

The Perception of the HIV and AIDS Pandemic by the Nigerian Press

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KEYWORDS Nigerian Newspapers. Media. Pandemic. Public Health. Press Perception. Public Awareness

ABSTRACT This study assessed the perception by the Nigerian press of the severity of the HIV and AIDS pandemic. The assessment was based on the coverage of HIV and AIDS issues by selected newspapers. Three variables were used for examining editorial matter in selected newspapers: *Scope* was used to define the extent of coverage of HIV and AIDS issues as a percentage of total editorial content; *genre* was to establish whether published matter was news, opinion, feature, and so on, while *trend* was to establish whether the press did more or less over time in covering the pandemic. Six national dailies were examined over a five-year period. The study covered three time frames, June 2005, June 2008 and June 2010. The data suggest that the press has severely underestimated the severity of the pandemic. The newspapers devoted only 0.35% of all editorial matter they published to HIV or AIDS. More dramatically, overall coverage declined 94% between 2005 and 2010. The implication is that if the press reflects the society, the public has underestimated the severity of AIDS and HIV. Thus, it may be hypothesized that *the longer a public health crisis lingers, the farther its severity recedes from the public mind.*