

News Coverage of HIV/AIDS in Selected South African Newspapers

Lungisani Moyo¹ and Nketsi A. Moqasa²

*Department of Communication, University of Fort Hare, Private Bag X 1314,
Alice 5700, South Africa*
E-mail: ¹<lungie06@gmail.com>, ²<moqasan@gmail.com>

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ABSTRACT This paper investigates HIV/AIDS coverage in selected South African newspapers. The rationale for the paper hinges on the fact that the media's role in informing society about social issues, such as HIV/AIDS, is of paramount importance. The paper adopted, principally, the content analysis method and, as a supplement, discourse analysis. Four daily newspapers were content-analysed, namely: Daily Dispatch, Daily Sun, Sowetan and The Star. A total of 288 editions of newspapers, spanning a period of twelve months (January to December 2010) were sampled. This paper is informed by agenda setting theory. Discourse analysis was used to determine the compliance of these newspapers to media guides on the use of appropriate language or terminologies. The results revealed that HIV/AIDS coverage by these newspapers is reasonable even though the prominence given to HIV/AIDS issues is dissatisfactory in terms of placement on the page, headline font size and number of paragraphs devoted to HIV/AIDS stories.

INTRODUCTION

The Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and the Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) have rapidly become the main cause of death in many countries in Southern Africa. Out of all the countries in the region, South Africa has the highest number of people infected by HIV/AIDS in the world (Visser et al. 2007: 2). The 2009 and 2010 report from the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), states that 40 million people around the globe were living with HIV/AIDS in 2009 and, out of this 40 million, 22.5 million were people from sub-Saharan Africa. The report also indicated that an estimated 5.6 million people were living with HIV/AIDS in South Africa alone (UNAIDS 2010).

In addition, statistics show that approximately 310 000 South Africans had died of AIDS between 2009 and 2010 (UNAIDS 2010). As the number of people living with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus and the Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) in South Africa is increasing at an alarming rate, one has to ask whether the media in the country is fulfilling its role of informing and educating society or not.

The media plays an influential role in setting the stage for important issues and events in so-

ciety, and it has significant influence in the shaping of public opinion and changing people's behaviour. This indicates that the media can point to the healthy behaviour for the prevention of HIV/AIDS, as well as how people living with this epidemic are treated or cared for by their community, families, friends as well as the health care systems. To buttress this, McQuail (2005) and Fourie (2001) suggest that the media has certain responsibilities to society. These include disseminating objective, accurate and informative information and setting the agenda for issues that are of great concern amongst the members of a particular society. "The news media have served as an important source of information about the epidemic for the public" (Brodie et al. 2004: 1). In the same manner, Coleman and Corbitt (2003: 110) affirm that "people learn about health issues from mass media, whether or not they are purposefully seeking information." Therefore, the media should cover and disseminate informative, objective and accurate information on HIV/AIDS. For the media to achieve this, well defined strategies for covering HIV/AIDS matters should be formulated.

In South Africa, there has been a substantial amount of coverage of HIV/AIDS issues by the print media over the past decade, although

various criticisms have emerged out of this coverage (Swanepoel et al. 2005: 2). Jacobs and Johnson (2007) point out that in a study conducted by Media Tenor, for the period of January 2004 to August 2005, less than one percent of coverage in leading print and electronic media report on this epidemic, which is corroborated by Sokana (Mail and Guardian Online 2006) when she points out that "only two percent of news items in South Africa mentioned or focused on HIV/AIDS." Currently, the coverage of HIV/AIDS issues in the media is irregular. Rehbock (2009) affirms that the HIV/AIDS topic is less frequently given priority, or rated as newsworthy in the high circulation and prestigious press. This means that the space, time and prominence given to this epidemic have been very little. The use of journalistic genres by print media seems to be biased as some genres are underutilised. On the other hand, the use of negative and stigmatizing language when reporting on this epidemic still exists in the media reports. In support of this notion, Forman (2008: 28) point out that the media frequently use words such as "scourge" and "plague" which add to the general perception that HIV/AIDS and those who are affected by it should be avoided. Doka (1997: 122) noted that "the AIDS epidemic could lead to significant disruptions in society as well as curtailments of civil rights and other restrictions on human behaviour." For this reason, public awareness and a clear understanding of HIV/AIDS is very important in attempts to minimize the spread of this disease. The media is supposed to set the agenda in this regard, by covering more HIV/AIDS-related topics and showing its responsibility to society. This means that HIV/AIDS issues should be permanently on the media agenda to ensure that society is well informed about the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

The fight against HIV/AIDS needs a multidisciplinary approach, but over all, there exists a need to keep the public informed (Linda 2000: 119). This implies that the public has a right to information. To emphasize this, Dennis and Merrill (1991: 45) point out that "the right to know is the right of the listeners to information of public interest and importance. They further clarify that in order for "the right" to be functional however; information must be acquired and published." Therefore, information on HIV/AIDS

should be readily available in the media. Uninformed societies practice things which are not acceptable. To avoid this, the media has to fulfil its role of disseminating information to society. This is why Rogers et al. (1999) point out that "if there is a lack of information about an issue, news coverage will stop." The International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) (2006) adds to this point by noting that news coverage is the first source of new information available on an issue. Shedding more light on the issue of information, Veinot (2010: 876) cited Ervin (2005) who points out that "information acts as a bridge for people as they face gaps in understanding or challenging situations." This statement is relevant to the issue of HIV/AIDS, as people need more information to understand the consequences of this epidemic.

In order to keep society informed about HIV/AIDS and its implications, media organisations in South Africa should cover HIV/AIDS issues thoroughly. The regular coverage of HIV/AIDS is very important because it helps to keep the public aware of the severity of the pandemic. Media reports can also help health workers to design programmes that can be used to address the epidemic more effectively. In the research report by Panos Institute (2004: 12), it was explained that the "public's reliance on the media for HIV/AIDS is unquestionable." Nevertheless, HIV/AIDS issues seem to take up a modest space in the media environment in South Africa, as confirmed by Media Tenor research. This research further shows that, for the period from January 2004 to August 2005, print and electronic media covered less than one percent of HIV/AIDS pandemic (Media Tenor 2005: 10).

The media has become a major source of information, and the tendency for people to discuss what appears in the media has considerable influence in shaping public opinion and people's behaviour (Linda 2000: 111). However, the outcome of this depends on how the media prioritises HIV/AIDS issues in its coverage, as the public will most likely react in a corresponding manner. This is because media is a powerful tool which is used to convey information to society. Therefore, if less information is provided on this issue, society will regard it as an insignificant issue. There is an almost universal belief that mass media institutions shape our think-

ing, influence our attitudes and opinion and contribute towards particular behaviour (Dennis and Merrill 1991: 83). HIV/AIDS, as a social problem, needs to be on the media agenda at all times in order to address its repercussions on society.

HIV/AIDS impacts society in different ways and in this regard one can ask how frequently media covers HIV/AIDS issue. What prominence is given to HIV/AIDS issues in the media? Does media use neutral language in reporting this epidemic? Answering these questions will help to ascertain whether the South African media, especially the press perform its role in informing society about this epidemic or not. In some countries such as Zambia, Uganda and Lesotho, to mention but a few, the issue of HIV/AIDS is given priority in the media.

It might be plausible that frequent coverage, including informative, well-written, accessible stories might influence people's sexual behaviour in a way that could reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS. Through HIV/AIDS agenda-setting, the media is able to influence people to change their behaviour. This will help in building a healthy nation.

Even though the media plays a crucial role in educating and informing society about the dangers of HIV/AIDS, collaboration with other institutions such as religious organisations, government and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) will help in combating this disease. But media has to be at the forefront in informing society about this epidemic. However, there is a debate that HIV/AIDS coverage in South Africa is infrequent. For instance, Media Tenor (2005) indicated this in the findings from its study, "Agenda cutting: AIDS fatigue is still media's excuse." This paper therefore investigates the frequency of coverage of HIV/AIDS. Other issues that will be investigated include prominence and proportion given to HIV/AIDS articles, as well as journalistic genres in these newspapers to determine whether these selected newspapers comply with guidelines proposed for language use in reporting HIV/AIDS issues or not. In addition to this, the paper will examine the message tone and sentence structure used to disseminate the HIV/AIDS message in these newspapers.

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the coverage of HIV/AIDS issues in South African print media. The paper will focus primarily

on four daily newspapers, namely: Daily Dispatch, Sowetan, Daily Sun and The Star. Therefore, the specific objectives of the paper are:

- To determine the HIV/AIDS content of selected South African newspapers (Daily Dispatch, Sowetan, Daily Sun and The Star) – the kinds, the frequency of coverage, prominence and depth of treatment.
- To ascertain the journalistic genres and proportions in which these genres are used for the dissemination of HIV/AIDS issues.
- To determine whether or not there are variations in the coverage of HIV/AIDS in terms of extent, categories, prominence and depth of treatment.
- To determine whether selected South African newspapers comply with guidelines proposed for language use in reporting HIV/AIDS issues or not.

Brief History of Newspapers under Study

A look at the press in South Africa is very important to this paper because the press in the country has been and is still educating and informing the public about social problems as well as development issues. However, before much can be said about the roles, functions and effects of media especially press in moulding, informing and influencing certain behaviour in the society; it is important to have a brief history of the newspapers under study as this will bring more understanding of how these newspapers contribute to the cover HIV/AIDS issues.

These newspapers were considered to be the appropriate sample for this paper as they target low, middle and upper class readership in South Africa, and they circulate in most of the provinces. For instance, *The Star* circulates in the following provinces: Gauteng, Mpumalanga, North-West, KwaZulu-Natal, Free State, Eastern Cape, Northern Cape and Western Cape (The Star 2007). The other reason for selecting these newspapers is that they are published in the provinces where HIV prevalence rates are high. For instance, statistics released by Avert in 2010 indicated that Gauteng had 30.4 percent HIV prevalence and this is a province where *Daily Sun*, *Sowetan* and *The Star* are published.

Daily Dispatch

The *Daily Dispatch* began its life in 1898 and was published as London's *Daily Dispatch*

(medioclubsouthafrica.com). This newspaper is owned by Avusa Media Limited known as Johnnic Communications before, formerly known as Times Media Limited (TML). This company is owned by a coalition of black business groups and trade unions, the National Empowerment Consortium. Other publications by this company include the *Sowetan*, *Sunday Times*, the *Herald* and *Sunday World*. *Daily Dispatch* is the biggest selling daily newspaper in the Eastern Cape. Its daily sales are estimated at 33,555 papers and daily readership amounts to 226,000 individuals (medioclubsouthafrica.com). Donald Wood, according to Williams (1997), is the most well known figure to have edited this newspaper from February 1965 until he was banned by the apartheid government in October 1977, for exposing government responsibility for the death of Steve Biko. Williams (1997) further points out that the *Daily Dispatch* continued publishing in politically turbulent times during the 1980s when its distribution area included the so-called independent states of the *Transkei* and *Ciskei*, where thirty percent of its readership lived in 1983.

Daily Sun

Daily Sun is a Media24 publication owned by Deon du Plessis. This is the first South African tabloid aimed at black readers (Wasserman 2005). It is mainly published in English and is a national daily newspaper. The circulation of this publication is estimated at 494,875 and it has audience 3,831 000 readers. This newspaper is sold in Gauteng, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and the North-West provinces (www.southafrica.info).

Sowetan

This is a tabloid daily newspaper which was founded in 1981, as a liberation struggle newspaper. It was initially distributed as a weekly free sheet in Soweto. This paper was transformed into a daily in 1987 to fill the void left by de-registration of the *Post*, at the hands of the apartheid government. According to De Wet (2004: 103), the *Sowetan* used to be the biggest daily newspaper in terms of readership. It is mainly and traditionally an English language people's paper with a strong emphasis on nation building. The daily sales for this newspaper are estimated at 118,261 newspapers and a readership

of 1.54 million people per day. The paper targets the black community and it is *Daily Sun's* primary competition. This newspaper is considered relevant to this paper in the sense that it will enable the researcher to examine how HIV/AIDS affects ordinary people.

The Star

This is a broadsheet newspaper which first appeared on newsstands in 1887 in Grahamstown in the Eastern Cape as the *Eastern Cape Star*. In 1989, it moved to Johannesburg (Fourie 2007: 32). *The Star* is a publication of Independent Newspapers owned by Irish tycoon Tony O'Reilly; Independent Newspapers first acquired a stake in local newspapers in 1995 when it took control of the Argus Newspapers in 1990s and renamed it Independent Newspapers. *The Star* is a prominent daily English paper with a history of quality reporting (De Wet 2004: 103). It targets middle to upper class readership in Gauteng. This newspaper was exclusively aimed at a white market and today over fifty percent of its readers are black. The demographic profile of its readers is as follows: Black sixty-five percent (65%), White twenty-nine percent (29%), Coloured two percent (2%) and Indian four percent (4%). This newspaper is distributed throughout South Africa, with most sales in Gauteng. It is also available in the following provinces: Free State, Northern Cape, Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga and North-West. This newspaper is considered important in this paper because the researcher will be able to examine how it informs the middle to upper classes on HIV/AIDS issues. Its daily sales are estimated at 125,490 while its readership is estimated at 574,000 per day.

Theoretical Framework

This paper focuses on the coverage of HIV/AIDS in selected South African newspapers and it adopts agenda-setting as its theoretical framework. This theory is very important in that it allows the researcher to examine how the media sets the agenda for issues such as HIV/AIDS that are of great concern to society.

Agenda-setting is based on the idea that media forms the public agenda through the amount of coverage devoted to a particular issues and events. An agenda is a list of current

events and public issues which are viewed in a hierarchy of importance at a particular point in time (Roger and Dearing 1988). Agenda setting is an effect theory that places the media in the powerful position of determining the salience of issues on the public agenda. Media achieves this through framing some aspects of perceived reality to enhance their salience in such a way as to promote a particular problem definitions, causal treatment, moral evaluation and or treatment recommendation (Entman 1993: 53). This means that the attention that media puts on the issues or social problems such as HIV/AIDS helps the audience to understand the seriousness of such issues. The concept of framing suggests that the way an issue or problem is presented influences the choice people make. That is why Druckman (2001a) point out that "framing in communication affects the attitudes and behaviours of audiences." This implies that the way journalists write or talk about HIV/AIDS can influence audiences either positively or negatively. Framing HIV/AIDS issues in the positive manner is one of the influential ways that media can adopt in order to shape public opinion. This can be achieved through the choice of good language because it is a vital tool of communication.

Essentially, the agenda setting function of the mass media refers to the ability of the news media to focus public attention on a few key 'objects' (Valenzuela and Correa 2009: 207). According to Rogers et al. (1991), agenda setting theory suggests that factors such as the number of articles, news types and locations in the newspaper are important for putting a media agenda into the public. The suggestion of this theory for the coverage of social problems such as HIV/AIDS is that frequent coverage of such issues that concern well-being of society is necessary to place them high on public agenda especially among policymakers. Rogers and Dearing (1991) studied AIDS coverage in the United States and the results revealed an interaction between the agenda of mass media and the agenda of the science community. Thus newspaper coverage of HIV/AIDS issues can provide information with which discussion of this epidemic can take place.

Rogers and Dearing (1991) further state that the agenda-setting theory can explain how the media emphasizes issues in the public's cognition through the increasing intensity and per-

sistence of media coverage and creating meanings for news events related to public issues. Patt et al. (2002) further point out that the framing techniques used by the media can affect the perceptions of the public and policymakers on those diseases. This indicates that a media agenda can serve as a yardstick on how certain issues are given attention by the public and how such issues affect them. For instance, if HIV/AIDS as a social problem receives more coverage from the media, this might change people's perception and attitude towards this epidemic.

Lee (2010) is of the view that agenda setting was able to explain the media effects such as telling people what to think, but also telling them how to think. This shows that the prominence that is given to certain issues, like HIV/AIDS, by the media agenda helps people consider such issues as important. McQuail (2000: 426) adds that "the attention given to news coverage influences the rank order of public awareness and attributes to the significance of an issue." This means that the attention that the media can give to social problems, like HIV/AIDS in South Africa, will promote awareness of this terrible disease and as result contribute to public agenda.

Giving issues such as HIV/AIDS more prominence in the media could help in informing and promoting awareness of this epidemic in the society. The use of different genres as well as decipherable headlines when reporting HIV/AIDS could also contribute to the awareness of HIV/AIDS issues in the media. Therefore, the researcher believes that this theory is suitable for this paper as it will help in finding out how media (especially press) cover and set agenda on HIV/AIDS issues.

METHODOLOGY

The Paradigm

This paper is underpinned by the post-positivist paradigm as it is a foundation of education and psychology evaluation (Mertens 2005).

The Post Positivist Paradigm

Positivism is a scientific research method that is based on the rationalistic empirical philosophy of Aristotle, Francis Bacon, John Locke, August Comte, and Emanuel Kant (Mertens 2005). It views knowledge as hard, objective and

tangible. Hence it demands the researchers to play an observer's role with an allegiance to the methods of natural science (Cohen and Manion 1994).

The post-positivism paradigm fits well into the present paper because the paradigm opens the door to multiple methods and worldviews while allowing for incorporation of different forms of data collection and analysis, thus it enables the researchers to get complimentary approaches to both explanatory and observational techniques of unearthing knowledge from peoples constructed ideas.

Thus post-positivism employs both qualitative and quantitative approaches both of which are also used in this paper.

Research Design

This paper adopted the mixed method which incorporates both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. Mixed methods research is the class of research where the researchers mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, approaches, concepts or language into a single study (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004: 15).

This helped these researchers to understand how HIV/AIDS issues are covered and portrayed in selected newspapers. Qualitative research helped to unfold information for understanding phenomenon where not much is known about them. It also provided space for new views and what is already known. Qualitative research also provides in-depth information that may be difficult to express quantitatively (Silverman 2005).

On the other hand, "Quantitative research is a formal, objective, systematic process in which numerical data are utilised to obtain information about the world" (Burns 2000: 140). Quantitative approaches assume interval or ordinal data which are amenable to statistical manipulation and the advantage of this method is that its results are very objective and that they can be generalized

Quantitative Content Analysis

This paper adopted quantitative content analysis method to enable the researchers to determine the frequency of HIV/AIDS coverage in these selected newspaper.

The disadvantages of content analysis, as established by this research, include the fact that content analysis only looks at whether a certain content of what is researched is available. Another disadvantage that the researchers recognized is that old newspapers may not be safely kept and some pages might be missing, hence there might be some errors in the collection of data and bias in the interpretation of the results. In this paper, data were obtained through quantitative content analyses of articles in Daily Dispatch, Daily Sun, Sowetan and The Star.

Discourse Analysis (DA) as a Method

This paper also employed discourse analysis as a qualitative procedure of textual analysis. Discourse analysis utilises the researcher's ability to analyse information from specialized language that belongs to a particular genre.

Guidelines for language use from International Federation for Journalists (IFJ) have been adopted in this paper. The media guideline for language usage or the terminology employed when reporting on HIV/AIDS issues includes strategies and approaches that should be followed when dealing with PLWHA or reporting this disease in general (IFJ 2006). This was used as a benchmark in analysing language or words used to report HIV/AIDS issues in the selected newspapers. The researchers read the articles on HIV/AIDS from selected newspapers and noted words and phrases which need not to be used when reporting this disease. The identified phrases and words were analysed to emphasize their impact to the receiver of information.

Population of the Study

This paper chose a population which constituted a total of 960 editions of newspapers. What informed the choice of this period, January to December 2010, is the fact that there was no major event that took place in connection with HIV/AIDS in South Africa throughout this year, except World AIDS Day that took place towards the end of the year.

Selection of the Newspapers

An attempt was made to include newspapers targeting a variety of population groups, as defined by race and class, across South Africa. These newspapers are major dailies in South

Africa and have been selected to analyse the coverage of HIV/AIDS issues. For instance, The Daily Sun has an average daily readership of 2.29 million in South Africa. Therefore, its content is likely to reach and influence a wide audience. Sowetan has an average daily readership of 1.54 million as compared to Star and Daily Dispatch which have an average of 616 000 and 226 000 readers respectively.

All these newspapers can be afforded by people from low, middle and upper classes which therefore guarantees a wide circulation and readership. One of the factors that were considered in selecting the newspapers for this paper was language. Since English is generally accepted as a medium of communication in South Africa, only newspapers written in English were considered. It is assumed that by using a language that may be understood by the whole nation, the papers intended to communicate to all South Africans affected or infected by HIV/AIDS. These four newspapers were also selected on the basis that they are popular dailies that target different groups and readers. These newspapers are read by all racial groups in South Africa—Blacks, Whites, Coloureds and Indians.

This paper used four daily South African newspapers, namely: Daily Dispatch, Sowetan, Daily Sun and The Star. Out of these, 288 issues representing thirty percent of the total were analysed for this paper. A systematic method was adopted in the sampling of issues of each of the newspapers. Systematic sampling involves selection of elements within a sampling frame, using a regular interval with a random start. In this case, the researchers used one as the starting point while selecting the rest at intervals of three.

To realize this, each month was divided into four weeks leaving out weekends because the newspapers used in this paper are published from Monday to Friday. For instance, the following weeks were selected for January 2010 (1st-8th), (11th-15th), (18th-22nd) and (25th-29th). From a segment of four weeks, six issues for each newspaper, per month, were picked for a period of twelve months. This means that 72 newspaper issues were content-analysed per edition. A total of 288 newspaper issues were content-analysed.

Sampling for the Qualitative and Qualitative Data

This paper, adopted purposive sampling to select relevant articles from newspapers. This means that the researchers made decisions on

picking articles that they saw as relevant in answering questions at hand.

Unit of Analysis

Wimmer and Dominick (2011: 164) are of the opinion that the unit of analysis is the smallest element of a content analysis but also one of the most important. They further indicate that, in written content, the unit of analysis might be a single word or symbol, a theme or an entire article or story. For this paper, units of analysis consist of the following:

1. Hard news stories on HIV/AIDS issues.
2. All feature articles and editorials on HIV/AIDS.
3. All opinion and commentary articles on HIV/AIDS.
4. All letters to the editors, news in brief, with HIV/AIDS as a theme.

Content Categories

Wimmer and Dominick (2011: 165) state that “at the heart of any content analysis is the category system used to classify media content.” The authors clarify that there are two ways to go about establishing content categories; these are emergent coding and a priori coding. The difference between these systems of categories is that in emergent coding, categories are established after a preliminary examination of the data while a priori coding system establishes categories before the data is collected. This paper adopted a priori method, in which the researchers use the categories developed and applied by other researchers.

This paper focused on the following categories: medical, economic, social, political, sexual (violence or rape), education as well as awareness and disaster, in relation to HIV/AIDS issues.

Procedure for Data Collection

The data for this paper was collected from August to September 2011. Data was collected through analysis of written stories with HIV/AIDS as the subject matter in four South African daily newspapers: Daily Dispatch, Sowetan, Daily Sun and The Star. Some editions of these papers were sourced from the University of Fort Hare library while those which were not available in the University of Fort Hare library

were sourced from Media24, Avusa Media and the Vereeniging public library in Gauteng.

Although the researchers were aware that there are some clippings from the database services provided by the SA Media Unit of the University of Fort Hare, the researchers decided to manually collect data from the selected newspapers. This is because the aforementioned clippings did not meet the objectives that the researchers wanted to achieve in this paper; for instance, it would have been very difficult to establish page dimensions for HIV/AIDS articles when studying clippings only.

Some of the issues of the newspapers proposed for sampling were not available. This was because of poor record keeping in some of the visited libraries. These libraries could not provide all the issues published. Some had been lost. However, Avusa media offered some help in providing missing copies of Daily Dispatch and Sowetan that were not available in the Fort Hare library.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 summarizes the number of HIV/AIDS stories analyzed (N=160) for 7 variables, that is; four newspapers (coded 1 to 4), category of the stories (coded 1 to 7), page (coded 1 to 3), genre (coded 1 to 2), number of paragraphs (coded 1 to 5), page dimension (coded 1 to 7) and headline font size (coded 1 to 5). The mean number of HIV/AIDS stories analyzed in the four newspapers during the period under review was 40 with a variation of 14.7 around the mean; the mean number of HIV/AIDS stories analyzed for the seven categories was 23 with a spread of 13.6 about the mean; the mean number of HIV/AIDS stories analyzed for the two genres was 80 with

no dispersion; the mean number of HIV/AIDS stories analyzed for the five paragraph measurements was 32 with a variation of 14.9 around the mean; the mean number of HIV/AIDS stories analyzed for the seven page dimensions was 27 with a dispersion of 16.7 about the mean; the mean number of HIV/AIDS stories analyzed for the five headline font sizes used was 32 with a spread of 30.7 about the mean.

Distribution of HIV/AIDS Stories in Newspapers

Table 2 indicates that, under the period of review, a total of 160 HIV/AIDS stories were analyzed; the *Sowetan* carried the highest number of HIV/AIDS stories as it accounted for 38.1 percent of the total sample population, followed by *Daily Sun* (23.1%), *The Star* (21.9%) and *Daily Dispatch* (16.9%).

Table 2: Distribution of HIV/AIDS stories in newspapers

Name of Newspaper	Percentage
1. Daily Dispatch	16.9
2. Daily Sun	23.1
3. Sowetan	38.1
4. The Star	21.9

Distribution of HIV/AIDS Stories by Category

Table 3 indicates that the majority of HIV/AIDS stories across the selected newspapers

Table 3: Distribution of HIV/AIDS stories by category

Category	Percentage
Medical	28.8
Politics	20
Education/Awareness	16.9
Economics	6.9
Sex/violence/rape	5

Table 1: Descriptive statistics

	N	Minimum code	Maximum code	Mean	Standard deviation
Newspaper	160	1	4	40	14.65
Category	160	1	7	23	13.64
Page	160	1	3	53	83.77
Genre	160	1	2	80	0
Number of paragraphs	160	1	5	32	14.88
Page dimension	160	1	7	27	16.68
Headline font size	160	1	5	32	30.72
Valid N (list wise)	160				

were related to medical, which accounted for 28.8 percent of the stories surveyed, followed by those related to politics (20%) and education or awareness (16.9%). News items concerning economics and sexual violence or rape were the least as they represented 6.9 percent and 5 percent, respectively.

Distribution of HIV/AIDS Stories by Appearance on Front, Back and Inside Pages

Table 4 indicates that out of the 160 news items on HIV/AIDS that were analyzed, 150 appeared on the inside pages of the newspapers, representing an overwhelming 93.8 percent. More news items were placed on the front pages (5%) than on the back pages (1.3%). The probability of news items appearing on the inside pages is much higher since there are quite a few inside pages and only one front or back page, than there is of it being placed on the inside pages which are in majority.

Distribution of HIV/AIDS Stories by Genre

Table 5 reveals a balanced distribution of news and feature stories, each carrying 80 items;

each genre thus represents fifty percent of the sampled group.

Distribution of HIV/AIDS Stories by Number of Paragraphs

Table 6 indicates that HIV/AIDS stories that used 6-10 paragraphs had highest frequency of 56 items. This was followed by news items that contained between 11-15 paragraphs with frequency of 36, 1-5 and 21 paragraphs or more accounted for 25 stories each. Stories which were between 16-20 paragraphs long accounted for only 18 stories of the total.

Distribution of HIV/AIDS Stories by Page Dimension

Table 7 reveals that the stories that occupied one-quarter of a page had the highest frequency (46) and accounted for 28.8 percent of the stories analysed. This was followed by news items that occupied one-fifth of a page which counted for 25.6 percent and one-third of a page was 22.5 percent. Those stories that occupied a full page amounted to 2.5 percent of the study sample.

Table 4: Distribution of HIV/AIDS stories by appearance on front, back and inside pages

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid percent</i>	<i>Cumulative percent</i>
<i>Valid</i>	Front	8	5.0	5.0	5.0
	Back	2	1.3	1.3	6.3
	Inside	150	93.8	93.8	100.0
	Total	160	100.0	100.0	

Table 5: Distribution of HIV/AIDS stories by genre

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid percent</i>	<i>Cumulative percent</i>
<i>Valid</i>	News	80	50.0	50.0	50.0
	Feature	80	50.0	50.0	100.0
	Total	160	100.0	100.0	

Table 6: Distribution of HIV/AIDS stories by number of paragraphs

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid percent</i>	<i>Cumulative percent</i>
<i>Valid</i>	1-5	25	15.6	15.6	15.6
	6-10	56	35.0	35.0	50.6
	11-15	36	22.5	22.5	73.1
	16-20	18	11.3	11.3	84.4
	21 or more	25	15.6	15.6	100.0
	Total	160	100.0	100.0	

Table 7: Distribution of HIV/AIDS stories by page dimension

<i>Page dimension</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
One quarter	28.8
One fifth	25.6
One third	22.5
Full page	2.5

Distribution of HIV/AIDS Stories by Headline Font Size

Table 8 indicates that the most frequently used headline font size was between 12 and 16, which was used on 74 news items, representing 46.3 percent of the sample population. This was followed by items that used a headline font size between 18 and 24 with 33.1 percent and 36 and 48 with 14.4 percent. It was less likely to find a news item that had used a font size of 72 or more as this accounted for 0.6 percent.

Table 8: Distribution of HIV/AIDS stories by headline font size

<i>Font size</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
12 and 16	46.3
18 and 24	33.1
36 and 48	14.4
72 or more	0.6

To What Extent do the Selected South African Newspapers Carry HIV/AIDS Issues?

This question is interested in knowing the categories of HIV/AIDS issues covered by selected South African newspapers content-analysed and the extent to which these issues were covered. The question is similarly interested in the level of prominence given to the HIV/AIDS-oriented stories. This prominence was measured in terms of the kinds of pages on which these stories appeared and in terms of the point-sizes in which their headlines were cast. The question

also interested in the depth of treatment, that is, the amount of space devoted to those stories. This was measured in number of paragraphs and page dimension.

Distribution of HIV/AIDS Stories in Newspapers

Table 9 indicates that, under the period of review, a total of 160 HIV/AIDS stories were analyzed; the *Sowetan* carried the highest number of HIV/AIDS stories as it accounted for 38.1 percent of the total sample population, followed by *Daily Sun* (23.1%), *The Star* (21.9%) and *Daily Dispatch* (16.9%).

Distribution of the Number of Items for the Various Categories of HIV/AIDS-oriented Stories

Table 10 indicates that the selected newspapers were found to publish HIV/AIDS-oriented stories in the areas of medical, economy, social, political, education or awareness, sexual violence or rape and disaster. Medical concerns the epidemiological aspects of the disease, prevention, cure, and AIDS researchers. Economic deals with effects of the HIV/AIDS on households, education, production, workforce, cost of drugs, cost

Table 10: Distribution of the number of items for the various categories of HIV/AIDS-oriented stories

<i>HIV/AIDS categories</i>	<i>Number of items (%)</i>	
Medical	46	(28.8)
Economy	11	(6.9)
Social	24	(15.0)
Political	32	(20.0)
Education/Awareness	27	(16.9)
Sexual violence/Rape	8	(5.0)
Disaster	12	(7.5)
Total	160	(100.0)

Table 9: Distribution of HIV/AIDS stories in newspapers

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid percent</i>	<i>Cumulative percent</i>
<i>Valid</i>	Daily Dispatch	27	16.9	16.9	16.9
	Daily Sun	37	23.1	23.1	40.0
	Sowetan	61	38.1	38.1	78.1
	The Star	35	21.9	21.9	100.0
	Total	160	100.0	100.0	

of treatment at the national and international levels while political concerns government action or inaction, political parties, president, ministers, members of parliament, provincial governmental authorities. Social category deals with religion, culture, traditions and places in society where the disease may be concentrated among sex-worker and in prison. Disaster category concerns portrayal of HIV/AIDS as desperate, unsolvable issue, overwhelming and impossible to combat; also statistics or trends (increase or decrease in mortality or death among population. Sexual violence or rape category concerns the act of sexual aggression that might lead to contracting HIV/AIDS, while education category deals with information which is provided by public health organizations to educate the public about this epidemic.

This table further reveals that the majority of HIV/AIDS stories across the selected newspapers were related to medical details, thus accounting for 28.8 percent of the articles selected. This is followed by those related to politics (20%) and education/awareness (16.9%). HIV/AIDS issues concerning economics and sexual violence/rape were the least reported upon and represented 6.9 percent and five percent of the items analysed respectively.

Placement of HIV/AIDS Categories on Pages

Table 11 presents the placement of HIV/AIDS categories (on pages). Inside pages appeared to be the most used for this subject matter with a total of 150 representing 93.8 percent. In this 150, medical has a share of 44 articles, followed by political and education or awareness with 28 and 25 articles respectively. Sexual violence or rape is the category with the least articles appearing on these pages as these articles appeared 8 times. Social issues related to HIV/AIDS appeared 23 times on these pages while disaster and economy appeared 11 times. Political issues

related to this epidemic have the highest frequency on the front pages, appearing for 4 times, while medical, social, education or awareness and disaster appeared only once. Economy and sexual violence did not feature on this page at all. Most of the categories identified in this paper were not placed on the back pages of the newspapers chosen for analysis. For instance, medical and education appeared once on this page.

Table 11: Placement of HIV/AIDS categories on pages

<i>HIV/AIDS categories</i>	<i>Back page</i>	<i>Any inside page</i>	<i>Front page</i>
Medical	1	1	44
Economy	0	0	11
Social	1	0	23
Political	4	0	28
Education/ Awareness	1	1	25
Sexual violence/Rape	0	0	8
Disaster	1	0	11
Total	8	2	150
Percentage (%)	5.0	1.3	93.8

Distribution of HIV/AIDS Categories Based on Font Size

Table 12 indicates that the most used font size to distribute HIV/AIDS categories was between 12 and 16; this was used on 74 items, representing 46.3 percent of the articles analysed. This was followed by a font size of 18 to 24 (33.1%) and 36-48 (14.4%). It was less likely to find HIV/AIDS categories that had used a font size of 72 or more as quantified by a negligible 0.6 percent.

Distribution of Lengths of HIV/AIDS Categories Measured in Number of Paragraphs

Table 13 indicates that the majority of HIV/AIDS categories in the selected newspapers were giv-

Table 12: Distribution of HIV/AIDS categories based on font size

<i>HIV/AIDS categories</i>	<i>12-16</i>	<i>18-24</i>	<i>36-48</i>	<i>54-60</i>	<i>72+</i>
Medical	15	16	11	3	1
Economy	4	5	2	0	0
Social	12	8	1	3	0
Political	18	7	5	2	0
Education/ Awareness	16	9	2	0	0
Sexual violence/Rape	3	4	1	0	0
Disaster	6	4	1	1	0
Total	74	53	23	9	1
Percentage (%)	46.3	33.1	14.4	5.6	0.6

Table 13: Distribution of lengths of HIV/AIDS categories measured in number of paragraphs

<i>HIV/AIDS categories</i>	<i>1-5</i>	<i>6-10</i>	<i>11-15</i>	<i>16-20</i>	<i>21+</i>
Medical	9	13	12	6	6
Economy	1	2	5	0	3
Social	3	9	3	2	7
Political	5	13	6	1	7
Education/ Awareness	6	11	5	4	1
Sexual violence/Rape	0	4	2	2	0
Disaster	1	4	3	3	1
Total	25	56	36	18	25
Percentage (%)	15.6	35.0	22.5	11.3	15.6

en a total of between 6 and 10 paragraphs. This occurred for 56 times which accounted for thirty-five percent. This was followed by categories featured between 11 and 15 paragraphs (22.5%), 1 and 5 paragraphs (15.6%) and 21 paragraphs or more (15.6%). The least number of paragraphs used was between 16 and 20, accounting for a meagre 11.3 percent of the total.

DISCUSSION

In this paper, only 160 HIV/AIDS-oriented stories were found out of 288 newspaper issues. As much as this paper considers HIV/AIDS as social problem that affects society in different ways, it, however believes that HIV/AIDS issues should be consciously and considerably covered. However, it has been observed that the coverage of HIV/AIDS issues by Daily Dispatch, Daily Sun, Sowetan and The Star is reasonable depending on the total of newspapers analysed.

On another consideration, the researchers found out that some of the sampled newspaper issues had no HIV/AIDS stories at all. However, the findings of this study are in contrast to Ajibola's findings (2009) on the ethics of reporting on HIV/AIDS, in three major South African newspapers. The findings from her study indicate that more than one HIV/AIDS story was published per issue of the selected newspapers. The Star and Daily Sun were included in that study. However, in this study, some newspapers issues were found to have no HIV/AIDS stories at all but overall the coverage of HIV/AIDS was found to be reasonable in these newspapers because the ones which published HIV/AIDS stories were found to have more than two stories. If each of these newspapers issues had covered a minimum of three stories on this epidemic per day, this would be regarded as extensive coverage;

however, this is not what is revealed by the findings of this study. It has thus become clear that there is a fluctuation in the coverage of this social problem.

In this paper, the findings revealed that the selected newspapers covered HIV/AIDS issues reasonably. For instance, 61 (38.1%) of HIV/AIDS stories found in Sowetan can be seen as reasonable coverage depending on the sample for this study. In regard to this, the researcher argues that these newspapers considered HIV/AIDS as a serious issue which the public has to be informed about. Murdock (1998: 6) is of the view that the media is the source of information and explanation of social and political processes for the most people. In relation to this, it can be argued that newspapers content-analysed in this study disseminated reasonable HIV/AIDS information to the public and as a result helped in setting public agenda.

The results show that these newspapers informed the public about this epidemic. For example, out of the 288 content-analysed issues, Sowetan had the highest frequency of HIV/AIDS stories accounted to 61 (38.1%), Daily Sun had 37 (23.1%) while The Star had 35 (21.9%) and the Daily Dispatch had 27 (16.9%). When looking at the nature and readership of these newspapers, as discussed in Chapter two and three of this study, it can be deduced that these newspapers were able to inform publics about the risks associated with HIV/AIDS even though the coverage was somehow fluctuating.

The reason for fluctuation coverage of HIV/AIDS issues these newspapers can be attributed to what Cullinan (2005) terms 'media fatigue'. The other reason for this kind of coverage of HIV/AIDS issues by the media could be the fact that journalists and/or editors regard HIV/AIDS stories as less newsworthy since it is believed that HIV/AIDS stories do not sell newspapers

(Linda 2000: 119). This could be due to a commercial and profit-oriented approach that has been adopted by the media. If this is how the media operates, one would have to question how the media will survive if it covers this epidemic in a fluctuating manner as its consumers might become infected due to a lack of adequate information. If all these issues can be treated well in the newsrooms, these newspapers can do much better in disseminating HIV/AIDS issues to the public.

Researchers saw it fit to include the proportions that journalistic genres used for the dissemination of HIV/AIDS issues. It was the belief of the researchers that, Journalistic genres are crucial in the reportage of social problems like HIV/AIDS issues. Analysis revealed a balanced usage of news and feature at fifty percent each. Fifty percent indicates a reasonable coverage of this epidemic. The importance of reporting issues such as HIV/AIDS in the news format is that news does not allow a comprehensive report; it just goes straight to the gist of a very specific issue. In addition to this, Stein (2002) points out that the role of media in promotion of public health is especially useful when applied to news media's advocacy role in relation to HIV/AIDS. This study, however, believes that these newspapers are using this genre effectively to disseminate HIV/AIDS information to the public.

On the other hand, features are more appropriate for thorough treatment of any issue; they allow background information to be gathered and provide detailed information to educate and inform readers on an issue. This shows that reportage on HIV/AIDS issues is both reactive and proactive, unlike other studies which argue that HIV/AIDS reportage in South Africa is merely reactive. Falobi and Babingbetan (2000) argue that journalists shy away from adopting an overly proactive response to HIV advocacy on the grounds that they must remain neutral and objective commentators. In this study, this is not the reason as results indicate a reasonable use of feature at fifty percent. Reporting issues such as HIV/AIDS in the form of feature shows that journalists are tackling this issue proactively. This however, can result into influencing positive behavioural change in society as well as setting agenda the on this disease.

The Sowetan used feature articles frequently to disseminate HIV/AIDS messages, with 29

(18.1%) stories. This indicates that, when it comes to HIV/AIDS coverage, the Sowetan is more committed in informing people about this epidemic than the other three newspapers. The Daily Sun had an average of 22 (13.8%) feature stories while The Star had 19 (11.9%) feature stories, followed by Daily Dispatch with only 10 (6.3%) feature stories. Feature writing as one of journalistic genres is perceived to have less structural constraint than hard news and allow more of the individual journalists' imagination. This means that feature stories should be used more frequently in reporting on HIV/AIDS issues as it allows journalists to provide detailed information so as to inform and educate their audience.

The paper also wanted to uncover whether the coverage of HIV/AIDS issues by selected South African newspapers vary in extent, categories, prominence and depth of treatment. The results reveal a statistically non-significant relationship between newspapers and categories, that is (.). This indicates an equal likelihood reporting of HIV/AIDS oriented stories based on the categories analysed in the four newspapers. A chi-square test further indicates that the placement of HIV/AIDS oriented stories on the front, inside or back pages were not statistically related, that is (.). This shows that there was a variation in the placement of HIV/AIDS issues in these newspapers.

The results further indicate no statistically significant relationship between the font size used for reporting HIV/AIDS-oriented stories. The non-significant relationship between newspapers and the font size used to report HIV/AIDS issues show that the content-analysed newspapers did not give this epidemic enough prominence. For instance, font size 54-60 was used only 9 times throughout the newspaper while font size 72 plus was used once. Lending support to this, Kasoma (1991) in his study of the Zambian press and the AIDS crisis observed that newspapers when content-analysed did not regard HIV/AIDS stories important enough to deserve page one treatment. This is similar to the findings of the present study as only five percent of the total stories on HIV/AIDS appeared on page one. This study, argues that these newspapers did not do well in reporting this social problem.

It is however, of importance to note that analysing the coverage of HIV/AIDS from these

newspapers in the present study, individually, one would find that Sowetan has performed creditably well on most counts. For instance, the newspaper contained 61 HIV/AIDS-oriented stories of all the stories found in its editions content-analysed. It is followed by Daily Sun, with 37 stories; The Star with 35 and Daily Dispatch with 27. For almost all content categories, Sowetan had the highest contributions.

The prominence given to HIV/AIDS in the media was measured in terms of the number of paragraphs and page dimension of each HIV/AIDS-related story. The results show a statistically significant relationship between the number of paragraphs used in reporting HIV/AIDS issues and newspapers. This indicates that the percentage of HIV/AIDS stories of varying paragraphs lengths were statistically significant from the four content-analysed newspapers.

The paper also looked at whether selected South African newspapers comply with guidelines proposed for language use in reporting HIV/AIDS messages. The results revealed that, indeed, the selected South African newspapers comply with the guidelines proposed by IFJ (2006) which is concerned with the way in which HIV/AIDS issues are portrayed in the media. Articles from these newspapers were found to be generally balanced and sensitive. It is also observed that the language used in these newspapers and the tone set in the stories was positive and encouraging. However, there are some articles which still use derogatory language, including terms like "HIV/AIDS victims" and "safe sex". The results are similar to what the study of Ajibola (2009) has revealed. Her study revealed that some metaphors containing negative connotations are still used. She further points out that this could create further stigma and discrimination for people living with this disease. To counteract this, journalists should make sure that they eliminate the use of words which cause harm to other parts of society.

The use of sensitive language in HIV/AIDS reporting can be a useful tool for encouraging positive behavioural change within society. In contrast, language can be manipulated for particular purposes; therefore journalists should take care not to place too much emphasis on the effects of the epidemic and they should also pay serious attention to HIV/AIDS sensitive language. De Wet (2004) emphasises that language, terms and terminology could be used to reduce

the level of stigma in HIV/AIDS reporting. This shows that language is a productive tool that can be used to instil positive behaviour amongst the public.

Each newspaper's agenda tends to influence the overall meaning of the stories they publish. In their study Krishnan et al. (1997) point out that media need to serve as reinforcers, as agenda setters as well as gatekeepers, in the coverage and dissemination of HIV/AIDS information in the African American community. It is also apparent, however, that these newspapers have a specific agenda infused and embedded in the HIV/AIDS stories they covered. It is evident, upon looking at the tone and sentence structures, in these stories, that the newspapers have a hidden agenda which is overtly anti-establishment. The general impression is that HIV/AIDS is seen as a disturbing social problem in South Africa. Therefore, these newspapers need to do better than what they are doing to tell people about this epidemic.

Even though these newspapers were found to comply with the recommended language guide in reporting HIV/AIDS, they need to adopt a more proactive, as opposed to reactive approach to reporting this epidemic. This is supported by Bardhan (2001) who found that the coverage HIV/AIDS has become routinized and is more reactive than proactive. This author, further points out that a passive description dominates over active narration about the future of the pandemic. This means that they need not to rely on events and personalities as this contributes to the low coverage of the epidemic.

The effectiveness of HIV/AIDS reporting depends on journalists' attitudes and values in relation to this disease. This means that journalists should carefully sensitise themselves against the prejudices and discriminatory attitudes found in statements and messages from many of their sources. By so doing, they are more likely to use sensitive language in their reports.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the selected South African newspapers' coverage of HIV/AIDS indicates that the papers in question pay reasonable attention to HIV/AIDS issues. Even though political, entertainment and business issues take prominent space in the newspapers this does not rub out the importance of covering HIV/

AIDS issues frequently. This disease needs to be covered extensively as this will keep society abreast of the changes that take place in relation to treatment or medication. This means that journalists and editors need to prioritise HIV/AIDS stories in order to feed society with accurate, fair and balanced information. However, the coverage of this epidemic can be seen as periodic because HIV/AIDS issues featured irregularly and are not featured prominently in the newspapers.

There is also a balance in the genres used in reporting on HIV/AIDS issues. In this regard, it can be argued that the newspapers have done enough work to set an agenda, raise public awareness and affect behavioural change. It is well known that media can frame issues in such a way that people can regard it as a true story. This shows that if a serious social problem like HIV/AIDS receives extensive attention and more prominence in the media, the public as well as policy makers will also pay more attention to it. This would, in turn, contribute to effective recognition of health campaigns aimed at promoting the awareness, prevention and treatment of this epidemic in society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking into consideration the important issues that the paper delved into, the researchers identified some points for consideration in order to improve the coverage of HIV/AIDS issues.

The researchers therefore recommend that:

The coverage of HIV/AIDS issues by the media is generally limited to issues like medical and political. Therefore, the media has to play its role in the realization of covering more HIV/AIDS issues in relation to education, economy and social. This means journalists and editors as part of the society affected by this epidemic need to increase the attention given to HIV/AIDS issues in the newsroom. One way of achieving this is to devote more space or have specific pages devoted to HIV/AIDS issues. There is also a need for greater magnitude of reports of this nature in the newspapers; they should be placed on the front and back pages as these pages carry more prominence than those on the inside pages of the paper. For the prominence of the headlines, there is a need for newspapers to use font size 54-72 and above, more often when reporting on HIV/AIDS related issues.

Government and non-governmental officials who advocate on rights and awareness of HIV/AIDS should encourage media editors to give HIV/AIDS issues more consideration. This can be achieved through conducting workshops or seminars with editors where the importance of reporting on HIV/AIDS issues can be discussed.

Since editors claim that HIV/AIDS stories no longer sell papers, there exists a need to train journalists to package HIV/AIDS stories in such a way that they will make them sell newspapers. This can be achieved through media training for journalists who specialise in HIV/AIDS reporting. Journalists would then be well equipped with requisite skills to create and sustain HIV/AIDS reporting that is accurate, fair, balanced, and informative.

The media should collaborate with HIV/AIDS services and organizations in order to curb the spread of this disease as well as helping the public develop their own solutions to HIV/AIDS as this would enable them to participate in planning prevention strategies. This can be achieved through developing effective policies and programmes to address emerging issues related to this epidemic.

Media should not engage in sensational reporting as this tends to create hatred and rejection for people living with HIV/AIDS. This can contribute to the stigmatization and discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS.

The media has to be socially responsible by providing regular and consistent coverage of this epidemic as this will contribute in forming public agenda.

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