

**PRINT MEDIA COVERAGE OF FREE MATERNAL HEALTH CARE ISSUES BY THE  
*DAILY NATION***

**BY**

**Florence Wambui Waitthaka**

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## DECLARATION

This research project is my original work and has not been presented for the award of a degree in any other university

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

FLORENCE WAMBUI WAITHAKA

K50/67984/2011

This research project has been submitted for examination with my approval as the university supervisor.

Dr. SAMUEL SIRINGI

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Lecturer: School of Journalism and Mass Communication  
University of Nairobi

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## **DEDICATION**

My study is dedicated to the following: my loving family for support and patience during the entire period. For their encouragement and continued prayers towards successful completion of this course. Finally I pay glowing gratitude to my husband Jimmy for understanding me during the entire period of study.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

KDHS	-	Kenya Demographic and Health Survey
MMR	-	Maternal Mortality Rate
HPV	-	Human Papilloma Virus
NGO	-	Non Governmental Organisation
MH	-	Maternal Health



## ABSTRACT

Maternal health care is a key societal issue which needs attention for any country working towards achieving millennium goals. The media has a role in highlighting and creating awareness on perceptions and policy on maternal health issues both to the government and the society. In Kenya's mass media system, the editors have power and legitimacy to decide on media content. It is difficult for health or science to be covered regularly when politics and other major news carry more weight. Kenya enjoys a more diverse and liberalised media scene than many other African countries and therefore stands a good chance in in-depth coverage of reproductive health issues. Health policies do exist in our country, but they need to be strengthened, and made more relevant to particular health issues and in this case maternal health.

The study sought to investigate how the print media covered free maternal health care programmes in Kenya a case of the *Daily Nation* newspaper. The period covered was January to June 2013; three months before and three months after the March General Elections. A content analysis of selected Kenyan print media publications specifically *Daily Nation* newspaper was done. The population of this study comprised all the 180 publications within the six months period. Analysis of the findings was done with the help of a code sheet.

From the findings, the study concludes that print media coverage of maternal health news is wanting. Media houses are primarily profit-making organizations. They tend to focus on issues that will increase their sales and as a result prefer very sensational reports. Maternal health issues, by their nature do not fall under this category they need to be given more coverage as we endeavour to attain the millennium goals. The study recommends that print media as an information tool should give maternal health issues prominence in their coverage and must play its watchdog role in highlighting implementation of government policies such as this one on maternal health.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

The mass media is an important vehicle for the dissemination of health messages, more especially those related to maternal health. The focus on other areas of health like public health reporting has attained more prominence and overshadowed reporting on maternal health. This has consequently given the illusion that maternal health is of less importance which is a big misconception altogether.

Health Journalism is an evolutionary yet established beat in most reputable papers as well as in the TV and Radio Media. It naturally has a significance as journalists simultaneously undertake multiple role of informing and educating the public as well as holding the medical authorities and in some cases government functionaries accountable viz a viz their role in securing the life and health of mother and child. In other words, a health journalist attains the role of advocacy for provision of state of the art facilities to mother and child so as to increase the life expectancy as well as assure happy healthy mothers to nurture the future generation of the society (Beamish, J. 1993).

Vast sums of money are spent annually for materials and salaries that have gone into the production and distribution of booklets, pamphlets, exhibits, newspaper articles, and radio and television programs. These media are employed at all levels of public health in the hope that three effects might occur: the learning of correct health information and knowledge, the changing of health attitudes and values and the establishment of new health behaviour (Noar, 2006).

The role of the media in reporting maternal health issues is to create a behavioural shift in the society to a more sensitive and responsible attitude by internal and external actors of a house towards their pregnant women and new-borns. The media can hold public Awareness to change perceptions: This includes health journalists to have anyone of the following as their underlining theme in whatever they cover no matter it is a simple news report of an event, a feature on an issue, an investigative story or a case study. The media should also position mothers as the most

important figures of life. They can also promote pregnancy as a special condition requiring proper care, nutrition, hygiene and clinical care (Beamish, 1993).

Media can also encourage birth preparedness including savings and arrangement for emergency, Promote caring husbands as role models Hold accountability of government departments: In light of promises made in the health policy by the government and the targets set in its development budget appropriations and supplementary grants etc., it is the journalists' duty to analyse the budget allocations and their actual spending on maternal health issues in the country and to unveil to what extent they cover the maternal needs for all regions of the country (Beamish, 1993).

Health Journalism is an evolutionary yet established beat in most reputable papers as well as in the TV and Radio Media. It naturally has a significance as journalists simultaneously undertake multiple role of informing and educating the public as well as holding the medical authorities and in some cases government functionaries accountable viz a viz their role in securing the life and health of mother and child. In other words, a health journalist attains the role of advocacy for provision of state of the art facilities to mother and child so as to increase the life expectancy as well as assure happy healthy mothers to nurture the future generation of the society (Beamish, 1993).

The mass media are critical in influencing behaviour, attitudes and policy changes in the way it portrays information. Professionals expect more specialisation and space allocation on health issues than politics in the media. They also need the press to be innovative, creative, and catalytic and practice the 'politics of health' in its coverage. Some of the health articles in the media bring a lot of confusion and generate controversies. Instead, public health professionals expect proper interpretation from the media based on accurate cross-checked data (Sahar et al, 2000). Presentation of debates and data must be in more accurate and informative ways. There is also a need for good analysis of the issues covered. The media should handle controversies by asking questions, which people want answered. With regard to women, the media needs to reach more women with friendly programs that help them understand basic health issues (Sahar et al, 2000).

According to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) (2006), Kenya enjoys a more diverse and liberalised media scene than many other African countries and therefore stands a good chance in in-depth coverage of reproductive health issues. According to a report by Press freedom advocacy group- Reporters without Borders (RSF) ranked Kenya 96th on its list of the press freedom in countries around the world in 2009. This is just an indication that Kenyan media have the capability to undertake more robust reproductive health coverage issues based on the platform of media independence and legal freedom which removes constraints that may affect health reporting.

In Kenya, Print media, especially daily newspapers like *Daily Nation's* Horizon magazine (Horizon is a weekly health, environment and technology magazine published by the Nation Media Group in conjunction with the Population Council, every Thursday) and Straight Talk magazine inserted in the East African Standard newspaper and some magazines are consistently covering health issues. Some have regular science and health pullouts. According to (Ramsay et al, 2009), private media is doing much better than public media in packaging information but with a limited spread. Through the use of cartoons, for example, they are communicating well. Some professionals feel the state media was so compromised by politicians that the people lost trust in it. So they rely on private media to hear the truth because it does not support any ideological positions. Despite this, the state media has a wide coverage and would still reach more people when they broadcast on issues of health.

Health policies exist in Kenya, but they need to be strengthened, and made relevant to particular health issues for example reproductive health. There is also the need to have constant consultations between the media, Ministry of Health and local health specialists to give advice on health issues. Politicians should not be allowed to guide the debate on such matters. According to a report titled *Media Coverage of HIV/AIDS & Health Issues in Africa: Needs Assessment in Kenya*, Public health awareness in Kenya is very poor. There are few sanitary facilities, which are poorly maintained. Although policies are in place to address these shortcomings, they are not implemented. One of the reasons for non implementation is poor dissemination of information source. According to the same report, the media ought to have a carefully thought out media policy and strategy on public health so that it can pull people along

with it. With such policies and strategies, the media can then approach the government to put in place media friendly policies.

Mass media campaigns have long been a tool for promoting public health (Noar, 2006) especially to expose high proportions of large populations to messages through routine use of television, radio, and newspapers. Communication campaigns involving diverse topics and target audiences have been conducted for decades. Some reasons why information campaigns fail is an early landmark in the literature. Exposure to such messages is, therefore, generally passive (Wakefield, 2010). Such campaigns are frequently competing with factors, such as pervasive product marketing, powerful social norms, and behaviours driven by addiction or habit.

## **1.2 Background of the study**

The media play a vital role in setting a country's policy agenda by deciding what news is and how it is presented. Policymakers often need to be persuaded by evidence and advocacy that attention to health and population will further national development (McIntosh et al, 2013). When journalists who are knowledgeable about maternal health issues report effectively on their country's population growth, unmet need for family planning, and levels of maternal mortality, policymakers are likely to take notice and also take action. Informed media coverage helps advocates and health personnel reach high-level policymakers with key messages about the benefits of addressing reproductive health and population as part of a comprehensive development strategy. It is well recognized that the media plays an enormously influential role in public responses to health issues. The Mass media have an unparalleled reach as a communication mechanism. It has substantial power in setting agenda, that is, what we should be concerned about and take action on, and framing issues, that is, how we should think about them (McIntosh et al, 2013)

In regard to maternal health reporting, the media can raise public awareness of health as a basic human right that underpins progress on many fronts. Media attention is also critical to holding policymakers accountable for spending public resources wisely and equitably to improve citizens' lives. News reports form important channels for transfer of maternal health-related information between public health officials, health researchers, and the public (Peters, 2009;

Viswanath, 2006). To author such reports, journalists either must themselves identify, access, and interview government officials and or researchers, or depend upon information subsidies produced by public information officers (PIOs) from institutions where such researchers work is done.

Trained journalists who are skilled in reporting about maternal health and population issues and are familiar with the policies and programmes needed to address them can help shape policies and public opinion. They can link the evidence on population growth and the environment, and factors that influence the quality and uptake of family planning services, to long-range planning, finance, and improved health outcomes. Through participation in stimulating seminars and study tours, interaction with health and development experts, and networking with colleagues, journalists gain understanding of how health issues are critical to national development. And through receiving ongoing information and technical support, the quality of journalists' reporting continues to improve. This means that Journalist can better appreciate the importance of reproductive health reporting if they are well in touch with the nature and status of health in a particular context. By working together with reproductive health practitioners, Journalist can cover reproductive health stories in good perspectives and afford the public with information enough for vital decision making (McIntosh et al 2013)

The importance of encouraging more and relevant media coverage of public health issues, as a condition for improving the preventive health awareness of society, is quite obvious. Although the media, especially newspapers have done well in flagging off important health issues and raising social public health awareness, a lot still needs to be done on the same to allow awareness levels to increase even more. Some of the remarkable initiatives that have been done by the media include special features and documentaries that shed light on topical issues in public health. Examples cited include the *Daily Nation Horizon*, *Family Doctor* on Family TV and Nation TV's *Eyes on the People*, which look at issues from a human interest point of view.

The media have also alerted the public of potential health hazards such as outbreaks of communicable diseases. Certain media such as drama on TV are unique ways of getting important messages to people. The media therefore has performed an important role in packaging

information in ways that are appreciated by the public. A remarkable point to note is that the media has played an important role in turning taboo subjects into everyone's agenda. A good example has been in demystifying HIV/AIDS and other public health advocacy areas. An emerging role of the media that cannot be easily ignored is that it has acted as an interface between the public, government agencies and professionals. In the recent past there has been good collaboration between media and health professionals especially when professionals are called in to discuss certain issues. Print media is seen to be doing better than the electronic media in this role (Ramsay et al 2009).

According to (Ramsey, 2009), Even though media are usually seen as an important tool in improving public health through education and awareness creation, some policy makers, media practitioners and health professionals warn that the media can also play a negative role. Due to the profit-orientation of most media houses they focus on what is fashionable and sensational even in health topics so as to increase sales. Therefore real public health issues get very little coverage. It should also be noted that some of the publications and/or programs do not give people options to take action. The media is not very keen on following up issues from A to Z; they merely offer scanty information which is pointless if no concrete alternatives or suggestions are proposed. This problem is due to the lack of in-depth analysis that can help the communities act on their public health concerns. Most of the stories tend to give only general information to people.

The journalists should also be encouraged to analyze reproductive health issues rather than just reporting them in a routine manner. The media has been accused of reporting catastrophe and epidemic when it comes to public health rather than preventive reportage on the perspective of the epidemics before they occur. Although the media habit of focusing on personalities has been somewhat changing, there has been a gap between health officials, researchers and the media. Some media houses are accused of relying more on politicians rather than health professionals who would provide them with accurate and comprehensive information (Noar, 2006).

According to (Noar, 2006), lack of specialisation and clear understanding of the health issues at hand causes reporters to distort information sometimes with catastrophic results. The media have

failed to hire professional science editors who can then report competently on the subject. There is also little investment in investigative journalism in the realm of public health. Further interest and investment in this kind of journalism should generate value added information. Mainstream media is based in urban areas, ignoring the health information needs of rural areas and Communities. It would be important for the media to focus on what is happening in the rural communities where public health concerns (Noar, 2006).

The media has been accused of avoiding public interest issues and instead being focused on making money and ignoring social responsibility to educate and inform. Media organizations are profit making entities who will give editorial space only if one can pay. Key messages could be left out to create room for the more lucrative venture, advertisement. Consumer demands also influence this trend since health issues are not controversial enough. It is a function of what the audience wants and thus the ease in packaging entertaining issues. The most vulnerable group- women and children- are the most disadvantaged when it comes to accessing public health information from mainstream media. The public is generally uninformed on what public health issues are. Many think it is a preserve of the professionals and this has made the public naive. The problem is partly the result of packaging and dissemination of information. While some shareholders recognize the role played by the media in educating the public on health issues, there is still consensus that a lot needs to be done (Ramsay et al 2009).

Health reporting however faces great challenges and barriers. One of the barriers that is quiet subtle but exists to media coverage of health issues is the attitude of civil servants and the red tape at the Ministry of Health was a key matter of concern since journalists do not get any information concerning public health in this country easily. A major concern with regard to public health service provision is the high cost. Due to a government policy on cost sharing, many Kenyans are unable to access these essential services. The high cost of public health has also been attributed to corruption within the health sector. As a result many people cannot afford such services. Government investment in public health facilities has also remained very low over the years.



### **1.3 Statement of the problem**

The health care that a mother receives during pregnancy, at the time of delivery and soon after delivery is important for the survival and well being of both the mother and her child (KHDS 2008-09). Comparing trends since 2003 KHDS, the analysis shows a continuing decline in the proportion of women who make four or more antenatal visits from 52 percent in 2003 to 47 % in 2008-09. This decline calls for programme interventions that will encourage more women to have regular antenatal visits throughout pregnancy.

On average, 488 women in every 100,000 die each year due to complications related to child birth according to the same 2008-09 KHDS report. One of the key reasons for this is that about half of pregnant women deliver without the help of trained health personnel and as highlighted earlier few attend antenatal clinics where pregnancy complications could be identified. Government and private sector efforts to reduce MMR have borne little success. During the general election campaigns, the Jubilee Coalition promised to give free maternal health care. When they formed the new Government, reacting to the above problem decided to introduce a programme through which pregnant women can deliver in public health facilities free of charge.

However, awareness of this project is considered less, although the print media have published reports to highlight the issue. Scholars have conducted fewer studies to assess how the media are covering the issue. This study sets out to find out how the print media, specifically, the *Daily Nation*, have covered the introduction of this programme. Findings from this study can be important for policy makers and the government in knowing how to engage the media to boost awareness about this programme and address teething problems arising from its introduction.

### **1.4 Objectives of the study**

The main objective of the study was to investigate how the print media have covered government policy on free maternal care a case of the *Daily Nation* newspaper.

The researcher attempted to achieve the following set of specific objectives:

- i. To determine the quantity of print media coverage of maternal health topics in the *Daily Nation*
- ii. To establish prominence of maternal health news and analysis three months before and three months after 2013 general elections

- iii. To find out the key issues covered in the media during period of political campaigns ahead of general elections in March 2013.
- iv. Offer recommendations that will aim at improving media coverage of maternal health issues in the media.

### **1.5 Significance of the study/rationale**

KDHS 2008-09 reports says that on average, 488 women in every 100,000 die each year due to complications related to child birth. One the key reasons for this is that about half of pregnant women deliver without the help of trained health personnel. Government and private sector efforts to reduce MMR have borne little success. The new Jubilee government, reacting to this problem decided to introduce a programme through which pregnant women can deliver in public health facilities free of charge.

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### **1.6 Scope of the study**

The study focused on the *Daily Nation* newspaper for the period 2013. The period under review was six months, just before and immediately after the 2013 general elections; chosen due to the availability of funds and staff to undertake various duties during the research process. The method used was content analysis where newspaper articles with maternal health stories were looked at with an aim of doing a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the same. A sample was obtained from a population of six months' newspapers after which the researcher went through all the newspapers to identify the stories related to maternal health. The data was fed into a code sheet which formed the basis for a quantitative and qualitative analysis.

### **1.7 Research ethics**

The researcher presented a research proposal to a panel at the School of Journalism and got it approved.

Permission from the Nation Media Group to conduct research was granted. The researcher promised to deliver a copy of the research findings to the University of Nairobi and the Nation Media Group.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Review of theoretical literature**

Health of mothers, new-borns, infants and children is important for any society. A healthy mother gives birth to healthy infants who grow into adults with sound body and mind, live a productive life, and contribute to the family and society. Being the prime caregivers of children, mothers have the most significant impressionable effect on their children in the early development years (Tamis 2001; Landry 2000). The healthy future of a society depends on the health of the children of today and their mothers, who are guardians of that future. If physically and mentally healthy, women can steer their children and the family towards prosperity and long lasting happiness.

United Nations Organization has acknowledged women's role by declaring that sustainable development could not be achieved without the full empowerment, participation, and contribution of women and men, in conditions of equality (Beijing Declaration 1995). Poor maternal health can have significant negative impact on the family and society as it is a major determinant of the health of children and indirectly affects the formation of human capital.

According to research, the motherless children die more frequently; are more at risk of becoming malnourished and less likely to enrol at school (Ainsworth 1998). The babies of ill or undernourished pregnant women are more likely to have a low birth weight (Reed 1998: 6; Kramer 1987) and impaired development. Low birth-weight (LBW) children in turn are at greater risk of dying and of suffering from infections and growth retardation, have lower intelligence and higher risk of developing chronic diseases in adulthood (Grivetti 1998). Societies that have developed, have always given emphasis to the health care of mothers, new-borns and children.

The mass media is one of the best communication tools to spread the information and create awareness in the people so that there is acceptance of any idea to create interest. Mass media displays information about health and make people aware so as to prevent the spread of various diseases. There are various types of mass media magazines, television, internet, newspapers,

traditional media and folk media etc., mainly the electronic media very much interact with the people even illiterates can easily understand the information aware about the social, political and well developmental issues (Ghanta, 2012).

The mass media has enormous potential to influence health-related behaviours and perceptions. It is well recognised that the media plays an enormously influential role in public responses to health issues. The mass media - print, television, radio and internet - has an unparalleled reach as a communication mechanism. It has substantial power in setting agendas, that is, what we should be concerned about and take action on, and framing issues, that is, how we should think about them( Ghanta ,2012).

The media have the power to direct our attention towards certain issues and highlighting various issues to resolve the problem as seen in the agenda setting theory. In the words of Cohen (1963), the media may not be successful in telling their readers what to think, but are stunningly successful in telling their readers what to think about". The media reflect the realities, values, and norms of a society. Thus, if we want to study a society we could turn to its media, its films, novels, television series, and popular stories. They will reflect to us what people feel and think, how they behave, and so on (Ghanta, 2012).

The media act as a mirror of society, or a 'window on the world', which can be used as a resource to understand the society. Freimuth et al. (1984) have shown that many people rely on the news media for their health-related information. Policy makers also obtain considerable amount of information from the media. The media has an essential function in social learning to provide the information that will empower ordinary people and transmit the idea that structure peoples thinking. Apart from the educative role, the media also play an advocacy role instrumental in making policy makers and key opinion leaders take the epidemic seriously (Ghanta, 2012)

Ghanta (2012) argues that the news coverage of health matters takes on considerable significance that has the potential to shape the impression of average citizens and powerful policy makers alike. This means that the news coverage of health tends to ascribe the power to control individual's health to medical experts using high-technology equipment. Communication

involves dialogue. Participants of the dialogue, who play their role as news sources, not only exchange knowledge but also critically look into their beliefs, attitude and behaviour patterns. Studies have also shown that the news media tend to increase their coverage of health concerns as they affect the society's mainstream and/or the greatest number of people in their audience.

Public health professionals have always been sensitive to the persuasive power of the mass media. In fact public health has often had the challenging task of both using the media to influence health practices while countering this same influence where it encourages unhealthy choices. These issues are especially acute in a crisis, such as the A(H1N1) 'swine' influenza pandemic. On such occasions hitting the right pitch is crucial, and difficult. Health communicators may need to advocate rapidly and effectively for the public adoption of basic preventive measures, like hand washing, while such messages may be displaced in a mass media dominated by discussion of technical interventions, such as thermal scanners, Gupta et al (2010).

There is a greater demand and need for accurate, relevant, rapid and impartial public health information by people, and a growing reliance on mass media as the main source of information. The public health community usually looks to the media for support, attention and endorsement and are considered as a primary source of health and science information, even for health professionals. On the other hand, they are also seen as an important tool to disseminate health information to the population. The news media are quite important in furnishing the public with health information (Gupta et al, 2010).

In line with the agenda-setting theory, Bryant and Thompson (2002) are of the view that news coverage of health matters takes on considerable significance, in that it has the potential to shape the impressions of average citizens and powerful policy makers alike”.

Both health policy makers and scientists recognize journalists' effect on public understanding. Reporting health stories requires judgment about how to interpret evidence and about the implications of evidence for the public. But most journalists have little formal training in assessing the validity of evidence that bears on health issues, so, inaccurate or deceptive reporting seems common. To begin to address this problem, we have built on others' work and developed a set of guidelines to help journalists understand and interpret health stories (Guyatt et al, 1999)

According to Guyatt (1999) many obstacles confront the health journalist, including limitations of time and space, editorial priorities, and the need to create stories that are compelling enough to warrant space in a publication. Our journalist's guidelines will not help with those issues. However, even given other constraints, understanding principles of scientific inquiry into human health problems will help journalists to produce more informed articles

The importance of medical and health news and information is recognised by medical researchers and practitioners and journalists; however, they view media news reports and practices through different lenses coloured by their professions and professional practices. Coverage has different implications for the three groups (Picard et al, 2011)

Researchers see the need for media coverage to generally improve public knowledge of science by providing a realistic view of science, its processes, and scientific results. Simultaneously they also want to have coverage that is favourable for reputation building for researchers and their institutions and for building public and political support for increased research funding from which they benefit (Picard et al,2011)

Practitioners want coverage that improves public knowledge in ways that lead to better understanding of risks of disease and conditions, treatment options, and behaviours that promote better preventative and therapeutic outcomes. Similarly they want coverage that builds public confidence in health care institutions and practitioners. Media professionals want coverage that informs the public about medical and health advances and debates, protects the public against risks, and exposes inefficiencies or corruption in medical and health institutions or delivery (Picard et al, 2011).

## **2.2 Role of the Media in Health Reporting**

The media has a major influence in the health communication be it during health campaigns, advertising or even mere reporting. Media also have the ability to shape and influence policy. Both media and journalists affect policy and the public through agenda setting involving the interrelationships among media agenda, public agenda and policy agenda. This process, however,

requires salience, which is achieved through the manifestation of media posture, relative to the issue.

The mass media helps health workers expand their audience reach, which is crucial considering the fact that face-to-face channels of communication often require too many human resources and reach only a small number of people in large, underserved rural areas. The mass media provides an important link between the rural residents and vital health information. The people living in rural areas who would otherwise not be reached by some crucial health messages are able to receive the same information via the media (Brezis et al.2008)

The mass media, in the form of the radio and television, are an effective way to persuade target audiences to adopt new behaviours, or to remind them of critical information. Besides informing the public about new diseases and where to seek help, they can also keep the public updated about immunization campaigns (Brezis et al, 2008)

The mass media can “empower rural populations to fight major causes of infant mortality such as diarrhoeal dehydration and diseases which can be prevented through vaccination, inform large numbers of people of seasonal or daily variations for such activities as an immunization campaign or availability of a new product or service, teach new health skills such as how to mix oral rehydration solution, promote new health, motivate ad hoc or organized listening groups, and increase community acceptance of health workers (Schwitzer et al, 2005).

Some journalists maintain their role and responsibility in reporting health information is no different than reporting information about politics, business, or any other topic (Schwitzer et al, 2005). These journalists say their chief concern is accurate, clear reporting – they are less concerned about the consequences of their story once it is published. Public health experts contend this type of approach as it often leads to sloppy journalism and possible harm to the public (Schwitzer, 2005). Some evidence indicates newspapers have begun to emphasize public health issues and include more environmental factors that shape the dissemination of health related messages (Lemmens et al,1999).



### **2.3 Status of Health Coverage in Kenyan media**

According to a report '*Media Coverage of HIV/AIDS & Health Issues in Africa*'(2012) by the African woman and child feature service, The media is critical in influencing behaviour, attitudes and policy changes in the way it portrays information. Professionals expect more specialization and space allocation on health issues than politics in the media. They also need the press to be innovative, creative, and catalytic and practice the 'politics of health' in its coverage.

The report notes that, some of the health articles in the media bring a lot of confusion and generate controversies. Instead, public health professionals expect proper interpretation from the media based on accurate cross-checked data. Presentation of debates and data must be in more accurate and informative ways. There is also a need for good analysis of the issues covered. The media should handle controversies by asking questions, which people want answered. With regard to women, the media needs to reach more women with friendly programmes that help them understand basic health issues. The main focus of coverage for public health issues has been in creating awareness about diseases '*Media Coverage of HIV/AIDS & Health Issues in Africa*'(2012).

Unfortunately, the media in Kenya still lacks innovativeness in developing programmes that can lead to behaviour change. It simply provides information, which does not necessarily target specific populations at greater risk such women and the youth. Prevention is another major theme in media coverage and more recently about the power of the antiretroviral drugs with regard to HIV/AIDS. But such messages on issues like home based healthcare and more recently HIV/AIDS antiretroviral drugs are discussed in general terms.

*Media Coverage of HIV/AIDS & Health Issues in Africa* (2012) report also indicates that VCT messages asking people to go for testing for a better future are also being covered more due to sponsorship by various organizations. The statistics of infected and dead persons as a result of public health problems such as AIDS are also covered frequently in news media (e.g. 700 people die in Kenya daily from the HIV/AIDS). Media also focuses on funding, how much is allocated and spent and whether this is being done efficiently. For example in Kenya, the debate on

HIV/AIDS has shifted to funds being misused e.g. on staff salaries, sometimes distracting attention from the real issues affecting the populations.

Media houses are primarily profit-making organizations. They tend to focus on issues that will increase their sales and as a result prefer very sensational reports. Public health issues, by their nature do not fall under this category. The media owners would like to engage only on articles or programmes that would sell their publications. For instance political stories, which are of great interest to the public, will be given more coverage. Many media houses claim that if they cover a lot of health matters they will close down since there is scant sponsorship for such items '*Media Coverage of HIV/AIDS & Health Issues in Africa*'(2012).

Public health stories are not considered newsworthy especially since they are not controversial enough. This is a function of what the public wants. People want good and exciting information. It is easier to package entertainment and other news in an exciting manner than to do the same for public health news. However there are recent exceptions like in the *Daily Nation's* Horizon magazine (Horizon is a weekly health, environment and technology magazine published by the Nation Media Group in conjunction with the Population Council, every Thursday) and Straight Talk magazine inserted in the East African Standard newspaper.

According to '*Media Coverage of HIV/AIDS & Health Issues in Africa*'(2012) apart from buying advertisement space and time, public and private institutions do not invest in journalists by supporting them to research and produce feature articles and documentaries. Few NGOs and media houses have budgetary provisions for investigative research and reporting on public health. Communication budgets are usually limited to buying advertising spaces in the newspapers or TV commercials rather than supporting research and investigative journalism.

There is no media policy that would require media houses to allocate minimum space and time for certain content. Although the government has promised to enforce laws requiring media houses to observe social responsibility by allocating a certain percentage to local production and presumably issues of national interest such as public health, this is yet to be enforced '*Media Coverage of HIV/AIDS & Health Issues in Africa*'(2012).

Most of the journalists (and editors) are not trained to be able to handle scientific information. They find it hard to understand and interpret what scientists say and instead prefer 'softer stuff' such as politics. This lack of capacity to cover health issues such as HIV/AIDS is a major reason for its poor prioritization in the media.

Media attitude towards public health issues is wanting. There is a perception that if a health issue cannot sell, then it is not good. In general, the public ends up not being sensitized about the importance of public health, and the media continues to disregard it. This attitude creates a vicious cycle because media must first highlight the issues then gain public interest and not the other way round. Some informants also feel there is a lack of discipline and commitment among some journalists.

Media, especially newspapers have done well in flagging off important science issues and raising social public health awareness. In fact, research shows that the media is a leading source of health information for many people. The media also alert the public of potential health hazards such as outbreaks of communicable diseases. Certain media such as drama on TV are unique ways of getting important messages to people. The media therefore has performed an important role in packaging information in ways that are appreciated by the public.

An emerging role of the media has been to act as an interface between the public, government agencies and professionals. In the recent past there has been good collaboration between media and health professionals especially when professionals are called in to discuss certain issues. Print media is seen to be doing better than the electronic media in this role.

Due to the profit-orientation of most media houses they focus on what is fashionable and sensational even in health topics so as to increase sales. Real public health issues get very little coverage. The publications and/or programs do not give people options to take action. The media is not very keen on following up issues from A to Z, they merely offer scant information which is pointless if no concrete alternatives or suggestions are proposed. This problem is due to the lack of in-depth analysis that can help the communities act on their public health concerns. Most

of the stories tend to give only general information to people. The journalists should also be encouraged to analyze health issues rather than just reporting them in a routine manner.

The media has been accused of reporting catastrophe and epidemic when it comes to public health rather than preventive reportage on the perspective of the epidemics before they occur.

Although the media habit of focusing on personalities has been somewhat changing, there has been a gap between health officials, researchers and the media. Some media houses are accused of relying more on politicians rather than health professionals who would provide them with accurate and comprehensive information.

Lack of specialization and clear understanding of the public health issues at hand causes reporters to distort information sometimes with catastrophic results. The media have failed to hire professional science editors who can then report competently on the subject. There is also little investment in investigative journalism in the realm of public health. Further interest and investment in this kind of journalism should generate value added information.

Mainstream media is based in urban areas, ignoring the public health information needs of rural areas and communities. It would be important for the media to focus on what is happening in the rural communities where public health concerns are catastrophic to help them on the predictive developments in health matters.

#### **2.4 News Media Coverage of Health Issues**

Health reporting is a key growth area for the news media, probably because it is in demand by the public and it is lucrative for media companies (Schwitzer et al., 2005). In the 1980s, news about health and/or science increased substantially (Seale, 2002), particularly with the growth of special science sections in the nation's newspapers (Bader, 1990). Through the years, the number of health news stories on television has increased as well (Signorielli, 1993).

Major networks began employing physicians to cover health topics, and local stations assigned reporters to specialize in health coverage. Many stations also created special health segments sponsored by local hospitals and businesses. Scientists also changed the way they work with the

news media with many physicians employing large public relations firms to promote their work (Russell, 1999). Today, many medical journals provide advance press release packages with release dates and times carefully chosen to increase the chance of being covered during in the evening news (Seale, 2002).

Institutions, including universities and corporations with new products to sell vie for media attention. The problem remains that the news media, print and broadcast, cannot wait for scientists to complete all of the research essential to reach consensus (Seale, 2002). Instead, journalists offer the best health information available to the public at a given point in time. Critics assert the news media do not provide the public with the most effective health information (Seale, 2002) many times journalists emphasize the dramatic over the mundane, new risks over old ones, and conflict and drama (Russell, 1999, p. 169).

For more than 30 years, media coverage of health risks has increasingly followed a wheel-of-fortune approach" (Russell, 1999). Be it hourly, daily, weekly, or monthly, journalists following the latest study spin out a new health risk that often contradicts a previous study and helps contribute to a general feeling of confusion and concern in the public. This increased coverage can be attributed to the general increase in knowledge and enlightening in the society about several topical issues that affect them (Russell, 1999).

A study was conducted on the health related messages that appear in print media (Newspaper and Magazine) and electronic media (Television and Radio). The radio and television channels, newspapers and magazine used for the analysis were randomly chosen. From the detailed content analysis of various communication media, it can be concluded that all the different types of media provide information regarding health matters but the political subject is the most preferred area of news in all types of media. Similar opinion has been stated by Weber (1990) and Oso and Odunlami (2008).

According to Gupta (2010), the health beat is not particularly high news yielding beat like politics or the economy. The news related to crime and accident is at second place. The news related to social life and culture is at third place. It included various kinds of social activities in

the area of Art and Culture, Education, Science, Health, Municipal Corporation, Banking, Economy and Local Administration. However, advertisements do cover a lot of space and time and they form the largest single category in terms of overall health communication strategy..

News related to health in our life is being widely covered. Very important and useful information regarding health had been given in them. There were special programme on radio and television and additional sections in the newspapers on health. It has also been found that various issues related with some subjects were given more space and they were frequently discussed while others were totally absent. The advertisements related to beauty and health products were telecasted more on television especially at the prime time when the viewership is high (Gupta 2010)

According to a study by Gupta (2010), the health messages were telecasted more on radio and in newspapers than broadcasted on television. This may be because of the financial investment which is more in the case of television than radio and newspaper. It is clear that health news rely heavily on health experts. Sometimes, the search or discovery of drugs for curing diseases and the consequences of diseases are also mentioned in newspapers and magazines. The orthodox and western biomedicine is given more coverage in comparison to alternative systems of medicine like ayurveda and homeopathy.

Following the study, some of the suggestions made are; first, there should be a special reporter for the coverage of different areas of development. Such reporters should be specialists in their subject. Secondly, Due to preference of majority of readers, the health messages should be given either on first page which covers mainly political news or on sports page of the newspaper. Thirdly, Due to large viewership, the health related information or messages should be telecasted more during the prime time on television (Gupta 2010)

The coverage of health issues by the media has been a source of great interest for many researchers. In another study by the Pew Research Centre's that analysed the coverage of health in 48 different news outlets sampled as part of a News Coverage Index . This research covered an 18-month time period, from January 2007 through June 2008. The study included small,

medium and large market newspapers, network TV morning and evening news programs, cable television news, news and talk radio, and online news. A total of 3,513 health stories were analysed for this report.

The key findings include: Health news was the 8th biggest subject in the national news, comprising 3.6% of all coverage. This is more than three times the amount of coverage for education or transportation, but much less than coverage about foreign affairs, crime, or natural disasters. Network evening news viewers were the most likely to find health news in their programming. Looking at every newscast (Monday - Friday) on the three evening news programs from January 2007 through June 2008 reveals that fully 8.3% of airtime was devoted to health-related news, with a heavy emphasis on specific ailments such as heart disease and cancer. This was more than twice the coverage of health in any other news genre except newspapers (where it was 5.9%) (Gupta 2010)

According to Pew Research Centre research, cable news, on the other hand, found very little room for health news, just 1.4% of programming studied. When the overall coverage of health was broken down, specific diseases such as cancer, diabetes or heart disease received the most coverage at 41.7%. Public health issues such as food contamination, tainted vaccines, and binge drinking garnered the next most attention, accounting for nearly a third (30.9%) of all health coverage. News about health policy or the U.S. health care system was not far behind, at 27.4% of the coverage.

The single disease to get the most attention was cancer, accounting for 10.1% of all health coverage. Some of this attention was driven by announcements of cancer in two public figures—Elizabeth Edwards and Tony Snow. The number two condition was diabetes/obesity, at 5.2% of coverage, followed by heart disease, at 3.9%, and HIV/ AIDS and autism at 2.2% each.

The biggest individual health-related story was the debate over U.S. health care policies, which was the focus of 16.3% of all health news. Coverage of that story peaked in the fall of 2007 when the debate about the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) erupted in Congress. The next biggest story was the tuberculosis-carrying traveller who entered the U.S.

This story accounted for 8.3% of health coverage for the entire 18-month period, but during the week it occurred, it was the top-ranked story in the nation.

Despite on-going debates in government about the future of the USA health care system, health did not become a dominant part of the 2008 primary campaign coverage. Whether focused on health policy or personal health issues, the subject accounted for less than 1% (.6%) of the campaign related news in the study. It is important to note that this includes only those stories in which the campaign was the primary topic, and health was a major focus of the story; and that the study included only those print stories that appeared on the front page of the paper. For these reasons, it is possible that the study underestimated coverage of health in the campaign. On the other hand, it does seem to indicate a smaller amount of high-profile coverage of the candidates' positions on health care than many insiders expected.

Among all news stories on health, the largest proportion focused on issues concerning the effects of, treatment for, or research about specific diseases or conditions (41.7% of all coverage). Potential epidemics and other public health issues (such as contamination of food, drugs or water, vaccine problems, nutrition, or trends like binge eating or drinking) accounted for just under a third (30.9%) of all health coverage. This was closely followed by stories about health policy or the well-being of the U.S. health care system itself (27.4%), including topics such as the uninsured, prescription drug care, health care costs, and programs such as Medicare or Medicaid. This means that news about health policy and the health care system received less than 1% (.9%) of total news coverage during the period of the study. Cancer received the most attention of any specific disease, accounting for 10.1% of total health coverage.

The highest spike in reporting on this disease occurred in March of 2007, when news broke of the recurrence of cancer in two public figures—Elizabeth Edwards, the spouse of then-presidential candidate John Edwards, and then-White House Press Secretary Tony Snow. Diabetes and obesity together, considered by many health professionals to be an emerging epidemic, came next, garnering half as much coverage (5.2%) as cancer. Heart disease followed, making up another 3.9%. Of total coverage of Health by Media Sector.



The different media sectors studied for this report varied widely in both the amount and the nature of coverage dedicated to U.S. health news. Network evening news was the most committed to the topic. With an older audience than other media, the evening news also focused more on specific diseases and ailments. Newspapers devoted the second most attention to health news (5.9%), but they spent most of their reporting on stories about health policy or the U.S. health care system. Health accounted for just 1.4% of airtime, mostly through reports on public health outbreaks such as salmonella-tainted tomatoes, stories that fit the definition of breaking news.

Numerous researchers have documented that the most common narrative style used by the media is an episodic approach, consisting of case studies that focus on specific people, places or instances of policy issues or problems. Indeed, previous news content analyses for the Frameworks Institute have found episodic reporting to comprise as much as 93% of the coverage of health issues. Surprisingly, according to a research by the Frameworks Institute report, 88% of the media coverage was thematic in nature, taking a broader and more contextual approach to the story of healthcare. In New Hampshire, virtually all the stories were thematic; in California, 78% of the stories were thematic and 22% were thematic with minor episodic discussion.

Episodic media reporting are those that are based on a single event, the activities of a single company or some other clearly circumscribed experience. Based on this research done by Frameworks institute, a story was coded as episodic with some thematic discussions if its overall style was episodic, but the stories begin by discussing broader trends or patterns. A story was thematic with some episodic discussions if its overall style was thematic, but it begins with an episodic case. And a story was coded as thematic if it spent more time discussing broader or more contextual and thematic information than it spent on case studies or specific examples.

Another study revealed while the most newspaper coverage remains primarily episodic as opposed to thematic, an emerging trend exists toward including more context, analysis, and interpretation in news stories about crimes and accidents (Barnhurst & Mutz, 1997). The public journalism movement in the United States has encouraged the news media to provide a contextual framework to help individuals comprehend the complexities of most issues that are

covered in health reporting. Although including contextual information is only one of the changes public journalism supports, studies show newspapers practicing the public journalism approach are more likely to include contextual information (Blazier & Lemert, 2000). For the most part, the news media routinely fail to include public health information in their coverage

The majority of research analyzing news stories about conventional health problems such as illness and disease, report infrequent inclusion of contextual information advocated by public health experts (Coleman & Thorson, 2002). Findings from several studies indicate this also is also the case for science stories .Merritt contends thematic coverage which includes a complete discussion of underlying issues helps encourage the “true deliberation” that is required to “revitalize public life” the fundamental goal of the public journalism approach. Public health experts share a similar objective. They believe changing the news media’s focus from personal behaviour and individual responsibility to a broader approach will lead to greater political participation resulting in an increase of possible solutions such as policy and social change strategies (Dorfman, Wallach, & Woodruff, 2005).

Dorfman et al. (2005) maintain it is not unexpected that most news coverage would promote Interpretations of personal responsibility in audiences. Individualism lies at the base of how we reason about health and disease, economics, and social policy. It is an invisible unseen hand that guides societal thought and action (Wallach et al., 1993).

## **2.5 Health Journalism as a Tool to Set Public Agenda**

Health journalism is one factor that plays a role in personal discussion about health issues, and finally for behaviour change, but has so far been less investigated than health communication campaigns (Jazbinsek 2001; Abroms and Maibach 2008). The feasibility study views health journalism in its genuine role of setting the public agenda which then will enable people to inform themselves, to communicate, to reflect on health related issues (practice, social norms, beliefs) on their own, and finally to change behaviour and act accordingly.

Agenda setting research holds that potential media effects can only be caused by explicit journalistic coverage of subjects and issues (McCombs and Shaw 1993). Journalistic coverage

ascribes societal importance. Knowledge transfer is related to a series of factors as (personal) involvement, appropriateness of information, specifically for disease affected, perceived reliability and validity of information and its enabling potential.

Parrott (2003) underlines the special importance of personality, of individual involvement, needs and perceptions of one's potentiality and argues that the differentiated analysis of these factors is a necessary condition for effective health journalism, communication and campaigns. Messages must be tailored to the needs of the individual. Active acquisition and the processing of information provided by media and other message-contexts are only rarely analysed. Nevertheless, these factors are determinants for compliance, adherence or shared decision making in health-related issues. Therefore the feasibility study tries to look at ordinary people's needs and media's performance to provide sound and enabling health information for them (HJP 2006)

Where the media has played a constructive role in providing sensitive and informed coverage of health issues, this is often underpinned by engagement between journalists and those most affected by a health condition, and good on-going relationships with health ministries. It has also been important to get a mix of support and training from health thematic experts, and journalists and editors who are aware of the real world pressures of the news room. Journalists need to balance both worlds and make complex medical information accessible and interesting to non-scientists, often with a human interest angle.

The need to place health issues in broader social, economic and political contexts, and tackle issues relating to health infrastructure and resources is very important. Among the range of recommendations for strengthening health journalism support, which are reported elsewhere in detail (HJP, 2006), two that are most relevant to health researchers are the need to: First, support government health ministries to provide news media freer access to health information and research in accessible language and formats and secondly, support journalists to better link with health agencies, health researchers, and people most affected by health issues. While the HJP found that there were many initiatives in the area of support to journalism, in particular on the

part of NGOs that focus on media support, the study also found that the resources invested in this enterprise

### **2.5.1 The Constraints on Health Journalism**

In 2006 the HJP gathered data from around the globe on the support that has been provided to health journalists to identify the existing gaps and needs in training and support programmes and the shortcomings of health journalism. The resulting database, profiling the experience of 450 organisations worldwide, was supplemented by more in-depth information gathered in 16 countries, through interviews with key informants with long-standing experience in media and national health initiatives, combined with existing desk studies. In addition, four in-depth case studies looked at factors enabling and constraining health journalism around a particular health issue or country, employing a combination of semi-structured in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and background desk research and media content analysis.

Overall, the study found that media coverage of health issues tends to be shallow and reactive, driven by announcements of new drugs or official health promotion campaigns, and lacking in investigative depth. Equally, reportage is often sensationalist or inaccurate. Occasionally, in-depth reporting will explore the social and economic issues that lie behind any particular health challenge, but this is the exception rather than the rule. It is largely media NGOs which are supporting health journalists, accounting for nearly 30 per cent of the 450 questionnaire respondents. However, most of these are small and new: none of them spent more than US\$20,000 on all forms of journalism support (not just health reporting) in 2005, and few undertake comprehensive evaluation.

The study highlighted the following leading obstacles to good health journalism: First, many journalists lack basic journalism skills and understanding of science and health issues, secondly, health reporting tends to have low status and few rewards, thirdly, many countries restrict access to health statistics and information, fourthly, many journalists lack time, equipment, travel expenses and access to communication and lastly, relationships between journalists and a range of health actors need to be strengthened. These observations are further discussed below.

Understanding health issues and critically analysing data is a problem for most journalists because most journalists have a weak grasp of the basic medical and social aspects of the health topics being covered and many lack the ability to critically analyse and interpret information and statistics. Investigative journalism plays an important part in some of the best reporting, as illustrated in the HJP case studies on HIV and AIDS coverage in Jamaica and South Africa. But all too often, press releases from governments and pharmaceutical companies are the focus of reporting, and the broader context of social, political and economic aspects of health are frequently neglected, as is prevention, in favour of treatment.

The low status of health reporting is another problem as health is often seen as a 'soft' issue, and in a handful of country studies it is explicitly seen as a woman's beat where the high value beats go to men. Sports and politics are seen as more of a priority and this is linked to the perception that they sell more newspapers. In some countries, such as Thailand, health is often reported as a consumer lifestyle issue, focusing on beauty or weight-loss for example.

In other cases the health issue is merely a pretext for reporting a related political scandal, such as the controversy over polio immunisation in Nigeria, or the tendency to focus on medical malpractice in Georgia. Low esteem for the subject is reflected in low wages and status for journalists who do cover health issues, encouraging them to seek other work. In extreme cases, such as the example highlighted in the Cambodia country profile, poor pay makes journalists more ready to accept bribes, with a detrimental impact on the independence and perception of media.

Neglect of important national health issues and rural matters was also seen as another obstacle. In two thirds of the countries surveyed, the HJP found that one or more major health issue, in terms of national burden of disease and mortality from available statistics, is barely covered in the media. Malaria is conspicuous by the lack of attention it draws in the media in many countries, including South Africa, Thailand and Kenya. Other major challenges such as tuberculosis, child and maternal mortality, and many non-communicable diseases that are an increasing issue in many developing countries are often neglected.

In a handful of countries, our contacts reported that HIV and AIDS tend to eclipse other health issues, and that there is an 'HIV and AIDS overload'. But this perception may reflect the lack of coverage of most health issues rather than an excessive reporting on HIV. Presentation made at Forum 11, Beijing, People's Republic of China, 29 October - 2 November 2007 and AIDS. In South Africa, for instance, one media content analysis between January 2004 and August 2005 showed that only 1 per cent of overall coverage was on HIV and AIDS in a country where it is a major national issue.<sup>9</sup> a tendency of the media to neglect rural coverage was cited in just less than one quarter of the HJP country profiles.

The lack of resources for journalists to travel and investigate noted above is obviously a factor here, and rural 'stringers' are particularly neglected, leading in many cases to poor quality coverage. One place that partly bucks the trend of disinterest in health reporting is Jharkhand.<sup>10</sup> The growing media industry in this new Indian state has prioritised health as a newsworthy topic, with some newspapers having dedicated health beats and health news even being a source of competition between news outlets. The increasing growth in local media, driven by advertising revenue and commercial opportunities, leads to local editions that often report on health as a topic of interest to the public. Paradoxically however, the case study suggests that health reporting is driven more by a concern to market to local audiences, than a genuine interest in accurate and informative health reporting.

Lack of access to reliable health information is another major obstacle as HJP interviews reported that two thirds of the surveyed countries block access to national health data for journalists in one way or another. In China and Botswana, permission to publish sensitive reports has to be obtained from government ministries. In many cases, secrecy stems from government concerns over critical coverage of government health initiatives. But respondents in nearly half of the countries surveyed said government officials worry that journalists will write inaccurate reports. In Chile, informants raised concerns about the fact that pharmaceutical companies are better at providing information to journalists than the government, even though a lot of the information provided is really marketing material, while in Georgia, difficulties of access to information means that journalists often get information from pharmacies.

Lack of time, equipment, travel and other expenses was noted in almost all the countries surveyed, lack of resources was cited as a barrier to effective journalism. Journalists lack resources to do the necessary research and investigation for strong stories – whether this is to travel, investigate or take time to do background research. Equally, lack of access to communications and information sources in general, and the Internet in particular, is an issue in many countries.

### **2.5.2 Shortcomings in Health Journalism Within Media Organizations**

In their report ‘Feasibility study, Enabling Health Journalism’, Schanne & Spurk (2009) concluded that interviewees from media companies (journalists, editors, managers) confirmed quite frankly the limited importance and low quality of health reporting. As the main reason this group of interviewees highlighted the general political orientation of most mass media. Literature on Kenya’s media system confirms this trend: 70% of all news and reporting in Kenyan media is political. Some of the key shortcomings identified are:

Political orientation of major news and reporting in Kenyan media is one of the major shortcomings. The most important reason for selecting health as a topic is thus not health-oriented but political or personal: The minister of health or a senior official of the Ministry of Health gives a public speech or spends a visit anywhere in the country. (*“And the cameras will be off, after the workshop has been officially opened by the minister and the scientists start to talk...”*) Or some funds of the Ministry of Health have been misappropriated to other uses. Then, health will be covered. Thus, health does hardly make it to the news on its own. Journalists and media managers insisted on the fact that „*politics sell*“ and other topics like health must usually have a political anchor to be selected for media reporting. Schanne & Spurk (2009)

The lack of appropriate, relevant and suitable editorial structure in the newsroom environment hinders proper health reporting. Additionally there are various factors mostly within the editorial structure that prevent more and better health reporting: There are hardly any specialized reporters for science/health even in the lead print media, and much less in small radio stations in vernacular languages. Usually health is covered by general reporters that lack medical or science knowledge. Thus, it is almost sure that they cannot fully understand researchers or doctors

without large preparation or additional training. Additionally, editorial structures for covering science (for example science desk) are not yet established. Schanne & Spurk (2009)

In Kenya's mass media system – where the editors have power and legitimacy to decide on media content – it is difficult for health or science to be covered regularly as they are not presented in the editorial decision-making bodies. As a consequence media must be externally mobilized to discover health issues, they are less pro-active. Working conditions within the newsroom are counterproductive to in-depth reporting – which is required for journalistic research in health. There are sometimes not even sufficient time resources to elaborate questions on lay level: an estimated 70% of journalists are paid on a strict publication base, it is less attractive to report science where it is needed to do major investigations and longer research. Thus, reporters go for covering 'quick and easy' stories like press conferences. According to our interviews editors are still rather sceptical about the importance of health reporting, although they know studies showing the relevance of health. They mostly think that media consumers are more attracted by political reporting. Schanne & Spurk (2009)

Lack of networks and regular exchange between journalist and scientist is also one of the newsroom barriers. Journalists and scientists have hardly opportunities to exchange views and to jointly learn. There are no regular forums on health and science and there are no established networks between scientists and journalists. Experience from Western countries show that forums and networks are rather helpful both for journalists to get to know background of trends in science and for scientists who can explain their research without being directly quoted. As a consequence journalists do not receive regular information from science or health institutions. Schanne & Spurk (2009)

The business aspect of health reporting is ambiguous and partly not known. Most interviewees gave contradicting information on media advertising potential. Some were affirmative regarding its potential, some to the contrary. But everybody agree that 'health reporting must make shillings and sense', but it is still to be discovered how that could work ( Schanne & Spurk 2009)



## **2.6 How Internet is Affecting Media Coverage of Health Issues**

The internet is displacing use of some traditional media platforms. Many print and broadcast media have established presences on the web to serve those who prefer news and information on digital platforms. This permits medical and health news from traditional sources to be accessed online. In addition, new, specialised health and medical sites have emerged, many operated by health services and medical societies. Those operated by traditional media tend to be used by the public on a day-to-day basis as part of their general news and information reception. The specialised sites tend to be used by the public when they, family members, or friends are diagnosed with diseases or conditions and they are seeking specific, authoritative information (Picard et al 2011)

The Kaiser and Pew study (2008) predicted that it is likely that viewers will be exposed to less news coverage of health and health policy ‘as consumers migrate from broadcast to cable, and from print to online; as newspapers cut pages, reporters and editors; as the amount of advertising on TV goes up and the news hole shrinks; as all of these shifts occur’ (2008). However, that does not mean that an individual will have less opportunity to learn about health.

The internet makes it generally easier and cheaper to access information. A survey showed that approximately 73 million adults in the United States reported using the internet to locate health information (Horrigan, 2006). In the same context, print newspapers have revamped their companies to include online news websites, reaching as much as 80% of their extended audience (Shafer, 2006). However, there seems to be a lack of research about online media coverage on health. One relevant study is Habel *et al.* (2009), which examined the quality, content, and scope of human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine news coverage on the internet in the US starting the day it was approved for use. Online news coverage of the HPV vaccine is interesting in terms of the vaccine’s potential for controversy over its efficiency and safety.

Between June 2006 and September 2006 a sample of 250 internet articles on the HPV vaccine were identified. The coding instrument captured how the headline was depicted and how the vaccine was labelled in addition to information about HPV, cervical cancer, the HPV vaccine, and current social issues and concerns about the vaccine. While the HPV vaccine was being

marketed as a vaccine to prevent cervical cancer, information about vaccine safety and side effects, duration of vaccine protection, and availability of the catch-up vaccine for females aged 13–26 was repeatedly missing. This research highlights the importance of monitoring media coverage of medical and health care technologies as a dynamic process across time, especially around significant events (Habel et al 2009)

## **2.7 Theoretical Framework**

The framing theory is important in understanding media coverage of medical and health topics.

### **2.7.1 Framing Theory**

Framing theory argues that the construction of media reports and the presentation of the information provide readers, listeners, or viewers a perspective with which to view, interpret, and react to the news or information (Pan *et al.*, 2003). This social construction of meaning provides ways for people to rapidly make sense of and organise information provided.

This is particularly relevant for medical and health topics because media often use frames related to factors such as causality, prevalence, risk, or responsibility and effectiveness of responses. Framing is a theoretical framework that frequently has been utilized by scholars to understand how media influence our perception of social reality. Considered as second-level agenda setting by some scholars (McCombs, Shaw, & Weaver, 1997), framing theory argues that the media not only tells us what topics to think about, but also how to think about a topic by selectively highlighting certain aspects of a story. According to Entman (1993), framing involves “selection” and “salience.”

Through framing, some information will be deliberately selected to be reported and some others will be omitted. This selected piece of information will be particularly highlighted and given more salience, while some others will be intentionally downplayed. Frames define problems by determining what a causal agent is doing with what costs and benefits; diagnose causes by identifying the forces that create the problem; make moral judgments by evaluating causal agents and their effects; and suggest remedies by offering and justifying treatments for the problems (Entman, 1993).

Many techniques have been used by journalists in news reporting to create media frames, including the choice of words used to depict participants and events, the manner in which events are described, the tone and emphasis of the report, the way a news story is organized, the selection and omission of events and elements, and the use of typical labels for persons, events, and situations (Pan et al,1993).

Framing analysis is useful in guiding studies of health-related reporting. Health news reporters' choices of words to depict diseases and risk factors, the tone of the report, and the selection or omission of discussion of causes, preventions, and treatments all can significantly influence readers' perceptions of a health issue.

A number of previous content analyses of health-related reporting also generated unique sets of media frames. For instance, in an analysis of reporting of mental illness (Slopen et al,2007), different thematic frames were identified, including treatment, recovery, origin or attribution of disease, personal responsibility of behaviour, research advances, and mental health systems. The frame of personal and societal responsibility in terms of causes and solutions and the frame of prevention were used in two studies of framing analysis of reporting of obesity. Finally, a comprehensive study of news coverage of different types of cancers in the United States focused on frames of treatment, causes, death, survivorship, funding, detection diagnosis, and prevention (Slater et al., 2007).

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Overview**

This chapter describes the methods that were used in the collection of data pertinent in the answering of the research questions. It was divided into: research approach, research methods, population and sampling, research instruments and data analysis.

#### **3.2 Research Approach**

This adopted Positivist ontology approach, concerned with the nature of reality which applies both objectivism and subjectivism in a social context (Saunders mark et al 2009). This is because the research shall consist of a controlled and structured approach in conducting research. A research topic with appropriate research questions and a suitable research methodology was developed.

The research focussed on generalisation and abstraction based on research findings. The study is aimed to discover external reality rather than create an object of study. The methodology used was rational, consistent and logical.

#### **3.3 Research Method**

The research method for this study was content analysis of selected Kenyan print media publications specifically the *Daily Nation*.

The content analysis shall be of a case study. A case study is an in-depth study of a particular research problem rather than a sweeping statistical survey (Jwan and Ong'ondo 2011). It is often used to narrow down a very broad field of research into one or a few easily researchable examples.

Content analysis enhances the abilities to use retrospective data and to track changes over time, its unobtrusiveness, and its lower costs compared with other types of research. Content analysis methods can be used to track messages over time, to assess changes or detect trends.

In the case of mass media, accessible archives reach back several decades or more, enabling long-term analysis of trends. Any archived communication material such as recorded focus groups or interviews, open-ended survey questions, or diaries can be used, thus broadening the potential application of Content analysis. This retrospective aspect of Content Analysis also allows it to be unobtrusive, thereby eliminating unwanted interaction effects between subject and researcher.

Finally, when compared with other types of studies, content analyses are often inexpensive. The costs of Content analysis are dependent on techniques chosen, equipment and personnel costs, and size of the study, which make cost comparisons valid only case-by-case basis. Once the material to be studied has been gathered, it is relatively inexpensive to perform additional analyses to clarify findings or further explore areas of interest.

### **3.5 Population and Sampling**

The target population for this research consisted of six months before, during and immediately after the General elections in Kenya with a focus on the *Daily Nation* publication for the year 2013. This was between January and June. This daily publication was chosen because according to Ipsos Synovate quarterly audience research study (Quarter 4, 2012), the paper has a high reach and share in terms of audience consumption.

The six months was chosen because it was marked by accelerated media coverage of political issues as the elections approached and health was one of the major topical issues covered during the campaigns period. The Jubilee Coalition had promised free maternal health care which was actualised when they formed the Government.

The target population consisted of 180 publications with the assumption that a month has 30 days and that the daily newspapers were published each and every day during the period under study.

Purposive sampling was used. This involved selecting only the articles that answered the research questions from the total population of articles. The researcher went to the Nation Media

Group library. The newspapers published during the period under study were read systematically looking for articles covering maternal health issues. All those articles were included in the study. The total number of articles on MH programmes that were published was 20. According to Premi (1998), sampling is the process of selecting units (people, Organizations) from a population of interest so that by studying the sample, we may fairly generalize our results back to the population from which they were chosen.

### **3.6 Research Instruments**

The research instrument used was a code sheet. The code sheet gave the variables being investigated. These were; dates of publication, themes, placement of the articles in terms of the page in the newspaper, prominence (had characteristics such as news splash, second lead story, special commentaries, features, news briefs and others), document description, main message and target audience ( Appendix 1).

### **3.7 Data Analysis and Presentation**

The researcher used mixed (qualitative and quantitative) approaches of data analysis to provide the researcher with ideal methods needed for descriptive explanation. The methods assisted the researcher to establish the status of the problem under investigation. The data from the code sheet was used to do quantitative data analysis.

The qualitative data analysis consisted of specific topical and message analysis of the media coverage of content on maternal health in the media.

The data was presented in form of tables. .

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents analysis and findings of the research. From the study population target of 180 newspaper publications, only 20 articles were published that were focussing on maternal health programmes. Data analysis was done through qualitative descriptions of the articles. Frequencies and percentages were used to display the results which were presented in tables.

#### 4.2 Analysis of general information

**Table 4.1 Percentage distribution of articles according to themes**

This study sought to find out the different themes covered in the articles on maternal health care. The table below shows the main themes covered by the newspaper within the six months of the study.

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Frequency (n=24)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Cost	9	37.5%
Health	5	20.9%
Policy	5	20.9%
Facility	4	16.6%
Technology	1	4.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Field survey (2013)

The period under study reflected that most articles focussed on the cost of providing maternal health care at 37.5% , followed by health and policy implementation at 20.9%, provision of facilities And equipments at 16% and technology at 4.1%. This information shows that media covers certain topics depending on what they deem important at a certain time. At the time under study the Government had promised free maternal health care. The media saw this as nearly impossible owing to lack of funds and high cost of living. Policy implementation was also important and media was watching to see how successful this would be. The health of mothers and their babies ranked high as these are key players of the programme. Provision of facilities was not highly regarded as it relates to cost. Technology health issues were given the least

coverage possibly because most journalists cannot appreciate the role it plays in MH programmes.

**Table 4.2 Percentage distribution of articles on maternal health according to months**

The table below shows the percentage distribution of MH issues articles published from January to June 2013.

<b>Month</b>	<b>No. of articles (n=20)</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
June	11	55%
May	3	15%
April	3	15%
January	2	10%
February	1	5%
March	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Field survey (2013)

On the distribution of articles on the months under study, the study found that most of the articles were on the month of June at 55%, April and May had equal number of articles at 15%, January 10%, February 5% and March none. This information reveals that media found information on maternal health very important at a time when the Government was implementing one of its campaign pledges during the month of June. March had no article a season that was marked by the General Elections and its outcomes reflective of the way media primes news. According to the media some issues are not completely covered at certain times despite their importance. January a month where politicians were campaigning with their manifestos had a higher number of articles possibly showing that maternal health was a key concern. Women of the reproductive age forming the largest part of the population could also be a target of the politicians who would use such promises to win their votes.



**Table 4.3 Percentage distribution of articles according to target audience**

The table below shows the percentage distribution of articles according to the target audience.

<b>Target audience</b>	<b>No of articles (n=20)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Government	7	35%
General public	7	35%
Women (15-49yrs)	5	25%
Pharmacists	1	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Field survey (2013)

The study sought to know the audience targeted by these messages. The study found out that most of the ,messages targeted the general public and the Government at 35%, 25% women of reproductive age(15-49yrs) and only 5% targeted pharmacists. This was likely because the media has a role to inform the public of the happenings and act as a watchdog of the government to ensure the play their role and fulfil its promises. Women were also a right target as they are directly affected by maternal health. Pharmacists have a role to play in distribution of drugs. Maternal deaths contributed by illegal abortions are attributed to pharmacists who sell prohibited drugs over the counter according to one of the articles.

**Table 4.4 Percentage distribution of articles according to the main messages**

The table shows the percentage distribution of articles according to the messages they were relaying.

<b>Main massage</b>	<b>No of articles (n=19)</b>	<b>percentages</b>
Maternal deaths	6	31.5%
Funding	4	21%
Poor policy implementation	3	15.8%
Cost of living	2	10.5%
Lack of health facilities and equipments	1	5.3%
Technology	1	5.3%
Campaign manifesto and pledges	1	5.3%
Drug abuse	1	5.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Field survey (2013)

On the main messages covered on the articles, maternal deaths appeared prominently at 31.5% followed by funding at 21%, poor policy implementation at 15.8%, lack of health facilities, technology, campaign manifesto and pledges and drug abuse tie at 5.3%. This information reveals that maternal deaths are unacceptably high as to warrant attention. It is one among the millennium goals and possibly the reason for the government wanting to give it free. Funding is also key for provision of maternal health care but poor policy implementation could derail such efforts. The implementation seem to focus on individuals such as the president who ordered its free provision without proper planning making the outcome nearly catastrophic; maternal and infant deaths.

**Table 4.5 Percentage distribution of articles according to prominence**

The table shows the percentage distribution of articles according to their prominence in the newspaper.

Prominence	No. of articles (n=19)	Percentages
Features	7	36.8%
News brief	5	26.3%
Special commentaries	3	15.8%
Others	2	10.5%
News splash	1	5.3%
Second lead story	1	5.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Field survey (2013)

On prominence of health articles, it appears that MH news is not considered newsworthy with only 5.3% occurring as a news splash or second lead story. 36.8% appear as features, 15.8% as special commentaries, 26.3% as news brief and even 10.5% appear on other pages. It is likely that the media does not find health news as juicy as politics and the fact that health news require expert journalists who most times are scarce and hence the prominence as features. A quarter of the articles appear as news briefs clearly showing they are not selling enough. It seems that MH news is basically used to fill editorial space.

The findings of this study reflect the tenets of framing theory. For instance the theory states that media reports give viewers perspectives with which to view media reports, as such they tell us what topics to think about. In the study the daily nation reported more on the cost of providing

maternal health than any other issue at a time the government had promised free maternal healthcare. The media possibly reflected it as heavily impossible owing to the lack of funds and high cost of living. In relation to this, the main message in most of the articles discussed the high rates of maternal deaths related to lack of health facilities, lack of qualified personnel or poor infrastructure.

The theory also highlights that media also tells us how to think about these topics by highlighting certain aspects of the story.

Framing analysis was useful in guiding this research as well. The journalist use certain words to depict the main message or tone of the report, for instance a story like newborn dies in confusion over uhurus order on free maternal healthcare “even suicidal” showing the inevitability of death with the use of a cytotec drug.

The study generated unique set of media frames, for instance in analysis of the maternal health issues covered, the following themes were identified; cost, health of mothers and newborns, technology and policy implementation.

The theory was hence key in acheving of the study objectives since the key issues covered their prominence and their numbers depended on what the *Daily Nation* decided to highlight and give salience while they ignored some.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, POLICY IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

#### 5.1 Introduction

From the analysis and the data collected, the following discussions and recommendations were made. These were based on the objectives of the study. The researcher had intended to determine the quantity of print media coverage of maternal health topics in the *Daily Nation*, establish the prominence of maternal health news within the six months of the study, find out key themes covered in the media during the same period and offer recommendations that would aim at improving the coverage of maternal health issues.

#### 5.2 Summary

##### 5.2.1 Maternal health articles published from January to June

From the findings the study found out that print media covers maternal health issues albeit sparingly. Indeed, only 20 articles in the 180 newspapers published during the six months period under study focussed on maternal health. Two months before the general elections, only three articles were published with none occurring in the most important pages of the newspaper that is either as a news splash or a second lead story. An article published in February entitled ‘manifestos that fail integrity test’ appears to be the most serious for that period. It tries to question the credibility of such manifestos. Being the only story on the page it gives a comparison of the Jubilee and Cord manifestos and pledges where maternal health is one of them. The story describes the pre-election period where citizens are fooled by the aspirants with pledges and manifestos that leave them divided. Ultimately the pledges are not fulfilled. Though the author is pessimistic about such pledges and manifestos, he opens up the mind of the reader to the reality of politicians who could only be doing public relations while the manifestos would soon gather dust on the shelves once they are elected into office.

It is not surprising that in March no maternal health article was published. This was an election period and the media did not possibly feel that this was an urgent matter. Most of the stories were political and focused on individuals and election outcomes.

With a government in place, the study found out that more articles on maternal health were published in April through June. These were 85% (17 articles) of the total number of articles published (20). Free maternal health care had been a platform for the Jubilee Coalition campaigns. When they formed the government, it was a good platform for them to actualise their promises. An article on maternal health published in April titled ‘pregnancy shouldn’t be a death sentence’ highlights the causes of maternal deaths which occur mainly during or immediately after birth. The author applauds the government for increasing the health budget from 6% to 15% and indicates that reduction of maternal deaths is a key index of the state of health and quality of healthcare in any society. The author seems to be reminding the government that the provision of healthcare is a right entrenched in the constitution. She is optimistic that this is achievable as is the case in Srilanka, failure to which she sees it as the governments non commitment to fulfilling fundamental rights entrenched in the constitution healthcare being one of them.

Another article “treasury to borrow more freebies” published in April as well sounds somehow satirical, freebies should not be that expensive. Written on a whole page with illustration of women and children the message is well communicated. It is ironical how politicians promise things but have no idea how they will be funded and the author is quick to highlight that the predecessors had left unsustainably huge current deficits as a result.

In June many articles are published at a time the Jubilee Coalition Government was implementing the free maternal health care. Media must have been keen to see how the implementation would take place, the attitude of the mothers and effect it would have generally. News spread from page 1 to 3 of June 4<sup>th</sup> was titled “Newborn dies in confusion over Uhuru’s order on free maternity fees” is the most important so far. It appears that media gives prominence to MH issues only when they are negative or relates to a senior politician like the president. Other articles followed totalling to eleven in one month the highest so far.

### **5.2.2 Prominence of MH articles**

According to the study it appeared that media does not consider MH news as prime enough owing to their placement in the newspaper. Only one article made it through as a news splash within the six months period of study. The article on 4<sup>th</sup> June titled “newborn dies in confusion over Uhuru’s order on free maternal fees” seems to criticize the government over poor policy

implementation and the sufferers are innocent newborns. The title of the story is specifically chosen to show that MH news are covered only when they are sensational, controversial or negative. Political orientation of media reporting is also reflected. The story may not have made it as a news splash if it did not relate to the president. Most of the articles appear as features (36.8%). This is most likely because MH articles require details and require large space to publish. This is a while the rest are placed in even less important pages of the newspaper.

### **5.2.3 Themes covered**

The study revealed that the key themes that the media covered during the period under study were mainly on the cost of providing maternal healthcare with 37.5% articles focusing on this. Coverage was mainly on funding with articles such as “treasury to borrow more for freebies, 4 billion released for free maternity care. What authors seemed to highlight is that though free, the government did not have monies to fund it and as such taxes would be levied to collect revenue for the same. As such the cost of living would go up as in the article “tax measures to boost growth but prices of goods will go up”.

Articles on health and policy implementation also got a wider coverage at 20.9%. Health mostly focused on maternal deaths whose cases could be prevented with free maternal healthcare. Standing at 488 per 100,000 births, the rate is unacceptably high and reduction of it is a key millennium goal and an article of the overall healthcare situation in a certain society.

Emotional articles such as “to all women who have lost their lives giving birth supported by a hammer says “I know how unfortunate I am” describes an almost inevitable situation of a mother who have to give her life for other lives. It is indeed fearful and sad. A side bar heightens the feeling with the statistics of maternal deaths and clearly states that 56% deliver at home without expert assistance. Told in the first person one cannot escape these feelings. Another story titled “pregnancy shouldn’t be a death sentence only increases the desperation of how necessary these services are. It shows that though it has been indeed a death sentence it can be prevented with provision of these services as a fundamental right entrenched in the constitution.

Policy implementation is a weighty matter being covered prominently. It includes one of the articles that appeared as a news splash and spread in three pages titled “newborn dies over uhuru order on free maternity fee”, shows how expensive poor policy implementation can be. Another

story “what an unhappy day for women in Kenya” satirises a government that does not understand its priorities. Regarded as a superpower by its neighbours, it only ranks better than Somalia a war torn country according to a research done by save the children on the state of the women 2013. Its government spends so much money fighting corruption, insecurity, internal wars with only pyrrhic victories. It gives the example of Goldenberg which has spent more money investigating than its real value. It concludes by saying that improving the state of mothers will improve their human condition and lead to global development.

Lack of health facilities and equipment is also covered. An article “Deliver in hospital, services are free” is sceptical since most of the hospitals in Nyanza, north eastern, eastern and cost regions are far and poorly equipped. There is no road network and accessing the hospitals is nearly impossible. It also highlights lack of personnel saying that one midwife caters for three women in labour and attends to numerous other who come for post natal care. In addition, many healthcare givers have fled the country for greener pastures. He hopes that the government would give better remuneration to maintain them. Another article entitled “Pumwani Hospital still a National Shame” describes the pathetic conditions of Pumwani maternity hospital the largest maternity hospital in Nairobi County run by county government. This is despite a taskforce that investigated its status put down its’ recommendations and authorities promised to improve in two months. Two months down the line the conditions are still the same. The writer wonders why matters of common sense like asking a new mother to use cold water to bathe are not common to these authorities. He ridicules the authorities by calling such an institution a ‘national shame’.

Other areas covered are technology and drug abuse with little said on them. The role of technology in MH issues has not been highlighted by the media. A story entitled “mobile phone apps that monitor pregnancy” was the only article published during the period under study. The story talks of the strides and benefits of new technology in monitoring pregnancy instead of the expensive ultra sounds. The mother is updated on the well being of the baby weekly without visiting a midwife or doctor. This would help prevent some of maternal or infant deaths as mother would know of signs of complications. In addition, entrance of technology author says would allow non-medics bridge the often ignored emotional support during labour and child birth.

Drug abuse focuses on pharmacists who sell prohibited drugs without a prescription. Such a drug is cytotec, mifeprax and misotrol. The story entitled “even suicidal” with pictures of the said drug draws a contrast by highlighting the importance of the said drugs alongside the fatal consequences of its abuse. WHO recommends it as an essential drug in preventing pregnancy related deaths and should be provided by governments. On the contrary, the article emphasizes the dangers associated with the said drugs when sold by rogue pharmacists to procure abortions. This makes the drug more dangerous than its being useful. Expert advice on the side bar seems to emphasize its importance and seems to suggest that pharmacists should be more careful.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

The study concluded that print media coverage of maternal health news is wanting. Media houses are primarily profit-making organization. They tend to focus on issues that will increase their sales and as a result prefer very sensational reports. Maternal health issues, by their nature do not fall under this category. The media owners would like to engage only on articles or programmes that would sell their publications.

MH stories are not considered newsworthy especially since they are not controversial enough. People want good and exciting information. It is easier to package entertainment and other news in an exciting manner than to do the same for maternal health news since they are basically factual.

The media appears to enjoy reporting catastrophe and epidemics when it comes to MH rather than preventive reportage on the perspective of the epidemics and catastrophes before they occur. Emphasis on coverage was given in June during implementation when maternal and infant deaths were already occurring as a result of poor policy implementation.

Political orientation of media is reflected in the study. The only article that appeared on the prominent pages had to mention Uhuru because he is the president. This appears according to the study that Kenyan media still focuses on personalities than the real health issues. The story is thus important because it relates to the president.



Media also covers MH news mostly when they are negative. Coverage of maternal health news was considered important during the implementation where the poor policy implementation caused deaths, highlighted the lack of personnel, inadequate facilities and equipments.

There appears to be a perception that if a health issue cannot sell, then it is not good. In general, the public ends up not being sensitized about the importance of maternal health, and the media continues to disregard it. This attitude creates a vicious cycle because media must first highlight the issues then gain public interest and not the other way round.

There is lack of capacity to cover health issues such as MH. This is a major reason for its poor prioritization in the media. Only a few articles are written by expert journalists (2) of which one is an opinion piece.

March a month of General Elections had no article on maternal health reflecting how media frames news. At the time the general election was key and media uses these frames to select which information it considers news and simply keeps quiet about others.

The key issues covered according to the study were cost, health, policy implementation and lack of health facilities and equipments.

This conclusion clearly shows the arguments of the framing theory that information will be deliberately selected to be reported and some will be omitted.

#### **5.4 Recommendations**

The study recommends that print media as an information tool should give maternal health issues prominence in their coverage.

The print media must play its watchdog role in highlighting implementation of government policies. Maternal health being one of them was given minimal coverage despite its importance.

Mainstream media is based in urban areas, ignoring the public health information needs of rural areas and communities. It would be important for the media to focus on what is happening in the rural communities where maternal health concerns are catastrophic to help them on the predictive developments in health matters. A case in point is the continued use of TBA's despite the dangers associated with it.

Media habit of focusing on personalities should change. Media should stop relying more on politicians but rely on researchers and health professionals who would provide them with accurate and comprehensive information.

There should be a media policy that would require media houses to allocate minimum space and time for certain content. This would ensure that issues of national interest such as public health are included in their reporting enhancing media's social responsibility as required by the Government.

The media should hire professional science editors who can then report competently on the subject. Most of the journalists (and editors) are not trained to be able to handle scientific information. They find it hard to understand and interpret what scientists say and instead prefer 'softer stuff' such as politics. Investment in investigative journalism in the realm of maternal health should also be considered. Further interest and investment in this kind of journalism should generate value added information.

### **5.5 Limitations of the study**

The following limitation was encountered. It was not possible for the researcher to carry out this study with a wider coverage necessary to obtain data from a longer period of time due to limited time.

### **5.5 Suggestion for further research**

A finding of this research reveals that print media coverage of maternal health issues is wanting.

A similar research on other forms of mass media can be done to establish their performance in flagging of maternal health issues and other areas of public health.

A research can be done to find out challenges facing media houses in publishing MH issues and programmes.

A further study can be carried out to determine whether there exist media editorial policies to ensure that various forms of mass media allocate space and time for MH issues.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix I: Code sheet

DATE	THEME	PLACEMENT	PROMINENCE	DOCUMENT DESCRIPTION	MAIN MESSAGE	TARGET AUDIENCE
		Pg1. Pg2. Pg3. Pg4. Others	Pg1. News splash Pg2. Second lead story Pg3. Special commentaries Pg4. Features Pg5. News brief Pg6. Others			