

Centre for Culture, Media & Governance

ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION

By

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Introduction

- Stigma and discrimination associated with Health related issues has proved to be the greatest barrier in prevention, care & support and reduction of economic impact.
- It affects the life of the people, lives of their families and people involved in prevention treatment and care.
- Various forms of stigma and discrimination existing stem from the ignorance and prejudices existing in our society.
- Media plays a crucial role in influencing public opinion and attitudes towards stigma. It has the potential for reinforcing various misinformation and stereotypes as well as removing the ignorance and shaping peoples' response towards Stigma.

Objectives of the study

The objective of the study was to review media coverage (print) related to HIV/AIDS in three states (Gujarat, Haryana and Madhya Pradesh) in order to determine the gaps in reporting.

- Nature of media coverage on HIV/AIDS.
- Gaps in reporting with regards to HIV/AIDS that may lead to stigma and discrimination.
- Do media encourage discriminatory attitudes?
- How do SACS and other agencies respond to media reports and their impacts on HIV positive people?

Key concepts derived from the research questions:

Nature of media coverage: frequency of reports on HIV/AIDS, focus areas, the use of displays in making the reports attractive to the reader/audience.

Gaps in reporting: Certain indicators related to gaps in reporting: use of language, misconceptions about HIV/AIDS, associations of HIV/AIDS with immoral activities such as crime, perversion, etc, gender sensitivity, biases against certain population sub-groups and sensitivity towards HIV positive people.

Discriminatory attitudes: HIV-related stigma is built on and reinforced through the association of HIV/AIDS with already marginalised behaviours such as:

- sex work, illicit drug-use, and homosexual and transgender sexual practice.
- Discrimination occurs at individual and community settings where individuals do either deliberately or by omission, harm others and deny them services or entitlements.
- Common examples of discrimination include ostracism, shunning and avoiding everyday contact, harassment, physical violence, verbal discrediting and violations of human rights.
- Discrimination occurs in institutional settings, in particular in workplaces and health care services.

Approach and Methodology:

- Interviews with media personnel, HIV positive people, NGOs, SACS officials and opinion leaders
- Content analysis of print media involved identification of newspaper articles related to HIV/AIDS and analysis in terms of frequency of reporting, news worthiness and linguistic analysis of the content.

Sample Selection

Selection of States

- The states of Gujarat, Haryana and Madhya Pradesh were selected for the study.

Selection of Newspaper

- Two vernacular newspapers from each State were selected for a 12 month analysis.
- The number of newspaper selected was limited to two taking into account the limited timeframe and resources for the study.
- Newspapers were selected on the basis of popularity and circulation figures (from RNI as well as local research).

- Gujarat (2 Vernacular Newspaper):
 - **Sandesh** (Gujarati), published from Ahmedabad
 - **Gujarat Samachar** (Gujarati), published from Ahmedabad
-
- Madhya Pradesh (2 Vernacular Newspapers):
 - a) **Dainik Bhaskar** (Hindi), published from Bhopal
 - b) **Nai Duniya** (Hindi), published from Bhopal
- Haryana (2 Vernacular Newspapers):
 - **Amar Ujala** (Hindi), published from Panchkula
 - **Dainik Bhaskar** (Hindi), published from Panchkula
- Besides, two National Level newspapers were also selected for comparative pupose:
 - a) **The Times of India** (English), published from New Delhi
 - b) **Dainik Jagaran** (Hindi), published from New Delhi

The newspapers were collected for twelve months period to understand the coverage and reporting trends. Four weeks newspapers were selected for detailed qualitative analysis.

Frequency of Reporting in twelve months

- 48 articles related to HIV/AIDS identified in Sandesh (Ahmedabad) in Gujarat.

43 articles were identified in Gujarat Samachar (Ahmedabad)

The monthly average for both Gujarati dailies is less than half as compared to the monthly average number of articles in a leading National English Daily.

- In Gujarat, there seemed to be higher exposure of people to HIV/AIDS as a result of the involvement of many groups and organisations working on the issue for a longer period than in other states.

† **Table: Location of HIV/AIDS Related Articles**

Location of Articles	Percentage of Articles in 12 months	
	Sandesh	Gujarat Samachar
Front Page	4.2	0
Local Section	56.3	34.9
National Section	29.2	18.6
International Section	0*	20.9
Editorial Section	4.2	0
Sports Section	4.2	0
Supplements	2.1	25.6

*Sandesh did not have a separate International section; rather, most international news was located in the "National" section along with national news.

As per the place of origin, the percentage of articles of local origin was found to be 60.4% in Sandesh and in Gujarat was 53.5%. Articles having sources outside the state, under the categories “Regional” and “National”, are substantially less than local origin articles. A significant percentage originates from International sources (20.8% in Sandesh and 20.9% in Gujarat Samachar).

Table: Source of HIV/AIDS Related Articles

Source of Articles	Percentage of Articles in 12 months	
	Sandesh	Gujarat Samachar
Local	60.4	53.5
Regional	4.2	20.9
National	14.6	4.7
International	20.8	20.9

Article Size

Gujarat newspapers had a significant percentage of articles that were large in size, which included features, editorials and news analysis. Further, some of the news regarding events also had details of the issues discussed and their implications, which resulted in the articles being of a larger size.

Table: Size of Articles

Approximate total number of lines* in article	Percentage of Articles in 12 months	
	Sandesh	Gujarat Samachar
Less than 25 lines	35.4	20.9
25 to 50 lines	22.9	18.6
50 to 75 lines	16.7	20.9
75 to 100 lines	4.2	11.6
More than 100 lines	20.8	27.9

* The product of the number of columns and the number of lines in the longest column

Types of Articles

In both newspapers, most of the articles are “news items” (see table 5 below). The percentage of photo features is quite significant, and is much higher than in Haryana and Madhya Pradesh. These photo features are intended for a greater impact on the readers.

Table: Types of Articles

Type of Articles	Percentage of Articles in 12 months	
	Sandesh	Gujarat Samachar
News	52.1	58.1
News Analysis	2.1	7.0
Feature	12.5	14.0
Photo Feature	20.8	18.6
Editorial	6.3	2.3
Book Review	2.1	0

□

Focus Areas

- The two categories with the highest percentage of articles in both Sandesh and Gujarat Samachar are “HIV/AIDS awareness” and “Events”.
- The remaining focus areas are “Clinical Research, other research and surveys”, “HIV Prevalence, Number of Cases, Death” (16.3% each) and “Stigma and Discrimination” (11.6%).
- Gujarati newspapers have a significant focus on care and support, stigma and discrimination and human rights issues.
- journalists in Gujarat have been writing on HIV/AIDS for a long time, and their writing has now evolved from basics to issues that concern HIV positive people.

Table: Focus areas of Articles

Focus Areas	Percentage of Articles in 12 months	
	Sandesh	Gujarat Samachar
HIV Prevalence / Number of cases / Deaths	12.5	16.3
Transmission of HIV	12.5	9.3
HIV/AIDS Awareness	25.0	25.6
HIV / AIDS Prevention	4.2	2.3
Clinical Research / Other research & Surveys	4.2	16.3
Drugs & Treatment	0	7.0
Funding and Expenditure	6.3	0
Care and Support	6.3	7.0
Stigma & Discrimination	10.4	11.6
Human Rights	2.1	7.0
Celebrity / Public Figure	10.4	7.0
Event	39.6	27.9
Other	4.2	0.0

* One article may have more than one focus area, thus the total percentage will not sum up to 100.

Qualitative Content Analysis (4 weeks articles)

- The qualitative content analysis is aimed at identifying gaps in journalistic writing
- The qualitative content analysis includes a) Indepth analysis of Structure of the Article and b) Analysis of relational categories.
- A) Indepth analysis of Structure of the Article: Analysis of structure provides the gaps in terms of logical sequence of proposition and arguments, flow of the article, inter-textual linkages etc. which determines the impact on readers.
- B) Analysis of Relational Categories: Relational analysis provides the frequency of occurrence of certain relationships within the text leading to a specific meaning or concept
- There were a total of seven articles related to HIV/AIDS in the two newspapers during March 2005 to April 2005 (four weeks).

Structure of Articles

Linkage with headlines – Most of the headlines are linked to the content of the articles. One article is about research on monkeys' genes which may have bearing on the treatment / prevention of HIV in humans. The headline suggests that monkeys' genes will provide a cure to AIDS. However, the content is not definitive, and describes that the similarity of monkeys genes to human genes can provide further research for an AIDS cure.

One journalist mentioned that headlines are given by a person who does not go to the field and that the responsibility for the story lies with the reporter. Another reporter confirmed this and added that the people who edit the articles do have the same sensitivity or understanding as those who go to the field.

Linkage with sentences/paragraphs – In one of the articles regarding the statements made by Richard Feacham (Global Fund for AIDS, TB, and Malaria), the final sentence is about the higher vulnerability of Hindus versus Muslims. This statement is out of context, and there are no supporting facts or data for it.

In the article about “Poor immunity against AIDS-HIV and fast progression in Indians” a vital statement regarding the implication of this research on the vaccines developed in Western countries is completely missed out, as has been mentioned in an English National daily on the same article.

In a discussion with NGOs, one worker observed that headlines and subsequent paragraphs have no link. Sometimes a final paragraph is added which has some sensational news, but it has no bearing with the rest of the article.

An NGO worker noted that there was no consistency in the style of writing even within the same newspaper. One reporter may write positively on a certain issue, where as another may report negatively on the same issue.

At times the quality of content of the article is compromised due to the fact that journalists have to meet certain targets within a time frame.

Sources and voices – In the article about the Global Fund for AIDS, TB, and Malaria, the article revolves around the statements made by one person (Richard Feacham). There are no facts and figures from Indian sources (i.e. NACO or Indian Government). The argument is partisan or biased.

A glance through the twelve months newspapers provides a better picture in terms of the representation of positive peoples' voices and vulnerable groups, especially in comparison to other states vernacular newspapers. This was also corroborated by NGO functionaries who informed that many times their stories are published from their points of view.

Analysis of Relational Categories

The following table gives the frequency of the relational categories.

Table: Frequency of Relational categories

Relational Categories	Frequency	
	Sandesh	Gujarat Samachar
Information Gap	1	-
Complexity of language	2	1
Negative Associations		
o Associations with already stigmatized categories/concepts		1
o Associations with immoral activities		
o Using negative words to associate concepts related to HIV/AIDS or to create fear, panic related to HIV/AIDS	3	2
Gender Bias	1	-
Bias towards specific groups	1	-

Information Gap

- The relational category of information gap includes misconceptions, incorrect information regarding HIV/AIDS and incomplete information. In the article about the statement made by Richard Feacham (Global Fund) there is a final sentence regarding about the higher vulnerability of Hindus versus Muslims. This leads to the impression that religion has a role to play in the vulnerability towards AIDS. This a misconception.
- It was pointed out, during discussions with stakeholders, that a new reporter is not sufficiently experienced or sensitive to issues such as AIDS. So, many of their misconceptions maybe highlighted in their articles.
- An NGO worker observed that the nature of stories change when one goes further away from the cities. He related an article in which a reporter in a remote area wrote that there was “no such thing as AIDS”, and continued to explain that it was only a campaign to promote condoms. This causes a great problem for the community, as they readily believe these misconceptions promoted by the newspaper, and when social workers try to explain the realities they are resistant.

- Another NGO worker mentioned that vernacular media tends to promote certain misconceptions and make statements such as “HIV hone se AIDS nahihota, bahut hi rare case me AIDS hotahai” (You do not get HIV from AIDS all the time, only in very rare cases does AIDS happen). Also, people start writing that “ab to AIDS ka ilaajhai” (now there is a cure for AIDS).
- There is no liaison between GSACS and media. The media get their own stories, and sometimes may ask for the GSACS to comment on them, if related to HIV/AIDS. GSACS does have a monitoring system for newspapers. However they are short staffed therefore the tasks are not efficiently carried out.

Complexity of language

There were three instances where the language used in articles was very complex. In the article about AIIMS research on the higher vulnerability of Indians to HIV/AIDS medical, and biological terminology has been extensively used, without explanation in simple terms. For instance, “human leukocyte antigens (HLA) and “HLA-34-PX” were constantly used. In a second article about monkeys genes “protein” has been used in the context of genetic material, which could confuse a layperson who may understand “protein” in the context of nutrition.

Negative Associations with stigmatised groups and activities

In a feature about an HIV positive woman who wants to end her life, the author emphasises that the woman’s brother-in-law got HIV as a result of his numerous relationships with women in Mumbai. It also highlights, that because of her ‘immoral’ relationship with her brother-in-law she is now HIV positive.

An NGO worker explained that jail inmates are already stigmatised as criminals. Further, some inmates engage in homosexual activities. He felt that when the media do a story on an inmate with AIDS, they tend to sensationalise this to a high degree. According to the NGO worker, a news regarding the release of an HIV positive jail inmate was presented in a way that the inmate was released on account of his HIV positive status, rather than being acquitted for his crime (the real reason for his release). Some people reacted to this, saying that criminals shouldn’t be released on the pretext of being HIV positive.

Use of negative words and phrases to associate concepts related to HIV/AIDS

- Five instances of the use of negative words and concepts have been identified. They include the use of “Dreadful disease” (Bhaiyankar rog), “extremely serious” (atyant gambhir), and “out of control” (Niyantran bahar) in context of the rise in HIV prevalence in India. These words create a sense of hopelessness, panic and fear as well as lead to stigmatisation about those who have been infected with HIV and eventually have AIDS. Words and phrases such as “dangerous” (Khatarnak), “beast” (Rakhshas), “potentially fatal” (ghatak), “devastating” (Vinashak), “extremely dreaded disease” (maha bhaiyankar rog) have been used in articles during the 12 month period.
- In the feature of a positive woman who wants to end her life, the heading says “I deserve the punishment, God please take my life”. In the story, the woman also curses the person whom she holds responsible for her HIV infection. She also says that she wants to end her life, since she feels that though someone else is responsible, she has also done something wrong and should be punished. These lead to a sense of despair, guilt and helplessness towards those who have HIV.
- An NGO worker also noted that the media also use a derogatory word in Gujarati, which does not translate to ‘sex worker’, in fact it is worse than that.

Biases towards Gender and Groups

In the article about the statement made by Richard Feacham (Global Fund), the final sentence discusses the higher vulnerability of Hindus versus Muslims. This could create a sense of bias in the community towards certain groups.

A photo feature showing a celebrity with her arm around an HIV positive woman can also be a gender bias, as men with HIV have not been shown or discussed. However, a positive aspect of this photo is that the celebrity is shown with her arm around the HIV positive girl. This photo was also taken by newspapers in other States.

The feature story about an HIV positive woman wanting to end her life, the author portrays a stereotype where the woman feels responsible for something she has not done, and believes she should be punished for it. This is a portrayal of self-stigma of women which leads to propagation of existing gender bias.

According to a GSACS official, an article was published about a research showing that circumcision reduces the risk of HIV. The article was written in such a way that it seemed that the sections of the community who do not practise circumcision are more vulnerable to HIV.

An NGO worker mentioned that media write stories on CSWs and make them out to be 'moral corruptors'. The clients are never seen as part of the immoral activities. Further, CSWs are portrayed to have easy living and that they make a lot of money. This creates a bias towards CSWs as a group as well as a gender bias.

According to an NGO worker, writings on homosexuals usually reflect journalists' misconceptions towards the group. They tend to focus on the lifestyle of homosexuals, rather than their problems, including those related to HIV/AIDS and how they cope with them.

Privacy and Confidentiality Issues

- According to an NGO worker, there was an article in the past, about a woman who died of AIDS. The article published her name, address even where her children go to school. Even though the lady has died, her children and other family members face stigma and discrimination because the media did not keep the lady's identity confidential. It was mentioned by a reporter that their editors demand the identity of the people (HIV positive, CSWs and so on) to be revealed.
- An NGO worker mentioned that it takes a long time to build rapport with certain groups, and if the media does not write sensitively then the group blames the NGO for leaking information and the rapport is lost. The NGO worker also mentioned that this was explained to a leading National daily (English) who readily complied with their wishes. In one instance, NGO workers were mistaken as CSWs and media highlighted this and disclosed their identity. These NGO workers had to face stigma from their family and society.

Human Rights Issues

The article on sex workers sending New Year's greetings to the Chief Minister and other State officials. The article further goes on to advocate the need for greater acceptance of this group and involvement in the mainstream society.

Another article talks about a positive woman who has lost her husband to AIDS and she and her children are being denied the inheritance left by her husband. It highlights the gender bias in the society against HIV positive widows and their children. A third article focuses on children who have been orphaned as a result of their parents dying of AIDS.

Analysis of Media Monitoring

The system of monitoring media coverage and providing feedback was also lacking in the State of Gujarat. During a meeting with GSACS and NGOs, a comprehensive collection of media reports were shown to the study team.

The officials as well as the NGO functionaries were unable to make use of the articles. They infact wanted to know as to how the content could be analysed. The feedback to the media is not uniform and systematic.

Summary of Findings & Conclusion

1. The coverage of HIV/AIDS in the Gujarati vernacular media is much lower than in English National Dailies as well as in comparison to vernacular media in Haryana and Madhya Pradesh.
2. There seems to be a higher exposure of HIV/AIDS amongst the people, due to a long period of involvement by organisations and groups working on HIV/AIDS in the State.
3. There is comparatively higher acceptance of HIV positive people by the community as well.
4. Gujarati newspapers treat most articles as local concern issues, since most of their articles are located in the local section of the newspapers.
5. A significant percentage of articles were large in size and included feature, editorials and news analysis items. Gujarati media therefore tended to provide details of HIV/AIDS related issues along with their implications.

6. News items constituted the highest percentage of articles, as in the other states.

Gujarati newspapers have a significant focus on care and support, stigma and discrimination and human rights issues.

Although HIV/AIDS in the headline does not sensationalise the news as in other States' vernacular media, the linkage between headlines and the content in some articles is still weak.

In the overall structure of articles, there is a flow among the paragraphs. However, some articles have a final sentence or paragraph which has no bearing to the rest of the article. Often, this creates a sensational effect to the article.

7. In some articles, vital statements to support argument or statistical data are lacking. Articles which describe research on HIV/AIDS use medical terminology which are not adequately explained, and sometimes convey a different meaning to a layperson. No consistency in the style of writing of an article even within one newspaper. Quality of the article's content is compromised due to the fact that most journalists are pressed against time to meet deadlines on a daily basis.
8. With regard to the balanced views on HIV/AIDS issues, few articles present biased arguments where only one source is quoted or discussed. From the 12 months' newspapers it was observed that Gujarati newspapers provide a better picture in terms of the representation of positive peoples' and vulnerable groups' voices, especially in comparison to other states vernacular newspapers.
9. The relational category of information gap includes misconceptions, incorrect information regarding HIV/AIDS and incomplete information. Although number of articles focus on the positive aspects of HIV/AIDS issues, certain statements within these articles carry misconceptions. These instances are mainly due to inexperience and lack of sensitivity of the journalists.

10. Instances of use of complex language were observed in articles related to clinical research. Use of words such as “protein” in the context of genetic material have not been explained, leading to an understanding of the term in the context of nutrition.
11. Articles emphasizing on the relationship of HIV with immoral sexual activities, jail inmates and so on were observed in the vernacular newspapers. Although such instances of negative associations with HIV/AIDS are less frequent in Gujarati newspapers, compared to other States, they are still present even in well-written articles and features.
12. Use of negative words is quite common in the vernacular newspaper. Most of the negative words used refer to HIV/AIDS as a ‘dreadful disease’, which has a potential to create panic. However, use of negative words to describe various vulnerable groups or HIV positive people is less frequent.

13. In the article about the statement made by Richard Feacham (Global Fund), the final sentence discusses the higher vulnerability of Hindus versus Muslims. This could create a sense of bias in the community towards certain groups.
14. Some of the articles have also portrayed existing gender biases where women feel responsible for their HIV status or even feel that they should be punished for what has happened to them.
15. There have been instances where the vernacular newspapers in their articles have revealed the identities, addresses even places of work of HIV positive persons, CSWs and homosexuals. In a particular case, NGO counsellors working with CSWs were shown by local media (TV channels) as though they themselves were CSWs. As a result these NGO counsellors faced stigma from their family and society.
16. As compared to other states, Gujarati vernacular newspapers covered human rights issues in a positive way. The articles that were given due importance included the human rights issues faced by CSWs, inheritance problems and rights of HIV positive widows and their children, and problems faced by children orphaned due HIV/AIDS.

Recommendations

1. Improving Coverage – In the light of comparatively lower coverage of HIV/AIDS in Gujarati newspapers, there is a need for increased reporting on the issue, especially the issues of local concern. This will help in greater acceptance of PLHAs and vulnerable groups and their integration in the mainstream.
2. Improving focuses and content of reporting – Local, National and International issues have been significantly reported. However, media should focus on removing misconceptions. Besides there is a need for greater emphasis on living with HIV/AIDS. Biases towards gender and other groups should also be avoided.
3. Structure – The overall structure of the article should be coherent and logical. Sentences or paragraphs that have no bearing to the main content or that sensationalise the news should be avoided. An overall consistency in the style of writing should be maintained throughout the medium. There should be greater understanding and sensitivity of field issues by the editorial staff. Further, there should be coordination with the field reporters, for presentation of various arguments in their context.

4. Simple Language – A conscious effort should be made to explain terminology normally not used by laypersons, especially in the case of articles related to clinical research. The presentation of facts and arguments in the articles should not lead to misconceptions. The language should be simple enough for a layperson to understand the content of the research.
5. There should be a conscious effort to avoid associating negative issues, concepts or words with HIV/AIDS, which lead to fear, panic, hatred, hopelessness. The article should be written in a way, such that existing social stigmas may be mitigated rather than reinforced.
6. There is a need for greater gender sensitivity among journalists, in order to avoid propagation of stereotypes that already exist in the society.
7. Efforts should be made to maintain privacy and confidentiality of individuals including PLHAs, vulnerable groups, and people working with them. Informed consent should be obtained before disclosing identities of individuals, especially in visual media.

8. Collaboration - There should a collaboration of State AIDS control Society and various other agencies working on HIV/AIDS, so that there can be effective reporting on PLHAs and vulnerable groups.
9. The State AIDS Control Society and the NGOs should monitor media reporting regularly and systematically. They should also provide regular feedback to the media.

THANK YOU