's behavior. Headlines and lead paragraphs cue readers to the main topic of news features and therefore play an important role in setting the agenda for how the public perceives a particular issue.

It is therefore no coincidence that a number of studies have looked at the portrayal of health issues in the media, and more recently at HIV/AIDS in particular (Odihiambo, 2000; Linda, 2000; Kasoma, 2000). Details of these studies are discussed in more detail below. The present study aims at contributing to this body of research by examining how the headlines and lead paragraphs portray HIV/AIDS in a leading weekly South African paper (The Mail&Gardian). South Africa is a particularly interesting case because of its key economic and political position in the region and the somewhat controversial position of the President and the Government.

This study examined HIV/AIDS main and secondary themes in the headlines and lead paragraphs of articles in this particular over time. The study also examined what population groups are mentioned in the articles in relation to HIV/AIDS and how these population groups change over time. Finally, because of the controversial role of the President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, with respect to the issue of HIV/AIDS, the frequency of reports on the President and the tone of these reports on the President were examined and contrasted with the dominant themes at different moments in time.

An overview of relevant literature is provided below. This is followed by an overview of the methodology that guided this study in section 3. The main findings are outlined in section 4 and the results in section 5. A discussion of the main conclusion and limitations associated with this study is provided in section 6 and the final section discusses suggestion for future research.

2. Literature review

"For millions of people infected with the HIV, for the "worried well" in high risk groups, and for the heterosexual population, mass media can play a vital role in persuading people to use precautions against AIDS infection. Decades of research on the influence of

opinion leaders, the agenda setting function of the mass media, the role of mass media in the diffusion of health information, and recent work on media dependency suggest that the mass media are in a unique position to respond to the need for reliable information about AIDS both in terms of its biological nature and the precise manner of its transmission." (Reardon & Richardson 1991, p. 73). Despite the encouraging conclusion made by K. Reardon and J. Richardson in 1991, the role of mass media in facilitating the resolution of HIV/AIDS problems still remains a subject of scholarly discussions and research studies.

National HIV and Syphilis Sero-Prevalence Survey of women attending Public Antenatal Clinics in South Africa, performed by the World Health Organization (WHO) and later the United Nations AIDS Agency (UNAIDS) since 1990, showed that in the year 2000, 24.5% of pregnant South African women who were assisted at public health were infected with HIV. This is compared to 22.4% in 1999 and 22.8% in 1998.

HIV infection rate have been steadily increasing in the past years and South Africa now has the highest HIV infection rate in the world. The PBS Website *AIDS in Africa. Online News Hour* of May 22, 2000 argues that South Africa has been exposed to an extensive awareness campaigns but this campaign is not working. Although 98 percent of South Africans say they are aware of HIV, AIDS, and how it is transmitted, this knowledge has not led to behavioral change.

The rapid spread of HIV/AIDS has sparked numerous studies in a variety of areas, amongst which AIDS coverage by mass media and specifically by the newspapers. Content analysis is one of the primary techniques used by the scholars in studying newspaper messages.

One of the branches of content analysis research is the study of newspaper and magazine headlines. Headlines are important in framing public opinion and as such they present one of the most important challenges in journalism. The headline creates the first impression of a topic for the reader and frequently leaves a lasting impression. To summarize all the news accurately and clearly, completely and interestingly is, therefore, not only an editorial problem but also an issue of news social influence.

The headline content analysis is a meaningful way to help researchers examine the media agenda-setting function. For example, McCombs and Shaw (1999) report, "since few directly participate in presidential election campaign, and fewer still see presidential candidates in person, the information flowing in interpersonal communication channels is primarily relayed from, and based upon, mass media news coverage"(p.328). However, empirical studies show that news headlines can also mislead or reframe the public opinion.

In a content analysis of 1988 presidential campaign, Kenney and Simpson (1993) found that Washington Post's coverage was balanced and neutral, but the Washington Times' coverage favored the Republicans. More than one-third of the Times' headlines and stories were biased, and each time, they were biased in favor of the Republicans. Ottosen

(1995) discusses changes in Soviet Union image in three Norwegian daily newspapers through 1980 to 1989. The researcher find that enemy image, Soviet Union, are projected mainly in editorials and commentary columns and less so in straight news articles. However, the angling of articles through headlines, illustrations and cartoons may reveal the attitudes of news desks as to who the enemy is, even when the test itself is written in neutral prose. In addition, the format of newspapers will influence the accuracy of headlines. In a content analysis of four Philadelphian daily newspapers, results indicated that dailies with the tabloid format had a higher percentage of misleading and ambiguous headlines than the standard papers (Marquez, 1980). These findings are supported by Fenichel and Dan (1980) and O'Conner and Casey (2001) who report that headlines generally were more sensationalized than the articles themselves, and revealed more of an editorial attitude to the fact than the story itself. Drushel (1991) in his study of use of words in stories on AIDS mentions the research of cancer coverage by press that showed that stories with more encouraging headlines were read by more people than stories with more frightening headlines. Thus, headlines and lead paragraphs can present the issue in a more concise and colorful manner than the articles themselves.

A number of content analysis studies performed in the area of HIV/AIDS coverage by media provide an idea of how this pandemic has been depicted in mass media and what specific themes are addressed. A study conducted by Bardlan in 1996 compared international and domestic coverage of AIDS by the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times* and *USA Today* between 1990 and 1994. Stories featuring the disease in sub-Saharian Africa provided 16% of positive coverage and 80% percent of negative coverage among 14 world regions. Seventy percent of these stories had negative headlines.
Gibson (1994) found that African media offered poor coverage of AIDS often under the pressure of national governments that feared adverse economic effects of negative country image. The articles also gave primarily negative coverage of the AIDS issues.

Pitts and Jackson (1992) analyzed three Zimbabwe newspapers published between 1987 and 1991 and reported that AIDS coverage was aimed at public education and awareness about the disease, as well as its causes and cures. In general, these issues were addressed more positively than in the US press. The study of media coverage of natural disasters conducted by Ploughman (1995) revealed that the newspaper stories frequently concentrated on dramatic or descriptive qualities of the events rather than on their causes.

Swain (1997) reporting the results of her study of AIDS coverage in U.S. news magazines makes an interesting observation that most scientists restrain from publishing their works before they are proved reliable by other scholars, while journalists already consider such publications outdated. She found that prevailing themes in US news magazines coverage of the AIDS epidemic in Africa were that of: disaster, destruction and doom; epidemiology; economy; and sexual behavior.

Analyzing competing discourses of HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa, Seidel (1993) came to the conclusion that the problem of AIDS in Africa is closely related to medical, medico-moral, developmental, legal, ethical and the human rights themes. He found that "HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa is about: human rights, gender, ethics including a

"global ethics," development, North-South relations, inter-regional African cooperation in a post-colonial context, and discrimination against illness." (p.193).

A detailed content analysis study of HIV/AIDS coverage in Namibian media conducted by Mchombu from the University of Namibia in Windhoek (2000) outlined the role of press and radio with regards to HIV/AIDS as one of setting social agendas for politicians and disseminating useful information to the public. Mchombu found low coverage of HIV/AIDS by Namibian media (an average of 9 articles per month from three newspapers and radio). He explains this by the fact that some organizations are not using mass media extensively enough, and also that the media is often unwilling to address this contentious issue in an in-depth manner. The epidemic issues are covered superficially and stress "no cure" message. He identified youth, women, top-managers of various institutions, and policy makers as the target groups of media address.

The studies outlined above have addressed the issue of HIV/AIDS coverage in print media from a variety of angles and provide a broad overview of how HIV/AIDS is depicted in print media in various countries. It is interesting to note how reporting on the issues various per country. None of the content analyses dealt with South Africa, while this country offers an interesting case, on the one hand because of the importance of this country for the Southern African region as a major trading and political partner but more importantly because of the controversial stance that the President Mr. Thabo Mbeki and his Government have taken on HIV/AIDS.

Based on the studies described above and on our understanding of the particularities of this issue in South Africa, we identified the following research questions for the content analysis of headlines and lead paragraphs of the articles addressing HIV/AIDS issues in the South African newspaper *The Mail & Guardian*.
i)   Has the frequency of reporting on HIV/AIDS changed over time?
ii)   What are the main themes that emerge from the headlines and lead paragraphs and have these changed over time?
iii) What are the secondary themes that emerge from the headlines/lead paragraphs and have these changed over time?
iv)   What are the main population groups that are associated with articles on HIV/AIDS and how have these changed over time?
v)   What is the frequency of reporting on HIV/AIDS from a local, regional and international perspective and how have these changed over time?
vi)   Is there a difference in the frequency of reporting about the president in the four years?
vii) Is there a difference in the manner in which the President is reported over time?

3. Methodology

The South African weekly paper The Mail&Gardian was chosen for this study. The Mail&Gardian is a prominent South African newspaper that covers national, regional and international events. This paper was launched in 1985 by a small group of journalists and

was at the time the only South African newspaper to cater for an ethnically and economically diverse segment of the population. Other newspapers of that time such as the Star, the Rand Daily Mail and the Sowetan, all marketed to specific ethnic segments of the population. The Mail&Gardian continues to have a very diverse readership in South Africa and neighboring countries. It is also the fastest growing paper in South Africa.

This content analysis covered a period of four years from 1 June 1998 to May 31, 2002. The on-line archive of the Mail&Gardian was used to generate a list of all articles that contained the words HIV/AIDS either in the headline or in the body of the text. The archive covers the period of January 1994 to today and is updated weekly. The search conducted in this manner yielded a total of 527 articles. Of this total, 423 fell within the study period.

The actual articles were the sampling unit for this study and the analysis unit was the headline and the lead paragraph of each story. Results are reported for headlines and lead paragraphs as one collective unit of analysis.

Total minimum required sample size was calculated at 204. This includes a correction for finite population. The authors recognize that this sample size does not take into account the desired reliability. It also does not take into account the effect size, which is an issue to which we will return later in this paper. Limitations in time and resources limited the possibility of additional sampling to cover these concerns.

Stratified random sampling was used to select the articles for analysis. Four strata covering a year each were created based on the dates of the articles. The periods covered were June 1998 to May 1999, June 1999 to May 2000, June 2000 to May 2001, and June 2001 through May 2002. The total number of articles in each stratum and the number of articles to be sampled are indicated in the table below. A table of random numbers was used to select the first article in each of the strata after which articles were selected according to a skip interval of 2 (423/204) so that every second article following the first randomly selected article should be included in the sample.

Year	Total # of articles	Required sample
Year 1: 1 June 1998 – 31 May 1999	158	76
Year 2: 1 June 1999 – 31 May 2000	120	58
Year 3: 1 June 1999 – 31 May 2000	84	41
Year 4: 1 June 1999 – 31 May 2000	61	29
Total	423	204

Table 1: Sampling of articles for the study

This study systematically analyzed the sampled editions of the Mail&Gardian for the following characteristics of reporting on HIV/AIDS issues: i) the type of headline; ii) the

main theme of the headline and lead paragraph; iii) the secondary theme of the headline and lead paragraph; iv) population groups covered in the news stories; v) whether the headline and the lead paragraph mentioned the President; and vi) for those headlines/lead paragraphs that did mention the president whether the portrayal of the president was favorable, neutral or unfavorable.

The coding scheme for the themes and population groups was adapted from two content analyses (Khan & Holtz, 2001; and Swain, 1997). Detailed definitions and operationalization of each the coding categories can be found in the coding protocol (annex 1). Headlines were first coded as to whether they were formulated in terms of a "question" or a "statement". A further important aspect of the content analysis was the themes, which were divided into a "main theme", and a "secondary theme". Following Sylvester & Hu (2000) a main theme was defined as the single most important topic covered in the headline, sub-headline and lead paragraph of the story. The secondary theme was defined as an individual topic that immediately follows the main topic in the news stories regardless of the location of the main them. The following themes were identified and adapted from research done by Khan & Holtz (2001) and Swain (1997):

a) "Medical": refers to epidemiological aspects of the disease, AIDS research, AIDS researchers, medication, prevention, cure, condoms, STD's and AIDS education.

b) "Economic": impact on the development and economy: effect on/ implications/ reflection about country revenue, country debt, impact on production and workforce, cost of drugs and cost of treatment at national, institutional and family levels.

c) "Social": refers to the social dimensions of the disease and includes issues such as culture, religion, traditions and places in society where the disease may be concentrated such as among prostitutes and in prisons. Also refers to particular groups or categories of the population indicated as being at the origin of the AIDS pandemic (includes stereotyping). Includes human rights (actions by the HRC, crimes against humanity, basic human rights, conventions that protect the rights of children, women and other groups), legal action against the government and civil society/activism/protest.

d) "Political": situates the issue in a political light by referring to government action or inaction, to the leading party (ANC) and other parties, references to the President, ministers, members of parliament, provincial governmental authorities, and to government plans. Includes references to dissident and dissident activities and propaganda.

e) "Disaster/devastation/hopelessness": portrayal of HIV/AIDS as a desperate, unsolvable issue, overwhelming and impossible to combat. Also refers to statistics or trends (increase, decrease, leveling off, stagnation, etc) in mortality and death among the general population or sub-groups of the population. Excludes references to individual deaths.

f) "Sexual violence/rape": refers to acts of sexual aggression and rape against any group in society (women, children, etc.)

g) "Unknown/others": any headline & lead paragraph that has a theme but which does not fit under the above or any headline & lead paragraph that does not have a clear theme.

A total of seven population groups were identified from the literature, as follows: "pregnant women", "women", "children", "men", "prostitutes/sex workers", "homosexuals/gays", "prisoners", and "others". In terms of geographical scope, coders had to identify whether the headline and lead paragraph discussed an HIV/AIDS issue in the context of South Africa or a portion of that country (coded as "local" scope), one or more African countries or organizations ("regional"), or a as a global issue i.e. affecting other regions of the world or the world as a whole ("international").

Articles were also coded as to whether they referred to President Mbeki. Coders would search for the name of the President in either the headline or lead paragraph and code either a "yes" or a "no" indicating whether the President was mentioned or not. In addition, coders had to indicate whether the overall tone of the headline and the leading paragraph was in general "positive", "neutral", or "negative" about the President. A positive article was operationalized as expressing approval, satisfaction, praise, understanding, a neutral article as one that contained no opinion or judgment, and a negative tone as a headline/lead paragraph that cast doubt, expressed irony, cynicism, or disapproval.

Two coders did the coding of the headlines/lead paragraphs. Coders were instructed to read only the headline, the byline (when these existed) and the first paragraph of each story. A detailed glossary was elaborated by one of the coders for terms and concepts that are specific to South Africa. Before starting the coding the coders ran a test run of a number of the news stories to discuss the coding themes and procedures to practice applying the coding protocol. Ten percent of the articles were then selected for an initial inter-coder reliability check. The initial intercoder reliability is reported below and was moderate on four of the seven variables. Upon closer analysis these low reliabilities revealed problems with the conceptualization and interpretation of some of the coding categories. A detailed review of the discrepancies between the coders on these items was conducted and the necessary adjustments to the coding protocol made. The articles used for the first reliability check were not included in the pool of articles that were finally sampled. A second reliability check resulted in improved reliabilities on the categories as can be seen below. Once acceptable intercoder reliability had been achieved for each of the categories the coders proceeded to code the full sample.

	Intercoder reliability test 1 (Kappa)	Intercoder reliability test 2 (Kappa)
Headline type	1.00	1.00
Theme 1	0.70	0.76
Theme 2	0.76	0.67
Scope	0.74	0.74
Group	0.60	0.80
President mentioned	0.86	0.95
Opinion	No result	No result

Table 2: Reliability scores on the first and second pre-coding reliability tests

Intercoder reliability was also calculated for the total sample and is reported upon in the results section.

For each of the articles that was selected in the sampling process, the coders would pull up the article from the online archive and read the headline, byline and lead paragraph in the on-line version of the Mail&Gardian. Coding was done directly into an SPSS data file. SPSS was also used for data analysis. Five of the 204 articles had to be discarded because they did not refer to HIV/AIDS either in the headline or in the main body of the article, leaving a total sample of 199 articles.
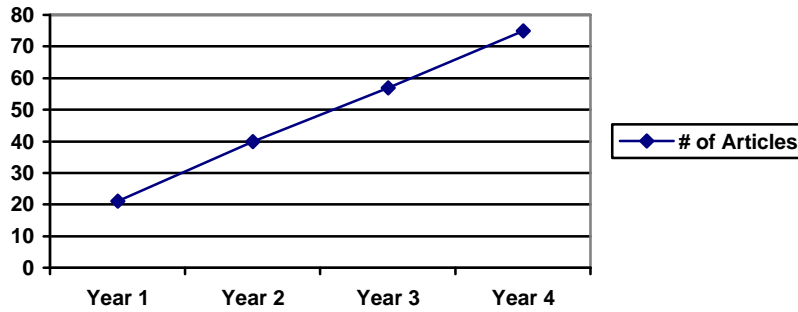

4. Results

The purpose of this study was to examine coverage of HIV/AIDS by the South African weekly Mail&Gardian between June 1998 and May 2002. Research questions were formulated that aimed at examining trends during the study period related to reporting on HIV/AIDS in general, main and secondary themes, main population groups mentioned in the articles, the geographical focus of reporting on HIV/AIDS, frequency of reporting on the President, and the manner in which the President is portrayed in articles on HIV/AIDS.

Reliability scores for coding the full 199 cases were, for some of the variables, below what had been achieved during the second round of pre-coding. The short time period available for the study may have led to coder fatigue. Also, the pre-coding was not done on a random sample of articles, which may have biased the pre-coding test 1 and test 2 results reported above. Reliability, calculated as a Kappa coefficient, for the full sample ranged between 0.70 (theme 2) and 1. On all the other variables, with the exception of "theme 2", the Kappa reliability score was above 0.75.

For the purpose of analysis, the six main themes were collapsed into four categories. "Disaster/devastation/hopelessness was combined with the "medical" category and "Sexual violence/rape" was combined with the "social theme". The other two themes, "economic" and "political" were unchanged. The articles were grouped into categories of one year each, with years 1 through 4 covering the time periods from June 1998 to May 1999, June 1999 to May 2000, June 2000 to May 2001, and June 2001 to May 2002, respectively. The remainder of this section reports on the results for each of the research questions.

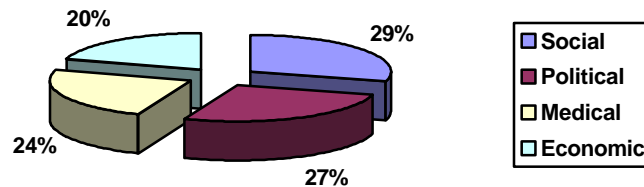Research question # 1: Has the frequency of reporting on HIV/AIDS changed over time?

We sampled 199 articles which mentioned HIV/AIDS either in the headline or main text between 1998 and 2002 and found that frequency of reporting on HIV/AIDS has increased over time as is shown in Figure 1 below. The percentage of articles increased from 11% (95% CI: 0.087,0.13) in "year 1", to 20% (95% CI: 0.17,0.23) in "year 2", 29% (95% CI: 0.25, 0.32) in "year 3", and 38% (95% CI: 0.34, 0.47) in "year 4".

Figure 1: Number of Articles on HIV/AIDS per Year in Mail&Gardian

Research question # 2: What are the main themes that emerge from the headlines and lead paragraphs and have these changed over time?

Three main themes account for over four fifth of the reporting on HIV/AIDS. The main reporting category is "social" issues with 29.6% (95% CI: 0.27, 0.33), followed by "political" which accounts for 26.6% (95% CI: 0.24, 0.30) of the reporting, and "medical" coverage with 23.6% (95% CI: 0.21, 0.27).

Figure 2: Percentage of articles devoted to main theme

The chi-square test showed that there was no change in the main theme of HIV/AIDS reporting over time. The same result was obtained when a binary logistic regression was run on the data. This test did, however, point towards the existence of a trend in which medical issues decrease in importance as the major theme and political issues gain importance between 1998 and 2002.

Research question # 3: What are the secondary themes that emerge from the headlines/lead paragraphs and have these changed over time?

The statistical analysis yielded a significant relationship (p < 0.05) between years and themes. From "year 1" to "year 4" articles for which the secondary theme was political increased from 21.1% to 30% (chi-square = 19.217, df = 9 p < 0.05). A similar trend was observed for "medical" issues, which over the same time period jumped from 15.8% in "year 1" to 44.8% in "year 4". For this analysis the design effect is 0.67 and the effective sample size is 189 (n= 127).

Table 1. The Report Tendency of Secondary Theme Across Years

		YEAR				
		1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
Medical	Count	3	7	13	17	40
		15.8%	24.1%	44.8%	34.0%	31.5%
Economic	Count	3	8	2	2	15
		15.8%	27.6%	6.9%	4.0%	11.8%
Social	Count	9	10	5	16	40
		47.4%	34.5%	17.2%	32.0%	31.5%
Political	Count	4	4	9	15	32
		21.1%	13.8%	31.0%	30.0%	25.2%
Total	Count	19	29	29	50	127
		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Chi Square = 19.217 df= 9 p< 0.05

Research question #4: What are the main population groups that are associated with articles on HIV/AIDS and how have these changed over time?

Just under one sixth of the articles (13% with 95% CI: 0.10, 0.16) mentioned pregnant women in articles concerning HIV/AIDS. About 6% (95% CI: 0.04, 0.08) of the articles are related to children. The remaining 155 articles fall under the category of "others" (n=199). This category included all units of analysis in which the group cannot be identified or is not clear. There is no significant relationship between the population group mentioned and the year of reporting.

Research question #5: What is the frequency of reporting on HIV/AIDS from a local, regional and international perspective and how have these changed over time?

Almost two thirds of the articles (60.8% with 95% CI: 0.58, 0.64) focus on South Africa when reporting on HIV/AIDS. On third (31.2% with 95% CI: 0.28, 0.34) covers HIV/AIDS from a regional perspective. The remaining 16 articles in the sample (8% with 95% CI: 0.06, 0.10) refer to HIV/AIDS from an international perspective (n = 199). Moreover, the content analysis found there is significant relationship between geographical scope (local, regional or international) and the main HIV/AIDS theme. The articles that focus on HIV/AIDS from an international perspective are more likely to have "medical" as the main theme (43.8%) than articles that cover HIV/AIDS from a local perspective. Only one sixth of the "local" articles report on HIV/AIDS as a medical issue (chi square = 16.492, df = 6 p < 0.05). For this analysis the design effect was 0.98, and the effective sample size increases from 199 to 203. The regression analysis showed that articles that covered HIV/AIDS as a local issue were 74 % less likely to report containing a "medical" main theme.

Table 2. The Relationship Between News Scope and Theme

		SCOPE			
		local	regional	international	Total
Medical	Count	20	20	7	47
		16.5%	32.3%	43.8%	23.6%
Economic	Count	14	10	1	25
		11.6%	16.1%	6.3%	12.6%
Social	Count	47	24	3	74
		38.8%	38.7%	18.8%	37.2%
Political	Count	40	8	5	53
		33.1%	12.9%	31.3%	26.6%
Total	Count	121	62	16	199
		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Chi Square = 16.492 df = 6 p < 0.05

Research question #6: Is there a difference in the frequency of reporting about the president in the four years?

Of the 199 articles sampled, 11 % (95% CI: 0.09, 0.13) of articles mention the President (n= 22). There is significant difference in frequency of reporting on President over four years (Chi-square= 9.729, df= 3, p < 0.05).

Research question #7: Is there a difference in the manner in which the President is reported over time?

In the analysis of the relationship between news theme and president, 77% of the articles that mentioned President Mbeki report on HIV/AIDS as a political issue (design effect = 0.84, effective sample size = 237). Only 4.5% of the articles that cover the President have a medical main theme (design effect = 0.73, effective sample size = 273).

5. Discussion and conclusions

This study examined trends in reporting on HIV/AIDS over a four-year period. It was found that while frequency of reporting has increased rapidly, there was not a significant change in the main themes of these articles, although the regression analysis pointed to the presence of a trend in which the political theme was increasing and the medical decreasing. It is possible that the sample did not provide enough power to detect the relatively small effect size. The study would need to be repeated with a larger sample to verify whether this trend is really present. Studies from other African countries, such as Uganda and Zambia and Kenya (Linda; Kasoma) have found similar increases in frequency of reporting and have reported on differences in themes, but most often when comparing different media (Kassoma). The trends with respect to the secondary theme reflect an increase in both political and medical themes. This is not surprising given the intense debate, over the past two years, around the provision of the anti-retroviral drug Nevrapine to pregnant women to protect their unborn children against the HIV virus. This debate has been particularly heated in South Africa and has resulted in various widely published court cases with the Government first taking the pharmaceutical companies to court, followed by retaliatory legal action by these companies towards the Government. Most recently it has been the Government who has been taken to court for crimes against humanity because of its refusal to introduce a policy of HIV/AIDS medication for all who need it.

The population group most frequently associated with HIV/AIDS was pregnant women, followed by children. It is interesting to note that there were very few articles that covered the population groups that have traditionally been associated with HIV/AIDS such as sex workers, homosexuals, drug users, and more recently prison inmates.

In contrasting the main themes of articles that focused on local, versus regional and international coverage of HIV/AIDS, the preponderance of the political theme in local reporting again became evident. It would appear that the intense debate that has been sparked in South Africa by the Presidents' declarations on the origins of the pandemic, as well as some of the subsequent actions/ lack of action of the Government have turned HIV/AIDS into a highly political issue which reflects itself in the nature of the articles published on the topic. Finally, it was found that frequency of reporting on the President increased significantly in this weekly paper between 1998 and 2002 and that the majority of these articles were negative about the President. The Mail&Gardian has always marketed itself as a progressive and critical paper from the time that it was created during the Apartheid era (when it was even banned for a while) to today, when by its own confession it "continues to be a thorn in the side of gravy train politicians" (Mail&Gardian on-line, http://www.mg.co.za/content/13_fjsp?o=553, accessed May 20th, 2002). Because of the proactive stance of this particular paper it would be important to extend the present study to other newspaper to examine possible differences in reporting trends.

A number of limitations need to be considered in examining the results of this study. As was just mentioned, the analysis covered a single newspaper which although widely read is not representative of what the whole South African print press. It is quite possible that reporting in other South African newspapers is different. A second major concern is the operationalization of some of the themes and the difficulties that the coders often faced in distinguishing between the main theme and the secondary theme. Producing a clear definition of what is being studied is one of the main challenges facing researchers who chose to examine latent meaning. Further research and training is probably essential to improve intercoder reliability on the themes. Finally, the time period studied did not allow for a comparison of coverage between the two Presidents as we had intended. Such a comparison would involve comparing articles before and after June 1999 when Thabo Mbeki was elected. It was not possible to do this because the number of articles prior to June 1999 was too small. In order to make this comparison it would be necessary to extend the study back by at least two years (i.e. starting in 1996 rather than 1998).

6. Recommendations

This study provides limited support for a trend of an increasingly politicized representation of HIV/AIDS in one South African weekly newspaper. This study should be repeated with a larger sample (so as to take into account the small effect size) and should compare different newspapers. It would also be interesting to conduct an in-depth study only of articles on HIV/AIDS that refer to or cite the President. Such as study would be able to provide a more comprehensive description of the context in which the President is mentioned, and the themes and groups that he associated with. Other interesting aspects would be to look at the sources that he references in his arguments and what sources are brought up by the newspapers to counteract or possibly support his arguments.

It is important to determine whether HIV/AIDS is increasingly becoming a political issue in the eyes of the general public and to, if such a trend is present, for newspapers and politicians alike to contemplate what effect this may have on efforts to halt the spread of HIV/AIDS. It is our opinion that politicizing HIV/AIDS may increase the perception of distance between the individual and the virus and increase complacency amongst the reading public at a time when urgent action is essential for the survival of this country and the region of Southern Africa.

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The Story Behind the Headlines –HIV/AIDS in a Leading
South African Newspaper
- Final Version -

1. Introduction

This coding protocol aims at examining what headlines and leading paragraphs tell us about how HIV/AIDS is portrayed in a major South African weekly paper, the Mail&Gardian. The study examines headline type, coverage of HIV/AIDS themes, reference to specific population groups, and the prominence and slant of headlines that specifically mention the South African president, Thabo Mbeki. Headlines and lead paragraphs will be coded for seven dimensions of AIDS coverage namely head type, main theme, secondary theme, scope, mention of the president, opinion of president, and population groups addressed in headline/lead paragraph

2. Definitions

The following definitions are important in this study.

a) Headline
A headline is the title of the news feature. The headline is physically separate from the text and can be distinguished from the main text by the fact that it is situated on top of the body of the text and has a larger, and sometimes different, typeface. If the headline includes a by-line then this should be coded together with the headline.

b) Lead paragraph
This is the first paragraph directly following the headline, irrespective of its size.

c) Main theme
The main topic is defined as the single topic covered in the headline, sub-headline and lead paragraph of the story. The main theme should be identified by reading headlines and the lead paragraph. The categories of topics are listed below[1].

d) Secondary theme
Secondary theme is defined as an individual topic that immediately follows the main topic in the news story regardless of its location. For example, if the headline covers one topic and the lead paragraph then refers to another topic then the topic in the first sentence of the lead paragraph should be coded as the secondary topic. The same

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[1] Adapted from "To quell the quarrels – Examining the Philadelphia inquirer's Israeli/Palestinian Coverage" by Judith Sylvester & H. Denis Wu. Research Paper Presented at the Newspaper Division of the AEJMC National Convention (2000).

categories of topics apply to both the main theme and the secondary theme. Depending on the nature of the article it is quite possible that no secondary topic is evident from the reading of the headline and lead paragraph. In this case only the main theme should be coded.

e) Scope
Scope refers to the geographical focus of the headline[2]. The scope can be local, regional, or international. Some headlines may not have a clear indication of scope. Thus "South Africa in the grips of AIDS" will be labeled as local since this headline concerns only South Africa. On the other hand "AIDS education increases knowledge but does not necessarily change behaviors" will be coded as not clear, unless the geographical scope becomes evident from the reading of the lead paragraph.

f) Groups
Refers to the major target groups mentioned in the headline and lead paragraph[3]. A total of 10 groups were identified and are listed below.

g) Opinion
Refers to the tone of the headline and the lead paragraph. The tone may be positive, neutral or negative and, in a limited number of cases, unclear. Only headlines that mention the President (Nelson Mandela if before June 1999 and Thabo Mbeki from June 1999 onwards) will be coded for opinion. The three categories of opinion are further described below.

3. Procedure

Coders should follow these steps in conducting the content analysis: i) Carefully read the headline and lead paragraph; ii) Identify type of headline; ii) Identify main theme; iii) Identify secondary theme – if present; iv) Identify the geographical focus; v) Identify specific population groups that are mentioned as targets in the headline and/or lead paragraphs; vi) Identify whether the President is mentioned in the headline/lead paragraph; vii) Determine whether the headline/lead paragraph expresses a positive, neutral or negative opinion about the President.

V1. Case number
The number attributed by SPSS to the case as it is entered. This number will be in ascending order.

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[2] Adapted from "AIDS coverage in US News Magazines in Light of World Health Organization Statistics: What is the True Picture of Sub-Saharan Africa's Pandemic", by Kristie Alley Swain. Paper presented at the Health Communication Division of the International Communication Association (1997).
[3] Categories of groups adapted from: "The Coverage of HIV/AIDS in Namibian Media – A Content Analysis Study" by Kingo Mchombu, University of Namibia, Windhoek (not dated).

V2. Coder Identification (CODERID)

V3. Story identification (ARTINO)
The article number as attributed by the Mail&Gardian archive. This number is located on the left hand side next to the title of the article.

V4. Day (DAY)

V5. Month (MONTH)

V6. Year (YEAR)

V7. Headline type (HEADTYPE)

Code these as per the numbers indicated below:
    1   Headline formulated as a question (must end with a question mark)
    2   Headline formulated as a statement (no question mark)

V8. Main Theme (THEME1)
Code the main theme according to the following categories. Choose only one theme as the main theme.
    1   Medical: refers to epidemiological aspects of the disease, AIDS research, AIDS researchers, medication, prevention, cure, condoms, STD's and AIDS education.
    2   Impact on the economy: effect on/ implications/ reflection about country revenue, country debt, impact on production and workforce, cost of drugs and cost of treatment at national, institutional and family levels.
    3   Social: refers to the social dimensions of the disease and includes issues such as culture, religion, traditions and places in society where the disease may be concentrated such as among prostitutes and in prisons. Also refers to particular groups or categories of the population indicated as being at the origin of the AIDS pandemic. Includes human rights (actions by the HRC, crimes against humanity, basic human rights, conventions that protect the rights of children, women and other groups), legal action against the government and civil society/activism/protest.
    4   Political: situates the issue in a political light by referring to government action or inaction, to the leading party (ANC) and other parties, references to the President, ministers, members of parliament, provincial governmental authorities, and to government plans.
    5   Disaster/devastation/hopelessness: portrayal of HIV/AIDS as a desperate, unsolvable issue, overwhelming and impossible to combat. Also refers to

statistics or trends (increase, decrease, leveling off, stagnation, etc) in mortality and death among the general population or sub-groups of the population.

6   Sexual violence/rape: refers to acts of sexual aggression and rape against any group in society (women, children, etc.)

7   Unknown/others: any headline & lead paragraph that has a theme but which does not fit under the above or any headline & lead paragraph that does not have a clear theme[4]

V9. Secondary Theme (THEME2)
Secondary theme is defined as an individual topic that immediately follows the main topic in the news story regardless of its location. Use categories listed under THEME1. If no secondary theme is present than use "0".

V10. Geographical scope (SCOPE)
Refers to the geographical scope of the main theme. Code these as per the numbers indicated below:

1   Local: the geographical scope of the main theme refers to South Africa or any of its provinces (consult glossary when in doubt).

2   Africa: the geographical focus of the main theme is on regional organizations (e.g. the Southern African Development Community – SADC) or any country in Africa.

3   International: The main theme refers to countries outside of the African Region and to international organizations such as UNICEF, UNESCO, IMF, WB, etc.

4   Not clear: neither the headline nor the lead paragraph mention any particular geographical area.

V11: Population groups (GROUPS)
Select the first population group mentioned in the headline & lead paragraph according the categories below:

1   Pregnant/expecting women
2   Women (18 and above)
3   Children (0-18 years)
4   Prostitutes/sex workers
5   Homosexuals/gay
6   Men

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[4] Coding categories adapted from: "AIDS coverage in US News Magazines in Light of World Health Organization Statistics: What is the True Picture of Sub-Saharan Africa's Pandemic", by Kristie Alley Swain. Paper presented at the Health Communication Division of the International Communication Association (1997) and from: "The Coverage of HIV/AIDS in Namibian Media – A Content Analysis Study" by Kingo Mchombu, University of Namibia, Windhoek (not dated).

       7   Prisoners/inmates

       8   Other categories not included above/not clear

V12. President mentioned (PRESIDENT)

Identifies whether the President is mentioned in the headline or lead paragraph. Code as indicated below:

       1   Yes: President is mentioned, includes references to President, Head of State, (Thabo) Mbeki, (Nelson) Mandela, Madiba (nickname for Mandela).

       2   No: President is not mentioned anywhere in the headline or lead paragraph.

V13. President profile (OPINION)

If the President is mentioned is the tone of the headline and the leading paragraph in general positive, neutral, negative or not clear? Use categories as below:

       1   Positive: expresses approval, satisfaction, praise, understanding

       2   Neutral: no opinion or judgment implied, just information

       3   Negative: casting doubt, expressing irony, cynicism, dissaproval