

## The Effectiveness and Ethical Reporting of HIV and AIDS Coverage in South African Media

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**ABSTRACT** The aim of this paper was to review the concepts relevant to the understanding of how HIV/AIDS is covered in South African newspapers. Statistics indicate that HIV/AIDS prevalence is still high in South Africa. Therefore, the media continuously has to inform and educate society about this disease. Literature revealed that much of the information on HIV/AIDS is sourced from the media, especially newspapers. The findings show that the quality of HIV/AIDS coverage remains an essential element for increasing public awareness of this epidemic and an integral part of influencing behavioural change. Finally, this paper concludes that ethical reporting on HIV/AIDS is vital in order to disseminate information that does not disgrace other parts of society.

### INTRODUCTION

Fourie (2008: 380) is of the opinion that it is important that the media takes its role as a partner in the struggle against HIV/AIDS seriously. Undoubtedly, the media is playing and will continue to play an influential role in the war against HIV/AIDS by influencing and setting the agenda on how the infection of this terrible disease can be avoided. The purpose of this paper is to review some of the vital concepts relevant to the study. This paper also reviews the available literature, as well as similar studies that have been undertaken on HIV/AIDS coverage in newspapers. It also explores the role that the media plays in setting an agenda on this disease. Moreover, this paper makes use of agenda setting as its theoretical framework.

### HIV/AIDS in South Africa

Southern Africa is often described as the epicentre of the global AIDS epidemic (Birdsall and Kelly 2007: 15). Among all Southern African countries, South Africa has been identified as the most severely affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. It is believed that, in 2010, an estimated 310,000 South Africans died of AIDS out of a population of 50 million. According to a report released by UNAIDS in 2010, the HIV/AIDS infection rate in South Africa was 17.8 percent

among those aged 15-49. The report indicated that almost one-in-three women aged 25-29, and over a quarter of the men aged 30-34, were living with HIV (UNAIDS 2010).

According to the statistics published by Statistics South Africa, in 2010, life expectancy was estimated at 53.3 years for males and 55.2 years for females. Statistics South Africa (2010: 3) further reports that the infant mortality rate was estimated at 46.9 per 1 000 live births in 2010. Judging by these figures, an estimation of 1.6 million people aged 15 and older, and approximately 183 000 children, would be in need of Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) in 2010. The total number of new HIV infections for 2010 was estimated at 410 000. Of these, an estimated 40 000 were children. There were 1.99 million HIV/AIDS orphans in South Africa in 2010 while new HIV infections among adults were estimated at 370 000 in the same year. Based on these figures, it is clear that HIV/AIDS infections are increasing rather than decreasing.

In South Africa, the first few cases of HIV/AIDS were identified in 1982 when two men were diagnosed with HIV. In 1987, another man in South Africa was diagnosed with AIDS (www.avert.org). From this point, HIV/AIDS spread to all corners of the country. Since then, South Africa has been among the list of countries with the highest number of people living with HIV/AIDS. According to the most recent

UNAIDS estimates on HIV/AIDS, South Africa's total number of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) now stands at 5.6 million (UNAIDS 2010). This indicates that HIV/AIDS is a major social problem in South Africa.

These figures indicate that HIV/AIDS is prevalent and progressively spreading in South Africa. There is still no vaccine or medication that can be used to cure this disease, besides informing the public to change its behaviour. Although there are some drugs, like ARVs, which are used to treat AIDS with consequences that suppress the spread of this epidemic; other measures still need to be applied. To achieve this, institutions such as governments, families, religious organisations, schools, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and media can play vital role in curbing the spread of HIV/AIDS. Among these institutions, it is the view of this paper that the media can play a crucial role in disseminating information and educating the public about this incurable disease. This means that the media needs to maintain constant coverage of HIV/AIDS and be proactive, as opposed to reactive, when reporting on the disease.

Reactive coverage of HIV/AIDS issues means that the media tends to focus on events and personalities rather than engage in a deliberate and concerted effort to generate its own news (Ajibola 2009: 64). A proactive approach, on the other hand, means that the media needs to generate its own stories or news on HIV/AIDS issues and stop focusing on events and personalities. This can be achieved through writing features, editorials and articles which scrutinize government plans and set an agenda on this epidemic. Doing so will allow HIV/AIDS issues to remain on the media agenda and, as a result, the public will be aware of this disease and infection rates will consequently decline. To minimize the spread of HIV/AIDS and its impact in society, the media is expected to act as conveyers of information to society. In support of this idea, Patel (2005) confirms that mass media is expected to play a leading role in stimulating rapid change and development in societies. This has to be across all institutions of society, including the economic, political and social institutions.

### **Impact of HIV/AIDS**

It is a known fact that curbing the HIV/AIDS pandemic is one of the major challenges facing

the world today. Since the global emergence of HIV/AIDS in 1981, an estimated 2.4 million people have died as a result of this disease, worldwide. Unfortunately, researchers have found that this disease is increasing at an alarming rate in Africa and this has imposed great restrictions on development issues (Way and Stanecki 1994: 3).

Stressing the impact of HIV/AIDS, Setswe (2009) cites a World Health Organisation (WHO) representative who stated that:

*Of all diseases, AIDS provides the most dramatic and disturbing examples of the capacity of a previously unknown pathogen to rapidly spread throughout the world... and cause social and economic upheaval on a scale that threatens to destabilize a large geographic area.*

Over the years, the HIV/AIDS pandemic has been found to have a negative impact on a number of elements in many countries around the globe. The epidemic has been found to affect elements which include the economy, families, education as well as health.

Barker (2007: 19) is of the view that HIV/AIDS has probably become the most devastating disease humankind has ever experienced and unfortunately the impact is particularly severe in South Africa. Way and Stanecki (1994) observed that AIDS may have both a direct and indirect impact on the affected population. The direct impact of AIDS may be the increase in the number of deaths in the population affected, while the indirect impact can be the survival of non-HIV-infected children who may be negatively affected by the death of one or both parents. This dissertation presents the above mentioned elements that have been affected by HIV/AIDS. The effects of HIV/AIDS are explained in an attempt to reveal the HIV/AIDS coverage by the media so that such effects may be ameliorated. This will support the notion that the HIV/AIDS issues need a significant presence on the media agenda at all times.

### ***Impact of HIV/AIDS on the Economy***

The survival of any country depends on the state of its economy. There is no doubt that HIV/AIDS affects the economic growth of those countries with a high prevalence of HIV. According to Bollinger and Stover (1999), AIDS is one of the major causes of rising labour costs and it

is threatening the competitiveness of many South African firms. On the same issue, Barker (2007: 19) points out that HIV/AIDS has had a negative impact on the profitability of South African companies and makes labour more expensive due to the higher cost of group and medical insurance, as well as the high staff turnover. Similarly, Kauffman and Lindauer (2004: 17) state that it is hard to state the economic and social impact that AIDS has had on Southern Africa. Hunter (2003: 53) adds that, in Africa today, HIV/AIDS has intertwined with a crippled economic and social development to rip society apart along every conceivable dimension.

These viewpoints suggest that HIV/AIDS has a substantial negative impact on the economy; the media needs to cover this and disseminate information on how this epidemic has cost the nation its human and monetary resources. The media can achieve this by analysing and interpreting this kind of information for the public.

#### ***Impact of HIV/AIDS on Household and Families***

It is common knowledge that since the dawn of human civilization, no other epidemic has inflicted so much misery and suffering on humankind than the HIV/AIDS pandemic (Tshoose 2010: 408). In support of this, Frohlich (cited in Abdul-Karim and Abdul-Karim 2005: 351) suggests that HIV has had a major impact on individuals and community structures such as the family. Frohlich in Abdul-Karim and Abdul-Karim (2005: 351) points out that “family has traditionally been the fundamental unit of any society but as the epidemic progresses, this structure is being eroded.” As it has been noted that the effects of HIV/AIDS are direct as well as indirect, families suffer from this epidemic differently. Kauffman and Lindauer (2004: 109) show that the direct effects of HIV/AIDS are linked to situations in which one or more family members die of AIDS. As a result of this, HIV/AIDS prevents families from pursuing investments. This means that, instead of budgeting for family issues such as school fees for children, they have to buy medication for affected family member(s) or cater for funerals. To buttress this, scholars like Booyson et al. (2001) found that AIDS-affected households draw on available savings to finance medical costs and funerals.

In the same manner, Natrass (2004: 32) maintains that HIV/AIDS reduces the economic security of households by reducing the productivity of (and eventually killing) income earners, while simultaneously diverting scarce household resources towards medical expenditure. This, however, will contribute to the lower levels of savings and in turn, causes these families to resort to borrowing money from relatives and micro-lenders. Booyson et al. (2002) imply that increased borrowing from relatives probably translates into lower levels of savings by these families and borrowing from micro-lenders certainly results in AIDS-affected households being caught in a debt trap. For this reason, the affected households are likely to become poor.

In light of the above information, the media can stimulate strategies which enable families to seek better options of staying out of debt; this can be done by publishing articles which inform these families and the general public about the impact of this disease. In this regard, the media can inform them of the organisations that help people living with HIV/AIDS and this can help the affected households manage their savings.

#### ***Impact of HIV/AIDS on Education***

Education is often the most valuable asset for people to pursue opportunities, obtain skilled jobs, and start businesses. However, HIV/AIDS tends to reduce both the supply and demand for education. Arrehag et al. (2006: 154) support this statement when they indicate that the demand for education is going to decrease in severely affected countries. Arrehag et al. (2006: 160) go on to point out that “one important mechanism behind the expected decrease in demand for education in countries with high HIV/AIDS prevalence rates is the epidemic’s demographic impact”. With reference to its demographic impact, Whiteside and Barnett (2006: 329) stipulate that the impact of HIV/AIDS results in smaller numbers of children going to school; fewer children born and many HIV-infected infants who do not live until the school-going age. Unfortunately, this results in the decline in manpower development which, in turn, depletes the human resource base, thus crippling the country’s economy.

Arrehag et al. (2006: 154) further point out that the epidemic’s adverse impact on household income may result in a decline in the share of the household budget which is dedicated to

children's schooling. This will obviously result in high drop-out rates due to the lack of funds for tuition fees. HIV/AIDS affects people at different ages. Enrolment rates are likely to decrease and absenteeism will increase in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. Due to this, Arrehag et al. (2006: 155) outline that decreasing enrolment rates, increasing absenteeism and high drop-out rates can be expected in countries with a high prevalence of HIV/AIDS. This will result in fewer people seeking any form of education.

The supply for education and its quality will also be negatively affected by the epidemic as teachers are also susceptible to HIV/AIDS infection because of their income and status (Arrehag et al. 2006: 161). This, however, will result in a low quality of education as the affected teachers will not attend classes continuously, due to their illness or medical conditions. Whiteside and Barnett (2006: 331) support this notion by pointing out that "all teachers are at risk of HIV infection; there are some indications that they may be at a greater than average risk." Whiteside and Barnett (2006) further point out that a teacher's status and income create opportunities for high-risk behaviour.

To emphasize the impact of HIV/AIDS on education, Bollinger et al. (1999: 12) identify the following three ways in which HIV/AIDS affects the education sector:

1. The supply of experienced teachers will be reduced by AIDS-related illness and death; children may be kept out of school if they are needed at home to care for sick family members or to work in the fields.

2. Children may drop out of school if their families cannot afford school fees due to reduced household income as a result of an AIDS death.

3. Another problem is that teenage children are especially susceptible to HIV infection and, therefore, the education system also faces a special challenge to educate students about Aids and equip them to protect themselves.

These factors clearly indicate that HIV/AIDS has an immense impact on education. To eradicate this, it would be of paramount importance to use tools that can inform and educate communities on the impact of this disease. The media is one of the tools that could be used to inform and educate communities about the impact of HIV/AIDS. This is because much of what society understands of this epidemic and its fu-

ture possibilities are sourced from the media. Therefore, the media's heterogeneous, diverse roles and agendas can be of the outmost importance in influencing behavioural changes in society. For instance, newspapers, as an important component of the media, collect, compile and process news and thoughts and communicate them to the public (Tasdemir and Kus 2011: 171). Taking this into consideration, newspapers are able to communicate appropriate information to society in order to inform them of this epidemic. This will reduce the number of infections and, as a result, the number of pupils and teachers in educational institutions will rise. Therefore, the impact of HIV/AIDS should be on the media's agenda at all times, in order to curb this epidemic.

### *Impact of HIV/AIDS on Health*

The aspect of health is very important in any country's economy; however, HIV/AIDS appears to be a great challenge to the health sector in the country. Wards in the hospitals throughout the country have become overcrowded by HIV/AIDS patients. In support of this view, Abdul-Karim and Abdul-Karim (2005: 336) maintain that the main impact on adult health services appears to be increased hospital admissions, leading to ward overcrowding and possible exclusion of HIV-negative patients.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic has posed and will continue to pose tremendous challenges to the health systems of developing countries, especially in the most severely affected countries. As the leading cause of illness and death in sub-Saharan Africa, HIV/AIDS has become an added burden on already strained health care systems (Colvin in Abdul-Karim and Abdul-Karim 2005: 336).

The impact of HIV/AIDS on the health workforce and health systems is an added burden to the already fragile health systems in developing countries which are characterized by poor infrastructure, an insufficient number of service providers, lack of drugs and commodities, and poor management (Tawfik and Kinoti 2006: 3). In this regard, media has to act as watchdog and inform society and government about the issues that might act as barriers in curtailing this epidemic. Based on this understanding, Madlala-Routledge (2006: 6) suggests that the "media should not only tell stories about HIV/AIDS but also

highlight the impact of the pandemic not only in terms of people dying but also in terms of how it is affecting the delivery of health care, as well as health professionals themselves.”

Looking at the role and functions of the media in society, it is of great importance that the media place greater emphasis on scrutinizing and showing how HIV/AIDS impacts the areas mentioned above. It is through media that the government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and influential leaders can be made aware of the impact of HIV/AIDS in society. With this, the media should not only cover issues about the spread of HIV/AIDS, but it should also show the consequences it has for different elements within society.

### **Roles, Functions and Effects of Media in Society**

It is important to note that the media can play an important role in raising public awareness about HIV/AIDS, by reporting issues that promote the prevention of the virus and reduce the stigma associated with those who suffer from it (Soul City 2001). However, the coverage of this epidemic seems to be infrequent in the South African media, especially the print media. Cullen (2003: 67) describes frequency of HIV/AIDS coverage as the ‘rise-peak-decline approach’. This means that the rate at which this epidemic is being covered by media is fluctuating. It is vital for media to maintain regular reporting on HIV/AIDS, as this will keep the issue in the public agenda and this in turn will promote HIV/AIDS awareness.

The mass media have a powerful influence on the mass audience and could easily alter or control people’s behaviour (Suresh 2003). However, some scholars argue that media audiences have a choice to accept or ignore a message from the media. Therefore, it can be argued that media effects are limited in influencing certain behaviour in society. The fact that many people rely on the media for information makes it vital for the media to perform specific functions in society. McQuail (1978), cited in Fourie (2007: 188) identifies the following functions of the media in society:

*1. Information:* Providing information about events and conditions in the society and the world, indicating relations of power; facilitating innovation, adaptation and progress.

*2. Correlation:* Explaining, interpreting and commenting on the meaning of events and information, providing support for establishment of authority and norms, socializing; coordinating separate activities, consensus building; setting orders of priority and signalling relative status of a topic.

*3. Continuity:* Expressing the dominant culture and recognizing cultures and new cultural developments; forging and maintaining commonality of values.

*4. Entertainment:* Providing amusement, diversion, and the means of relaxation; reducing social tension.

*5. Mobilization:* Campaigning for social objectives in the sphere of politics, war, economic development, work and sometimes religion.

It is very important that press contributes to the national, if not international awareness of the HIV/AIDS epidemic by fulfilling the important role of disseminating information. This has to be fair, accurate, balanced and newsworthy information in order to bring positive change in society’s behaviour and attitude towards this epidemic. In support of this idea, Swain (2005) points out that the media has enormous potential to help stop the spread of AIDS if it could inform the public continuously and accurately about the true nature and scope of HIV risks around the world. This means that accurate information from the media can help people change their behaviour and take informed decisions in curbing the infection rates of this disease. Ajibola (2009: 53) asserts that information includes all those facts and details that an individual needs in order to make meaningful decisions about issues of interest and significance to him or her. This information may involve news on development, culture, education and health issues, such as those related to HIV/AIDS. It is true that the media performs all these functions in order to keep society abreast of what is going on around them. But the question which now arises is whether the press in South Africa includes these functions when reporting HIV/AIDS issues.

Wood (2006: 308-309) offers another view of the role of the media as information providers when she states that “mass communication does more than report information; it also provides characters with whom we identify, and entertain us.” Wood further suggests that mass communication also shapes our attitudes, values, and

perceptions of people, situations, places, and events. However, Severin and Tankard (2001: 125) affirm that “a mass communication message does not have the same effect on everyone.” Severin and Tankard (2001) reaffirm that “its effect on anyone is dependent on a number of things, including personality characteristics of the person and various aspects of the situation and the context.” This indicates that by giving social problems like HIV/AIDS issues more space and time in the media will affect people in varying ways depending on the personality and situation.

The effective communication of appropriate information about HIV/AIDS is very important in order to eradicate many of the social ills associated with misinformation and myths about the epidemic (Forman 2005: 192). This implies that to contain HIV/AIDS infections, more information should be supplied to communities. This can be achieved through the use of media. However, Linda (2000: 118) maintains that to contain the HIV/AIDS situation, the media as a channel of information dissemination needs to be supplemented by other sources of information dissemination since not all people, particularly those in rural areas, have access to the mass media.

In addition to the abovementioned functions of the media, Vivian (1993) identified surveillance as one function of mass media. Vivian (1993: 340-341) also asserts that “in modern human society, surveillance is provided to individuals by the mass media, which scan local and global environments for information that helps individuals make decisions to live better, even survive.” This implies that the media familiarize members of a particular society with issues that might affect their lives directly or indirectly. Through news coverage on social issues such as HIV/AIDS, the media can fulfil its surveillance role successfully.

Another role of the media in society is advocacy. Media advocacy provides a framework for shifting the focus of health oriented news reporting to policy issues addressing public health (Stein 2002: 4). He further argues that the aim of media advocacy is to increase the capacity of groups or societies to act in a manner conducive to their goals. This role of the media is also aimed at achieving social behaviour among societies. A strong hands-on advocacy role might mean that reporters should incorporate social and cultural situations in their news reports on HIV/AIDS.

The advocacy role involves more than educating the public regarding appropriate individual behaviour; it includes the promotion of social change and collective action (Stein 2002). This testifies to the fact that media advocacy can help in building a conducive environment for behavioural change and, as a result, help in managing the impact of HIV/AIDS over a long period of time. The research undertaken revealed that advocacy within the context of newspaper reporting involves an internal policy agenda that is specifically focused on social issues and this can go a long way in bringing about the much required change.

The fact that the media nourishes society with information means that more information about HIV/AIDS should be covered and disseminated to society in order for the abovementioned functions to be achieved. News coverage is occasionally the only source of new information available on an issue (Steinberg 2010: 266). This means that more has to be done in order to ensure that the society has access to different forms of information. The majority of people have come to depend on the media for news and other significant information to such an extent that this information can shape people’s everyday lives (Hanefeld 2005: 2). In addition, Connelly and Catriona (2003: 64) add that the media can also play a vital role in informing public opinion on key issues of the day and communicating knowledge about HIV/AIDS. In support of this, Linda (2000: 111) articulates that “the media can play an influential part as an agent of change so that the knowledge acquired is translated into practice or the desired behavioural change.”

Even though that is the case, it is important to note the following aspects of media effects in society as identified by Klapper (1960), as cited in Fourie (2007: 235):

1. Media communication in itself is not a necessary or sufficient cause for behavioural change. At most, it operates in conjunction with and via certain mediating factors and influences.
2. Media, however, can contribute to behavioural change and reinforce existing behaviour.
3. Where mass communication does change behaviour, there may be no mediating factors, or mediating factors themselves operate in the direction of change. This is found in authoritarian societies or in developing societies where the media is expected to play a leading role in transforming society.

4. The effects exercised by the media are subject to situation and context.

It is true that the media can provide society with information that is aimed at changing behaviour; however, this alone cannot bring about the desired change in society. Individual behaviour is influenced through relationships of the individual with others (Rogers and Kincaid 1981). It is also believed that behavioural change in society can only be achieved if other institutions such as religious organisations, government, families and schools collaborate in the fight against this pandemic.

Adopting new issues or ideas from media can also contribute to behavioural change. Singhal and Dearing (2006) relate this to diffusion of innovations when they point out that the concept of diffusion of innovation concerns messages that contain new ideas and mass communication encompasses all types of message. They further point out that in the case of diffusion, messages are new and a degree of risk for the receiver is present. This leads to somewhat different behaviour on his or her part in the case of innovations than if he were receiving a message about routine ideas. Dissemination of new ideas on how to treat and prevent contacting this disease might contribute to positive behaviour in society. Communication is the exchange of information through which new ideas are propagated from one individual to others (Rogers 2003). Communication is very important for diffusion of innovations. Roman (2003) points out that mass media are best for creating awareness about innovations.

In this regard, covering or reporting new ideas on how to deal with HIV/AIDS can lead to positive behavioural changes in society. In addition to this, Rogers and Kincaid (1981) point out that diffusion is linked to existing social networks while Rogers (2003) says the concept of homophily is very important in the propagation of new ideas. Media should inform the public about new innovations in relation to prevention and treatment of this epidemic as this might contribute to behavioural change towards this epidemic.

In succinct terms, Bracht (1999) asserts that media institutions are particularly important in society in promoting major health issues such as HIV/AIDS because they legitimize an issue in order that it is regarded as relevant. The media also raises awareness and provides frameworks of meaning (Qakisa 2003: 45). Although the me-

dia has this potent role, it still has a long way to go in terms of informing and educating the public about the consequences of HIV/AIDS. In light of this, many scholars have written on the role of the media with regard to HIV/AIDS and Shepperson and Parker (2000) cited in Ajibola (2009: 17), cognizant of such a situation, observe that:

*The role of the media in reporting and framing HIV/AIDS issues within the context of a growing epidemic is well recognized. Press reporting and analysis play an important role in developing public understanding of key elements of the epidemic, and also promote understanding amongst professionals, working in the field. Health workers, for example often cite newspapers as their main source of regular information on HIV/AIDS research. In addition, the press also plays an important role in mediating response to HIV/AIDS, policy issues, and provides a forum for discourse.*

In relation to this view of the role of media in society, McQuail (1994) and De Beer (1998) (quoted in De Wet 2004: 96-97) suggest the following assumptions about the influence of the media:

1. The media is able to influence matters and control innovation because it remains the most potent way of informing and influencing society.
2. The media remains the sphere where issues, nationally and internationally, are played out. It has the potential either to place issues at the centre of debate or to ignore issues that could steer debate in particular directions.
3. The media provides definitions of identity and social realities. It is an intellectual, yet tangible place where the changing cultures and values of society are displayed, constructed and communicated.
4. The media is a platform to fame and disgrace where instant heroes and villains are made.
5. The media is the source of an ordered and public meaning system that provides a benchmark for what is 'normal'.
6. The media is the single largest focus of leisure-time activity and means of entertainment.
7. The conduct of both democratic and undemocratic politics, nationally and internationally, depends increasingly on mass media being a part of social systems. For example, government policy on HIV/AIDS cannot be communicated effectively without mass media involvement.

These are plausible roles that the media plays in an effort to curb the spread of HIV/AIDS. Its potential in providing the information, knowledge, attitude and skills that will inform and lead to positive moral behaviour is vital in building a healthy nation. The media is in a position to create greater public awareness of HIV/AIDS, which is necessary before individuals can critically analyse the challenges posed by the epidemic (Wangulu 2007: 12). In order for citizens make informed decisions to help prevent infections, protect people, and ensure proper care of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA), the media has to accurately inform the nation.

### **Role of Journalists in Reporting HIV/AIDS**

Having dealt with the functions and the role of media in society, it is germane to assess the role of journalists in reporting HIV/AIDS. Journalists, as media workers and members of a society affected by HIV/AIDS, should act as advocates in the war against this epidemic. Journalism has a threefold role: to inform, educate and entertain (Cullen 2003: 74). Based on these functions, journalists can play a major role in the fight against HIV/AIDS by covering and disseminating well researched, objective and accurate information surrounding this incurable disease. By so doing, journalists will be able to inform and educate people about the extent of the problem and ways of preventing infection.

HIV is a large-scale and disturbing social problem that needs proper strategies to combat it. In support of this idea, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) (2006: 10) posits that "HIV/AIDS pushes all the news buttons, it is a health emergency, it has a human face, it has elements of science, medicine, religion, and it has deep grief and moments of extreme joy." This denotes that HIV/AIDS generates news from different angles. With this view in mind, journalists should cover news on HIV/AIDS from different angles in order to inform and educate communities about the consequences of this epidemic.

### **Challenges of Covering HIV/AIDS**

The challenges of covering HIV/AIDS are varied and complex (Valentine 2006: 12). Valentine (2006) notes that journalists need to understand the sometimes difficult science behind, for example, vaccine and microbicide trials in

order to report them well. The fact that some journalists have not had training in science means that scientific errors are sometimes found in their reports on HIV/AIDS matters. For instance, journalists should be in the right position to understand how antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) work in order to educate and inform people who live with HIV/AIDS on how to use them. However, journalists' lack of scientific interpretation of HIV/AIDS issues sometimes misleads the public because they rely on the media for their understanding of HIV/AIDS issues.

One of the biggest challenges of reporting HIV/AIDS is to ensure that every person interviewed is treated with respect, and gives their "informed consent" to be interviewed and for their names and photographs to be used (Cullinan 2001: 5). This means that articles on HIV/AIDS should be well sourced and the source of information should not be disclosed without the consent of the source. However, in some cases, journalists do not take this into consideration.

In such cases, journalists may face many barriers to good reporting, from government censorship to prejudice from their own media outlet. Despite these, organisational constraints and traditional news gathering practices can also act as a challenge to the coverage of HIV/AIDS issues. For instance, journalists could face a problem when trying to interview sources of information, due to the unavailability of resources. Wangulu (2007: 12) states that "covering the issue of HIV/AIDS requires a clear understanding of the challenges and limitations faced by journalists." Pertinent to this, Panos Institute (2005: 4) outlines the following challenges which are faced by media workers in reporting HIV/AIDS:

1. Lack of access to accurate information about the epidemic.
2. Curbs on freedom of speech and oppressive government policies affecting access to information and freedom to scrutinize policies affecting HIV/AIDS.
3. Limited personal understanding about issues, trends and changing dynamics in the epidemic due to lack of training.
4. Lack of resources, including money, time and equipment, to travel and investigate HIV stories, leading to an over-emphasis on HIV in urban areas and neglect of rural populations.



5. Ethical dilemmas, such as the tension between the need to respect a person's confidentiality and the need to provide a platform for the voices of people affected by HIV/AIDS.

6. Self-censorship, as a response to cultural taboos, such as open discussion of sexual behaviour or analysis of gender roles.

7. Competing topics on the news agenda and perceived AIDS fatigue by editors, as well as audiences, resulting in a lack of editorial support.

8. The need for new, imaginative approaches to creating AIDS stories and programmes appropriate to different media such as community radio.

In relation to the challenges of reporting on HIV/AIDS, it is apparent that covering HIV/AIDS stories is very challenging, because reporters or journalists have to take different issues into consideration before they can publish their stories. Regardless of these challenges and limitations, journalists should make sure that they contribute to the fight against this epidemic. To strengthen this point, Cullen (2003: 76) concurs that regardless of any limitations and difficulties in effecting behavioural change, the press is able to improve awareness, knowledge and understanding of the epidemic. In order to defeat these challenges, journalists should acquire adequate skills so that the issue of HIV/AIDS can be reported effectively.

#### **HIV/AIDS Coverage in South African Media**

The Sub-Saharan region has been hit hard by HIV/AIDS, especially South Africa which has the highest number of people living with this incurable disease. For this reason, Fourie (2008: 394) is of the opinion that African reporting on HIV/AIDS should be specialized. The impact of media messages and campaigns has helped to inform, sustain and shape attitudes on health issues, such as HIV/AIDS (Qakisa 2003: 45). If the media cover HIV/AIDS more extensively, it could help in changing and building an environment which is conducive to behavioural change within society.

Much of the early coverage of HIV/AIDS implied that people who are at risk of contracting the disease are prostitutes, homosexuals, drug abusers or people who have multiple sexual partners (Qakisa 2003: 49). Qakisa further posits that, although the media went out to correct this perception, some people still believe that HIV/AIDS affects only immoral people. The me-

dia was the initiator of the association between the disease and prostitutes, homosexuals, drug abusers or people who have multiple sexual partners, whilst ignoring other means of contracting this disease.

Qakisa (2003: 49) proposes that "another problem that may have influenced the way in which the AIDS issues are reported is the issue of language and presentation." In this regard, the use of negative and stigmatizing language in reporting HIV/AIDS issues discourages people living with this disease from disclosing their status. Therefore, HIV/AIDS stories need to be accurate and balanced in order to convince readers, listeners and viewers about the effects of this pandemic. Accuracy is a critical media principle, since society may be influenced by media reports. In this regard, Williams and Miller noted that:

*"When you talk about a disease such as AIDS," says a TV news science correspondent, "and you can't show actual injections, you can't show blood and you can't talk about anal intercourse, and then it does cause problems. I'm sure that it is one of the reasons that it is very hard to convince people what the hell is happening with AIDS"* (quoted in Qakisa 2003: 49).

In South Africa, HIV/AIDS communication has focused on methods that will motivate individuals to change their attitudes and behaviour. Even though positive behaviour and attitude change can play a crucial role in the prevention of this epidemic, Melkote et al. (2000: 25) argued that such behaviours and attitudes are produced and reproduced by individuals living in larger communities and being impacted by cultural, economic, social and political influences. In this regard, press can still play a vital role in shaping the individual's attitudes and behaviours related to HIV/AIDS. This can be easily achieved through frequent coverage of this epidemic and the use of neutral language by print media which will result in setting public agenda.

In spite of this, press coverage of HIV/AIDS has been erratic. This, however, could be due to a lack of funds or inexperienced journalists who lack the skills to accurately cover this deadly disease. Wangulu (2007: 12) reasons that "adequate skills in HIV/AIDS can help in reporting this issue effectively." Muchendu (2008: 1) shows that the media's role in the covering of HIV/AIDS issues is more than vital, while Fourie (2001: 499) states that media plays an impor-

tant role in informing the public about issues that affect their day-to-day lives. This means that the media should continuously disseminate information which concerns the public.

Covering HIV/AIDS issues, on a continuous basis, will encourage people to change their behaviour. Providing society with fair, balanced and accurate information will raise awareness and help people stay informed about this disease. This indicates that the role of media is vital in the fight against HIV/AIDS. This is why Kofi Annan, the former United Nations Secretary General, made the following argument:

*When you are working to combat a disastrous and growing emergency, you should use every tool at your disposal. HIV/AIDS is the worst epidemic humanity has ever faced. It has spread further, faster and with more catastrophic long-term effects than any other disease. Its impact has become a devastating obstacle to development. Broadcast media have tremendous reach and influence, particularly with young people, who represent the future and who are the key to any successful fight against HIV/AIDS. We must seek to engage these powerful organisations as full partners in the fight to halt HIV/AIDS through awareness, prevention, and education* (Kofi Annan, UNAIDS 2004 in Kruger 2004).

Frequent coverage of HIV/AIDS can promote awareness of this epidemic in society. However, this is not the case in South African media and Duncan (2008) posits that HIV/AIDS coverage is still irregular, with peaks relating to moments or events that provoke coverage that is, generally, not sustained. This implies that the media tends to cover more stories on HIV/AIDS when there are special events like HIV/AIDS World day.

In addition to this, the media only publishes more HIV/AIDS stories when politicians or celebrities are in conflict about this disease. This is why Fourie (2008: 391) points out that reporting on HIV/AIDS is generally done in a simplistic way. Similarly, Panos Institute South Africa (2004) found that HIV/AIDS is still primarily reported as a health issue and not as a social or cultural issue that affects the society in general. The fact that the media is a key institution for deliberation, consensus building and information dissemination, this means that all the issues that surround the HIV/AIDS pandemic should be covered thoroughly.

### Quality of HIV/AIDS Coverage in South Africa

Studies of media coverage of HIV/AIDS, however, have shown that despite the horrific impact of AIDS in South Africa, until the recently national media coverage - with few exceptions - does not reflect the urgency of the crisis. Instead, media coverage focuses primarily on conflicts around HIV/AIDS policy (Jacobs and Johnson 2007: 127). The reason for this might be the result of the lack of reporters who specialize in reporting health issues. Muchendu (2008: 71) points out that for media to have a quality and effective HIV/AIDS news coverage, it needs to get specialized reporters on health or train their journalists on HIV/AIDS issues.

However, journalists should write more proactive articles which will aid in setting an agenda on HIV/AIDS issues. Proactive approach means that journalists should peruse and investigate truth in an independent manner rather than relying on events that deal with this epidemic. This will cause HIV/AIDS issues to receive more productive coverage from newspapers as journalists will not wait for special events or issues such as World HIV/AIDS Day to produce articles. Reporting on this epidemic, in this manner, will make it look like a serious matter in the eyes of society and, as a result, the media contributes towards positive behaviour. That is why Omoera et al. (2010: 3) argued that "the strength of the media in influencing people's perception as well as making society to change their behaviour may be an essential tool for fighting medical and social problems such as HIV/AIDS." In relation to this statement, it can be argued that the media has a huge impact on the public, as it can shape the public's opinion in different ways, depending on the objective of the message. For instance, writing more news and feature on people who have HIV/AIDS or who have died from this epidemic, people will see this as real an issue that affects them and will have to adopt good behaviour especially the one that will make them avoid contracting this disease.

The findings of a quantitative content analysis of press coverage of HIV/AIDS in Australia, the USA, France and Britain during the 1980s and 1990s reveal a common pattern (Valentine 2006). Initially there was a slow response to evidence of the infection in which certain high-risk groups such as homosexuals and drug addicts were targeted as the main offenders and suffer-

ers. This was followed by increased coverage of HIV/AIDS with the acknowledged risk of HIV infection in the wider heterosexual population. Finally, the disease was 'reutilised' and treated as just another health story.

Actually, HIV/AIDS should be given more prevalence in the media than other issues, such as crime, due to its complexity and impact on society. Fortunately, some researchers have revealed that "AIDS reporting has been no different from reporting on crime, elections, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, corruption or any sort of stories of the decade" (Whiteside 2008). Yet, as the above argument shows, HIV/AIDS should receive more attention from media.

To put it differently, the quality of the media coverage of HIV/AIDS epidemic remains an essential element to increasing public awareness of the issue, and forms an integral part of any behavioural change. The quality of reporting on an issue can be gauged through different media principles. These principles include: accuracy, balance, clear and concise writing, well-focused reporting as well as a diversity of sources and context. However, these principles will not be discussed here.

### **Ethical Reporting on HIV/AIDS**

In every discipline, there are ethics that control and guide individuals. This is no exception in the media industry as journalists and editors have to abide by ethics that guide them whenever reporting on issues such as HIV/AIDS. This is why Wood (2006: 31) points out that "all forms of communication involve ethical issues. The principle with regards to ethics in reporting HIV/AIDS is to reduce the stigma it has in society." Ethical reporting should however, provide appropriate facts on HIV/AIDS and eliminate stress from those affected or living with it.

Media ethics is not an exercise solely for leadership (Claassen in Hadland 2005: 134). This implies that not only editors have to make ethical decisions to publish or not to publish, but everyone involved in the process of gathering and publishing news has to follow and abide by ethical standards. For instance, journalists have to exercise ethical considerations because whatever they say or write has the possibility of influencing the public either positively or negatively. Claassen in Hadland (2005: 134) further notes that ethics deal with the philosophical foundations of decision making, or choosing be-

tween the good and bad options that one faces (Claassen in Hadland 2005). In relation to HIV/AIDS reporting, journalists have to consider which information is relevant to changing people's behaviour for the better, while not discriminating against people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA).

Media coverage when reporting on HIV/AIDS should be fair, accurate and objective in order to be ethical in reporting on this disease. Ajibola (2009: 71) stipulates that it may not always be obvious to the audience, but implicitly, ethics are always at the core of the decisions that a journalist makes while in the field, or what the editor does at his desk in the newsroom. This means that media practitioners, such as journalists or reporters, have to make ethical decisions when reporting sensitive and social problems as this determines what the public may read, hear and see. When reporting on HIV/AIDS matters, journalists should follow certain ethics in order to write ethical stories. Fourie (2008: 393) is of the view that, to change the attitude of the public, there needs to be a sensitive and ethical way of reporting on social and cultural ideas and beliefs that influence the general attitude that many people have regarding HIV/AIDS in South Africa.

To report news ethically, journalists need to seek clarification of information before reporting it. Clarification is especially important in reporting issues such as HIV/AIDS because it can be difficult for a reader to fully understand scientific and statistical information. For instance, the statistics on the prevalence of HIV/AIDS might look easy but is often misunderstood when reported out of context.

The issue of HIV/AIDS is a story of critical importance that should be covered by journalists with imagination, initiative and sensitivity to gender and larger social forces that drive the epidemic ([www.journaids.org](http://www.journaids.org)). This shows that the reporting of HIV/AIDS by journalists needs high ethical standards. It is true that the media portrays reality for a certain society and Panos Institute (2009: 8) supports this notion by stating that the media reflects the realities, values and norms of a society. Therefore, it is imperative that reality is presented in a convincing manner so that myths, prejudices, fear and misconceptions towards this disease are minimized. With this in mind, journalists must remain vigilant in their performance of their duties, and must be aware of their responsibilities.

Journalistic ethics includes respecting rights to privacy, and matters of public interest (Kruger 2004: 7). This indicates that journalists have to bear in mind the confidentiality of their sources of information when writing and publishing information pertaining to HIV/AIDS. The issue of privacy is very complicated when one considers that the public has the right to know anything that journalists find newsworthy. Kruger (2004: 7) further indicates that journalists' first loyalty is to the audience and it is critically important that issues of HIV/AIDS are reported fully and accurately. However, sources must be protected from the harm caused by the disclosure of the HIV/AIDS status of PLWHA, without their consent.

Language usage is another factor that journalists have to keep in mind when dealing with HIV/AIDS issues. Language usage determines the message passed to the audience and it further determines whether the message is clear and understandable, as well as the value it carries (Irimu and Schwartz n.d: 14). In order to communicate effectively with their audience, media practitioners need to use appropriate language so that they can present reality. In relation to this, Hopson (2000) suggests that the selective use of language can trivialize an event or render it important, marginalize some groups and empower others; define an issue as an urgent problem or reduce it to a routine one. This suggests that journalists need to be careful in their choice of language, when reporting on HIV/AIDS issues, as this might aid in curbing this epidemic.

Since each discipline has its own vocabulary or jargon, journalists should learn to find appropriate terminology when reporting on HIV/AIDS issues. The very words we use to describe HIV/AIDS play an important role in shaping perceptions; journalists therefore need to ensure that their words do not carry a value judgment (Cullinan 2001: 6). It is, for instance, not ethical to call a person who lives with HIV/AIDS "an HIV/AIDS carrier or an AIDS sufferer" as this will negatively affect the infected person. Words or concepts can be considered as labels that structure perception by classifying objects, people and situations (Fourie 2008:110-111). This emphasizes the ethical importance of the using appropriate language when covering HIV/AIDS issues in the media.

Based on the ethical use of appropriate language in reporting on HIV/AIDS, Foreman (2007)

identifies the following points as appropriate for guiding journalists in the use of language when reporting on HIV/AIDS issues:

1. It is essential to use language appropriate to the journalist's audience. The use of language is not just a question of whether to use a local dialect, but how to phrase concepts, and what type of vocabulary to use. To find the appropriate language, a journalist needs to build her/his understanding of her audience, and to become "fluent" in HIV/AIDS terminology.

2. Language has a strong influence on attitudes toward HIV/AIDS and people affected by HIV/AIDS. It can be damaging or it can be non-judgmental, positive, and constructive. Good media coverage of HIV/AIDS uses neutral, gender-sensitive language.

3. HIV/AIDS involves highly technical terminology. It is imperative for journalists to "translate" this terminology into ideas and terms that their audiences can readily understand. It is also crucial to ensure that the language used in stories is accurate. Good journalism requires journalists to understand the facts about HIV/AIDS, and to get these across to their audiences in ways which the audiences can understand.

The above points indicate that the appropriate use of language is imperative when covering HIV/AIDS issues. The appropriate use of language will encourage the target audience to read articles from newspaper sources. This is why the words of Valentine (2006: 17) are relevant:

*Good media, as much as it is about news, is also about story-telling and people are at the centre of those stories. So yes, there is a need to both be accurate and ethical about how we report those things, but also to connect with the human issues. And HIV ultimately, comes down to how we have sex, with whom we have sex, how often we have sex, how many partners we have at the same time or not...and if we can't find decent media stories to write about that then we're in a really sorry state.*

The appropriate use of language coverage of balanced, accurate, fair and informative news especially on social problems like HIV/AIDS will encourage behavioural change among members of society. In relation to this point, Deacon et al. (2007) state that "media language use is seen as embodying relations of power and authority in society and contributes to the ongoing production of social conceptions, values, identities and relations." The media should also engage in con-

sistent coverage of this epidemic in order to combat it.

In general, the points below were identified in a meeting between senior media editors (from Mauritius, Bakina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire and Senegal) who wished to adopt basic principles to assist the media in reporting on HIV/AIDS ethically. Irimu and Schwartz (n.d: 4) state that, in this meeting, it was noted that any journalist who imparts biased information on HIV/AIDS is a constraint to the flow of information and a hindrance to the fight against the epidemic. Therefore, journalists should:

1. Respect the rights of persons living with HIV by being sober, realistic and balanced and by keeping confidentiality of news sources.
2. Increase knowledge and training on HIV/AIDS issues.
3. Be concerned about figures and facts.
4. Involve the community in reporting.
5. Collaborate with HIV/AIDS organisations and persons living with HIV/AIDS.
6. Make a link between HIV/AIDS and STDs.
7. Use appropriate language.
8. Sustain commitment to increased coverage of HIV/AIDS.
9. Avoid discrimination by linking HIV/AIDS to tribe, class, race, culture, religion or nationality.

## METHODOLOGY

### Participants

The paper did not use any participants since it was a content analysis based research, which evaluated relevant information. However, an attempt was made to include newspapers targeting a variety of population groups, as defined by race and class, across South Africa. These newspapers are major dailies in South Africa and have been selected to analyse the coverage of HIV/AIDS issues. The assumption was that, these newspapers are read by all racial groups in South Africa- Blacks, Whites, Coloureds and Indians.

### Instrument

This paper used the major daily South African newspapers and Out of these, 288 issues representing thirty percent of the total were analysed for this paper. A systematic method was adopted in the sampling of issues of each of the

newspapers. Systematic sampling involves selection of elements within a sampling frame, using a regular interval with a random start. In this case, the researcher used one as the starting point while selecting the rest at intervals of three. This means that 72 newspaper issues were content-analysed per edition. A total of 288 newspaper issues were content-analysed. This therefore means that purposive sampling was used to select relevant articles from newspapers. This was a valuable quality that availed opportunity for the researchers to manoeuvre matters on the ground into a workable plan and still remain credible.

This was in accordance to Engel and Schtt (2010: 97-102), who noted that, in purposive sampling; sampling units are selected subjectively by the researcher, who attempts to obtain a sample depending on the subjective judgment of the research.

This means that the researchers made decisions on picking articles that they saw as relevant in answering questions at hand.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

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

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

On another consideration, the researchers found out that some of the sampled newspaper issues had no HIV/AIDS stories at all. However, the findings of this paper are in contrast to Aji-bola's findings (2009) on the ethics of reporting on HIV/AIDS, in three major South African newspapers. The findings from her study indicate that more than one HIV/AIDS story was published per issue of the selected newspapers. *The Star* and *Daily Sun* were included in that study. However, in this paper, some newspapers issues were found to have no HIV/AIDS stories at all but overall the coverage of HIV/AIDS was found to be reasonable in these newspapers because the ones which published HIV/AIDS stories were

found to have more than two stories. If each of these newspapers issues had covered a minimum of three stories on this epidemic per day, this would be regarded as extensive coverage; however, this is not what is revealed by the findings of this paper. It has thus become clear that there is a fluctuation in the coverage of this social problem.

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

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

The reason for fluctuation coverage of HIV/AIDS issues in these newspapers can be attributed to what Cullinan (2005) terms 'media fatigue'. The other reason for this kind of coverage of HIV/AIDS issues by the media could be the fact that journalists and/or editors regard HIV/AIDS stories as less newsworthy since it is believed that HIV/AIDS stories do not sell newspapers (Linda 2000: 119). This could be due to a commercial and profit-oriented approach that has been adopted by the media. If this is how the media operates, one would have to question how the media will survive if it covers this epidemic in a fluctuating manner as its consumers might become infected due to a lack of adequate information. If all these issues can be treated well in the newsrooms, these newspapers can do much

better in disseminating HIV/AIDS issues to the public.

### **In What Proportions are Journalistic Genres Used for the Dissemination of HIV/AIDS Issues?**

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

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

The *Sowetan* used feature articles frequently to disseminate HIV/AIDS messages, with 29 (18.1%). This indicates that, when it comes to HIV/AIDS coverage, the *Sowetan* is more committed in informing people about this epidemic than the other three newspapers. The *Daily Sun* had an average of 22 (13.8%) feature stories while *The Star* had 19 (11.9%) feature stories, followed by *Daily Dispatch* with only 10 (6.3%) feature stories. Feature writing as one of journalistic

genres is perceived to have less structural constraint than hard news and allow more of the individual journalists' imagination. This means that feature stories should be used more frequently in reporting on HIV/AIDS issues as it allows journalists to provide detailed information so as to inform and educate their audience.

### **Does the Coverage of HIV/AIDS Issues by Selected South African Newspapers Vary in Extent, Categories, Prominence and Depth of Treatment?**

The results reveal a statistically non-significant relationship between newspapers and categories, that is ( $\chi^2 = 25.09, p = 0.122 > 0.05$ ). This indicates an equal likelihood reporting of HIV/AIDS oriented stories based on the categories analysed in the four newspapers. A chi-square test further indicates that the placement of HIV/AIDS oriented stories on the front, inside or back pages were not statistically related, that is ( $\chi^2 = 6.16, p = 0.405 > 0.05$ ). This shows that there was a variation in the placement of HIV/AIDS issues in these newspapers.

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

It is however, of importance to note that analysing the coverage of HIV/AIDS from these newspapers in the present paper, individually, one would find that *Sowetan* has performed creditably well on most counts. For instance, the newspaper contained 61 HIV/AIDS-oriented stories of all the stories found in its editions content-analysed. It is followed by *Daily Sun*,

with 37 stories; *The Star* with 35 and *Daily Dispatch* with 27. For almost all content categories, *Sowetan* had the highest contributions.

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

### **Do Selected South African Newspapers Comply with Guidelines Proposed for Language Use in Reporting HIV/AIDS Messages?**

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

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

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

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

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

### CONCLUSION

This paper found out that there has been a vast improvement in the coverage of HIV/AIDS issues in South African media. This was mainly attributed to the fact that many South Africans are beginning to understand the effects and stigma associated with the pandemic. Many South Africans are opening up about the effects of HIV/AIDS in their households, a fact that makes it easier for journalist to interview and write factual stories on the topic. It was also evident from the findings of the research that not all newspa-

pers carry these stories and those that report on them do not do it on daily basis. The reasons attributed to this is that not all HIV/AIDS issues are newsworthy.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Although this paper is a worthwhile endeavour that should be replicated in future research, the researchers recommend that future studies include a wide range of media institutions when assessing the reportage of HIV/AIDS issues. Moreover, the researchers recommend that the following topics be taken into consideration when conducting research in relation to the media and HIV/AIDS.

Further research should also be conducted to ascertain how media audiences react after receiving media content on HIV/AIDS issues. There exists a need to study how media producers are best able to obtain feedback on the messages they disseminate to their readers or audience. This will allow for the evaluation of message production or communication processes so that further strategies can be implemented.

While the present paper focuses solely on newspapers, comparing electronic and print media can help to determine which medium may be the most effective in disseminating information on HIV/AIDS issues.

In addition, instead of dealing with daily newspapers alone, further research could compare the coverage of HIV/AIDS issues in both daily and weekly newspapers in order to determine those which offer greater and more substantial coverage of this epidemic.

It is important to find out if print media (press) meet the challenges of HIV/AIDS reporting as most readers get more HIV/AIDS information from electronic media like internet.

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