

Coverage of health-related articles in major local newspapers of Manipur

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ABSTRACT

Background: Newspapers have immense potential for generating health awareness on diverse issues such as hygiene, immunization, environmental pollution, and communicable disease. The present study was conducted to determine the frequency of coverage and types of health-related articles published in local newspapers of Manipur. **Materials and Methods:** This was a cross-sectional study conducted among the most regularly published 10 local newspapers (4 English and 6 Manipuri) of Manipur from February 2011 to January 2012. Health-related articles published in everyday local newspapers were collected after careful search and finally entered into a design Proforma under different categories. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 16. **Results:** Total health-related articles published were 10,874 and maximum articles were published during February (12.8%). Maximum health-related articles were published on Wednesday (16.1%). Among all the health-related articles, almost half were related with injury followed by public health articles. Maximum public health and injury-related articles were published on Monday, but medical topics were published more on Wednesday. Newspapers of both the languages were publishing public health articles more compared to medical topics. Public health (72.9%) and injury-related articles (95.9%) were published maximum in the news items section, but medical topics (45.8%) were published maximum in the health section of the newspaper. Newspapers of both the languages published maximum small size articles. **Conclusions:** There is a room for improvement for newspapers of both the languages regarding number of health-related articles' publication, section of publication, and size of the health articles.

Key words: Cross-sectional study, health-related articles, Manipur, newspaper

INTRODUCTION

Mass media have a wide reach and large target readership/audience/listenership.^[1] Campaigning with mass media is associated with the following advantages: first, it can reach many people quickly; second, it gains creditability, especially

if appearing on television or newspapers; finally, it can provide continuing reminder and reinforcement.^[2] Mass media helps the health workers to 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.^[1] Being available in all language and accessible to all communities, newspapers enjoy a wide readership throughout the world and represent a time-honored means of disseminating printed word information. They can contribute

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maximally to health education of people by publishing articles on diverse issues such as hygiene, immunization, sanitation, population control, environmental pollution control, communicable disease control, deficiency disease control, accident control, reproductive health, maternal health, child health, adolescent health, geriatric health, industrial health, mental health, and healthy life style.^{13,41}

Global daily circulation of newspaper was 519 million having a readership of 2.3 billion in 2010. This was 20% more than the internet users worldwide. In the age of internet, still newspapers represent 8% of total media consumption time.¹⁵¹ Globally, there is a major diversity between developed and developing countries representation of health-related articles in print media. Newspapers from advanced countries have predominant focus on clinical trials, issues of global health, health policy, and laws, etc.¹⁶⁻⁹¹

In India, registered newspapers were 82,237 and Hindi language newspapers were leading the race followed by English and other regional languages.^{110,111} There is an extreme scarcity of scientific studies evaluating the coverage and content of health-related articles in national as well as regional newspapers. However, limited evidence have suggested that prime focus was on health and nutrition message, health communication, health news, etc.¹¹²⁻¹⁵¹

No study has been done in Manipur regarding newspaper's importance on health. We also do not know, how often and what health articles are published in the daily newspaper of Manipur. Hence, this study was done to determine the coverage and document the type of health-related articles in local newspapers of Manipur.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A cross-sectional study was conducted in Imphal between February 2011 to January 2012 among the locally published most popular daily newspapers. Local newspapers in Manipur were categorized into A, B, C, and D groups according to their circulation size. Among them, 18 newspapers were circulated daily and regularly.^{116,171} Ten (4 English and 6 Manipuri) most popular and regularly published newspapers were selected for the study and they were all in the category A. These newspapers published most of the health-related articles and they have a large number of readers. Everyday 10 newspapers were collected from a news vendor and selected health-related articles from all the newspapers were entered one by one in the scheduled Proforma for analysis. The proforma contains the following variables: Number of publication of health articles, types of articles, section of the news: news items/editorial/letter to editor/column/photograph, etc., content of the articles, page of publication, and size of articles/photograph. Broad categorization of the articles was done as follows: public health-related articles: Public health-related articles are those articles, which are related with preventing diseases, prolonging life, and promoting health and well-being of the community or population. Medical topics: medical topics

include medical intervention or treatment, scientific research, new discovery, or laboratory technology-related articles. Injury-related articles: injury-related articles are those which include suicide, homicide, and accident. Large size articles: articles containing more than 1200 words or photograph area more than 500 cm². Medium size articles: articles containing 600–1200 words or photograph area 300–500 cm². Small size articles: articles containing <600 words or photograph area <300 cm². Section of the newspaper: newspaper has the following section: news item, editorial, letter to editor, column, advertisement, cartoon, and photograph.

Statistical analysis

Data were entered in Microsoft excel 20 and analyzed using SPSS 16 [SPSS Inc: Chicago]. Data were presented in the form of table and graph. Descriptive statistics proportion was used for categorical variable. Pearson Chi-square test was used to assess the level of significance. $P < 0.05$ was considered as significant. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Ethics Committee, Regional Institute of Medical Sciences, Imphal, prior to the start of the study and confidentiality was maintained.

RESULTS

Total number of publication of local newspapers (Manipuri and English) from February 2011 to January 2012 was 3650. Newspapers collected during the study period were 3364 (92.2%). Total number of publication of health-related articles was 10,874 and English newspapers published more than half of the health articles. Maximum number of health-related articles were published during February (12.87%) and minimum in the month of December (5.18%). Maximum publication of health-related articles were on Wednesday (16.1%) and minimum on Sunday (12.3%). Figure 1 shows that maximum of the published health articles were related to injury (5653 [51.9%]) and minimum was other health-related articles (597 [5.5%]). Figure 2 shows that public health-related (630 [16.3%]) and injury-related (878 [15.5%]) articles were published maximum on Monday, whereas medical topics (205 [15.1%]) and other health-related articles (130 [21.7%]) were

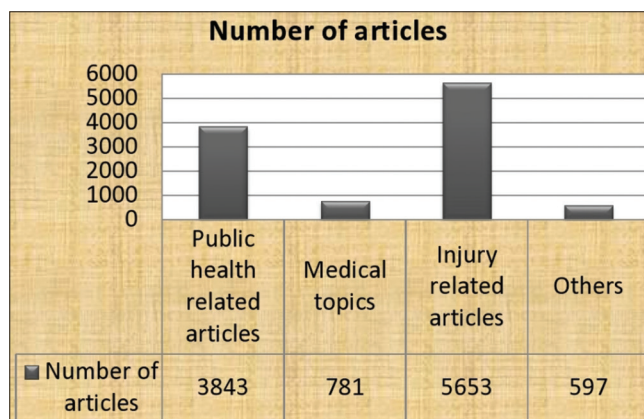


Figure 1: Type of health related articles

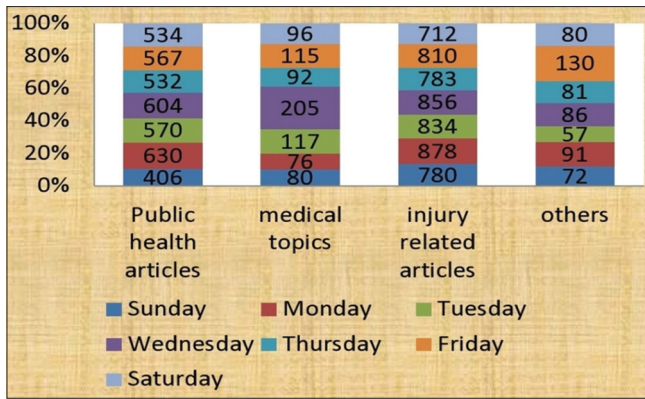


Figure 2: Day wise publication of different types of health related articles

published maximum on Wednesday and Friday, respectively. Maximum public health articles (2805, 72.9%), injury-related articles (5424, 95.9%), and other health-related articles (501, 83.9%) were published in news item, but medical topics (358, 45.8%) were published maximum in the health section of the newspaper [Figure 2]. Table 1 shows that public health (59.0%) and medical topics (87.0%) were published more in English newspapers compared to the Manipuri newspapers ($P = 0.001$). The table also shows that there is a significant difference on the size of the articles published in both types of newspapers ($P = 0.012$). Table 2 shows that there is no significant relationship between page of publication of public health-related articles and language of the newspapers ($P = 0.891$), but medical topics were published more in first three pages of the English newspapers ($P = 0.001$) and injury-related articles were published more in first three pages of the Manipuri newspapers ($P = 0.001$).

DISCUSSION

Newspapers are a major source of factual information, opinion, and analysis. A smorgasbord of items is offered but most people will neither read all of the articles nor read to the end of selected articles. How far print media (newspapers) in Manipur is catering to the needs of the readers with health-related information? Is the quantity of the health-related articles is same or varies between English and Manipuri newspapers? To answer part of these questions, a quantitative analysis was conducted on health-related articles appeared in the local newspaper of Manipur.

Publication of health articles

In this current study, total health-related articles published during 1 year period were 10,874 and English newspaper published maximum (55.1%) of the health articles. A study conducted by Gupta *et al.* in India including two national (1 Hindi and 1 English) newspapers found that Hindi newspaper published more number of health articles compared to English newspaper.^[15] The difference in finding with the present study may be because of the fact that Hindi national newspapers was circulated all over India and the publishers gave much importance to the health-related

Table 1: Association between language of newspaper and type and size of articles

Characteristics of the articles	Manipuri (%)	English (%)	P
Type of articles			
Public health-related	1578 (41.0)	2265 (59.0)	0.001 (df=3)
Medical topic	102 (13.0)	679 (87.0)	
Injury-related	2893 (51.1)	2760 (48.9)	
Others	317 (53.0)	280 (47.0)	
Size of the articles			
Large	38 (48.7)	40 (51.3)	0.012 (df=2)
Medium	628 (41.5)	884 (58.5)	
Small	4224 (45.4)	5060 (54.6)	

news, but Manipuri newspapers publishers did not give much importance on the health topics compared to the English newspapers. It may be because of the fact that most of the health experts and column writers are comfortable writing in English rather than Manipuri.

Day-wise health articles

In our present study, maximum of the health articles were published on Wednesday. Maximum public health and injury-related articles were published on Monday and medical topics were published maximum on Wednesday. Few English newspapers have a special health section because of this, probably, maximum of the medical topics were published on Wednesday. Sunday is a holiday and because of this, probably, maximum of the homicide and suicide was committed on that day, so maximum injury articles were published on Monday. A study was conducted by Nichols *et al.* including three local newspapers (Newsday, Express, Guardian) in Trinidad and Tobago between January 01, 2003 and December 31, 2003 to determine the health research articles coverage in the newspapers and it was found that maximum health research articles were published in The Newsday on Thursday (18.6%), Express on Thursday (27%), and Guardian on Monday (51.5%).^[18]

Type of health articles

In this present study, almost half of the health-related articles were injury-related and public health articles published 5 times more compared to the medical topics. Other health-related articles were 5.5%. Among other health-related articles, one of the important news was conflict between doctor and patient. This finding was different from a study conducted by Westwood *et al.* in Australia where medical news were 2 times more common compared to the public health articles.^[19] This difference in finding may be because of the fact that Australia is a developed country and lots of medical research are conducted there, so they give more importance on medical topics, but in Manipur, public health-related issues are more relevant, so they were published more.

Health articles and section of the newspaper

In this current study, maximum public health and injury-related articles were published in the news items and

Table 2: Association between language of newspaper and page of publication of the articles

Characteristics of the articles	Manipuri (%)		English (%)		P		
Page of publication of public health, medical, and injury-related articles							
First three pages	1061* (40.9)	58** (17.6)	1622*** (62.5)	1532* (59.1)	270** (82.4)	973*** (37.5)	0.891*
Other pages	517 (41.3)	44 (9.7)	1271 (41.5)	733 (58.7)	409 (90.3)	1787 (58.5)	0.001** 0.001***

*Association between language of newspaper and page of publication of public health articles, **Association between language of newspaper and page of publication of medical topics, ***Association between language of newspaper and page of publication of injury-related articles

maximum medical topics were published in the health section of the newspaper. This may be because of the fact that both Manipuri and English newspapers does not have any specific section for publishing public health and injury-related articles. But, English newspapers have a separate health section where they published maximum of the medical topics and in Manipuri newspapers, medical topics were usually published more in the column section. Moreover, public health and injury-related articles usually draw maximum attention of the readers so they were published mainly in the news items. A study was conducted by Maheswar *et al.* including 6 leading newspapers (3 English and 3 Telugu) found that nutrition-related articles were published more in health section and women's page in Telugu newspaper, but in English newspaper, it was found more in the column section.^[8]

Health articles and page of publication

Manipuri newspapers gave more importance to the injury-related articles (homicide, suicide, and accident) because they were common local events in Manipur. English newspapers usually have a separate health section in the last part of the newspaper where they usually publish the medical topics, but it was not so for the Manipuri newspapers. For public health articles, both types of newspaper gave them similar importance regarding the page of publication. A study conducted by Westwood *et al.* in Australia had shown that public health articles were less represented in the prominent pages compared to the medical topics.^[19]

Size of health articles

The present study has found that English and Manipuri language newspapers published maximum of small size articles. This showed the reluctant attitude of the publishers toward health-related articles. Since newspapers of both languages were publishing small size health articles more; in future, they can publish more medium and large size articles to improve reader's health knowledge. A study conducted by Westwood *et al.* in Australia had shown that there was no difference in the size of public health and medical articles published in a national newspaper.^[19]

CONCLUSIONS

There is a room for improvement for newspapers of both the languages regarding number of health related articles publication (especially medical topics and public health articles), section of publication, type and size of health

articles. The findings could be useful to influence the press persons/reporters as well as the health executives to consider newspaper as a medium in promoting and maintaining health status of the community. No attempt was made to interview journalists and editorial staff of any depth to assess health reporting from their perspective.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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