

INTRODUCTION

Though media's function in society is a deeply contested terrain, media's involvement with development issues is of paramount importance. Continuous attention has been given to media's ability to facilitate in organizing the goals of development in developing countries (World Bank, 2002; Melkote, 2003; Coyne & Leeson, 2004). In this research report, I begin with the premise that media has the ability to raise or diminish critical awareness of development issues. Consequently, the broad aim of my research report is to discuss to what extent commercial news media can provide a platform for social change in the context of development. The particular issue of development for my research is women's health in the realm of the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, hereafter referred to as PMTCT, in South Africa.

1.1 Women's health in the realm of PMTCT as a development concern

Women's health is an essential component of social and economic development. It is an issue that is related to other international developmental targets such as gender equity, reducing transmission of HIV/AIDS, and reducing the rate of infant mortality (UNDP, 2002; UNAIDS, 2004). However, the discussions on the importance of women's health as a central focus for development are often on the periphery of other major concerns (Moss, 2002).

The prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV (PMTCT) is indisputably an important concern for development given that without intervention 35% of children born to HIV-positive women will contract the virus (UNAIDS, 2005, p. 13). Consequently, without PMTCT, HIV- transmission at this rate perpetuates the developmental challenges of the pandemic on these women and on societies. However, many efforts for PMTCT focus narrowly on the biological role of the woman in transmitting the illness, neglecting the individual health of that woman or a more holistic approach to family prevention and care (WHO, 2004). Further, most HIV/AIDS research involving women concentrates primarily on the possible transmission of the virus to the child rather than on the various psychological and socio-economic effects HIV/AIDS has on women (Welch-Cline & McKenzie, 1996). Thus this discussion is important because it aims to highlight the concerns and experiences of these women in relation to PMTCT, as critical to their development and the overall development of a country.

I discuss the ‘realm of PMTCT’ in more detail in the next chapter, for introduction purposes I will discuss the concept briefly. Discourses around PMTCT and HIV/AIDS suggest that women deserve particular attention mainly because they are the major source of HIV infection for infants (Welch-Cline & McKenzie, 1996). The emphasis on HIV-positive women is on their potential role as “child- bearers.” Once a woman is pregnant she must decide if she will continue with pregnancy (abortion is legal in South Africa). Further she must then decide whether or not to “save her baby’s life” through treatment and cope with the uncertainty of the consequences it will have on her future health as a HIV infected person. This emphasis on the women’s role of child-bearer results in media

content generally depicting women either as mothers and caregivers or, conversely, sex objects and victims (Steeves, 2003). Media's constructions are thus critical to how women's health is handled in the realm of PMTCT and how women's health is viewed as a developmental and social issue.

1.2 Defining development and media

This study will broadly investigate how media covers developmental issues, it is important to define these terms in order to have a consistent connection between media and development throughout this research.

Development as a socio-economic and political process is a highly contested term and is highly subjective to the place and time of this process (Martinussen, 2000). Development includes a web of concepts, such as poverty reduction, the notion of the state, equality and many other terms that are similarly contested. Though it is important to use multiple indicators as a holistic view into the development of a country, for the purposes of this research I will use "human development" as my framework for development. Countries are ranked on their level of human and social welfare using the human development index (HDI), which includes an array of social and economic indicators, such as access to good health, levels of education and the ability to attain political freedoms (ibid). Human development, as defined by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) (2002), is

about people expanding their choices to lead lives they value...The most basic capabilities for human development are leading a long and healthy life, being educated, have access to resources [and information] needed for a decent standard of living and being able to participate in the life of one's community...that they be free—and able—to participate in the formation and stewardship of the rule and institutions that govern them

Within this framework questions can be asked about the extent to which news media have promoted objectives of human development for women's health in the realm of PMTCT, and how much news media believes this to be a part of their mandate.

Media are heterogeneous and there are diverse roles and agendas that influence the place and impact of media in a society. The unit of analysis is the print news media in South Africa, particularly, mainstream commercial newspapers. Newspapers are the oldest form of mass media, and many media scholars argue studies of the media are based mainly on the organization and processes of newspapers (McQuail, 2000; Negrine, 1994; Cottle, 2003). Newspapers are vital to how we examine media in development; with its long history, newspapers have solidified media as a major institution in society (McQuail, 2000, p. 117).

Nevertheless, to ask news media to cover pertinent issues of development can be challenging because they are focused on the commercial imperative. How much business sense will it make to meaningfully cover issues pertaining to HIV-positive pregnant women's health in the realm of PMTCT? This is the essential counter question that will run throughout this research report.

More over the World Bank (2002, 4) suggests that media is

It is at the core of equitable development...they can facilitate trade, transmitting ideas, and innovation across boundaries... [they are also] important for *human development*, bringing health and education information to remote villages in countries...[italics added]

The World Bank proposes that media have the ability to inform and give voice to those who are marginalized and impoverished: “to reduce poverty, we must liberate access to information and improve the quality of information” (ibid).

1.3 Media coverage of HIV/AIDS and women in the realm of PMTCT

A premise on which this research is based is that media have the ability to affect social change within regards to development, specifically for this research: women’s health.

Salome Raheim (1996, p.402) asserts that

Media constructions of HIV infection and AIDS can influence (a) perceived risk of infection (b) knowledge of effective preventive measures and perceptions of responsibility and employing them, and (c) attitudes toward infected persons

A discussion of media’s reporting of PMTCT must be contextualised within media’s history of covering the HIV/AIDS pandemic in general. Mark Connelly and Catriona Macleod (2003, p. 63) point out that “HIV/AIDS is the first epidemic of the information age and as such has been widely reported by the media due to its newsworthiness.” In this

information age, the ability to transmit knowledge and awareness of public concerns is far greater than before, the boundaries are limitless. Within regards to HIV/AIDS, media exposure is essential; however, just because something is covered in the media does not mean it is covered in a way that enlightens the public. Media representations about HIV/AIDS in South Africa have focused on ‘celebrity’ and conflict between stakeholders (Finlay, 2004) and have also portrayed certain groups in stereotypical fashion, particularly poor black women without much interrogation (Kalipeni et al, 2004).

Alan Finlay (2004) in his study suggests that the social impact of the disease and the fact that South Africa has one of the highest prevalence rates of HIV/AIDS in the world, does not contribute to its newsworthiness. Instead the conflict between government and civil society, for instance the Constitutional Court Case in 2002 or the Minister of Health’s statements at the Bangkok conference, gives HIV/AIDS newsworthiness; that of conflict. He further states that media coverage of HIV/AIDS subsides between these kinds of ‘events’ (Finlay, 2004, p.9). This depicts the South African press as being highly reactive and focused on commercial news values¹, failing to be proactive and analytical about a very challenging social issue in South Africa (Finlay, 2004).

Joanne Stein (2002) investigates the context, the actors and the processes involved in covering HIV/AIDS issues in South Africa in the news media. Respondents, journalists and editors of newspapers in South Africa, parallel the moral obligation to cover HIV/AIDS to that to of covering issues surrounding apartheid with an advocacy agenda

¹ News values are cultural and ideological understandings of what drives the media to cover particular stories; the concept of news values is imperative to the discussion of media in development and will be discussed in chapter 3.

(2002, p. 12). Advocacy in this context refers to the media having a proactive agenda to contribute to social change regarding HIV/AIDS and issues related to it (p.5). Regardless of this potential agenda, respondents admitted to the fact that politics and controversy frame the coverage of HIV/AIDS. As one editor states (Stein, 2002, p. 13):

Our focus has been so much on the controversial issues that we actually forgotten what this whole thing is about...And now that [The President] is not saying anything, where are the news items in the newspapers?

In addition, Nicola Spurr's (2005) preliminary analysis of news articles on PMTCT² shows that the peaks in coverage of PMTCT correspond with the political disputes between government, particularly the Minister of Health and the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) (2005, p.12). Spurr states that 33% of all stories covering PMTCT in South Africa source government officials, with the Minister of Health being the most prominent, and 13% source NGOs, mainly the TAC. Women who are affected by the issue of PMTCT hardly feature at all, with 9% sourcing HIV-positive people, and only 6% (or 9 stories) sourcing mothers or pregnant women (ibid). Spurr (2005, p. 15) importantly notes:

...those ordinary people most affected by issues of mother-to-child transmission – HIV-positive women attending antenatal clinics, and their male partners and families – are almost invisible in the press

The voices recognized as being pertinent to the case of PMTCT are those responsible for implementing policy –politicians, bureaucrats and civil society leaders who speak on

² Her analysis covered three calendar years of media coverage: 2000, 2002, and 2004

behalf of ordinary citizens. The voices neglected are, as stated above, those most affected by issues and debates of PMTCT—HIV-positive women who visit public ante-natal clinics, their partners, children, family and members of their communities.

1.4 Rationale and Aim

The literature briefly discussed in the last section introduces the understandings of the media coverage of HIV/AIDS and PMTCT in South Africa as being preoccupied with political controversy. This research discusses recent news coverage in South Africa around issues of PMTCT and women's health. The studies presented above suggest that there have been neglected perspectives and voices in the media, in particular women who are affected by HIV/AIDS and specifically PMTCT. This research emphasizes that it is essential that various viewpoints, especially those that are directly affected by such news, are recognized within media coverage instead of being silenced.

The importance of news media in the development of women's health should not be underestimated. According to “empirical studies...women's access to media is associated with better health and fertility outcomes, even after accounting for different income and education” (“Chapter 10: The Media,” 2002, p. 181). The challenge of this research is to comprehensively analyse how women, in the realm of PMTCT, are covered and what it implies about media's ability to critically engage with women's health concerns as a developmental issue.

In the face of such disputable issues, this research argues that news media consider a shift in media's perception of women's concerns. They should rise from marginal issues to an imperative subject of development in South Africa that discusses the socio-economic and clinical vulnerability of women in relation to PMTCT. One of the primary objectives of this research is to understand how women's health can be raised as vital for development in the public's eye, and if news media can be expected or responsible for covering such issues in this particular way. I aim to investigate the quality of recent coverage: the prominent concerns recorded and the gaps in news coverage, to ask questions about the social importance of media's engagement with these marginalised developmental issues.

1.5 Research Questions

1. To what extent have the news media covered the development issue of women's health in the context of PMTCT?
2. What does newspaper coverage imply with regard to the media's engagement with women's health as a critical concern for development in South Africa?
3. To what extent can the commercial news media facilitate the development of women's health, in the realm of PMTCT, in South Africa?

1.6 Chapter Overview

The following is an outline of this research report:

Chapter 2 consists of the contextual and background information pertinent to the case study of women's health in the realm of PMTCT. I will describe PMTCT and discuss to what extent this is a critical issue for women's health. This chapter also includes a brief history about the political debates around PMTCT in South Africa as well as the present issues concerning Nevirapine. This chapter gives significant literature around women's health in the realm of PMTCT, which will be used throughout the rest of my research report.

In Chapter 3, I will discuss the various theoretical frameworks pertinent to my discussion of media for development. The main concern of this chapter is to clarify the meaning and importance of having a media for development. I discuss pivotal period of development where communication through mass media was used for societal transformation, also known as Development Communication. I mention critical perspectives of Development Communication including feminist critiques that assert that women's use of media are generally neglected in these paradigms.

The context of news media as a profit-driven enterprise, considering the political economic perspective as well as the libertarian ideals of a market-regulated media is further discussed in this chapter. The possibilities for a commercially driven media to support marginalised developmental aims, such as women's health, by discussing the presence of news values and media advocacy will provide a conclusion for the chapter.

The method I used for this research is qualitative thematic content analysis (TCA) which I discuss in Chapter 4. The two types of data that are used in this research report are: articles from the *Star* and the *Mail and Guardian*, as the selected print media, and secondly, in-depth interviews with relevant stakeholders in the media and the case of PMTCT and women's health in South Africa. In this chapter I describe how and why I selected this data and what kind of information I expected to yield from this data. I also discuss the limitations to this methodology and recommend ideas for further research.

Chapter 5 consists of the presentation of data collected in the newspaper articles and the interview transcripts. In this chapter I illustrate what I have observed in my data collection through thematisation of the news texts and interviews.

My analysis, in Chapter 6, discusses the findings in relation to the theory and literature that I consider in previous chapters. This part of the chapter will discuss to what extent my findings dispute or agree with the literature and theoretical concepts in regards to media's engagement with woman's health concern, in the realm of PMTCT, and media's ability to provide a platform for social change.

The Conclusion chapter recapitulates the aim of my research report, as well as my construction of what a media for development, particularly for women's health in the realm of PMTCT, should entail.