

HIV/AIDS Reporting in South Africa: an analysis of the response of the press



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Department of Health, South Africa

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BACKGROUND

The role of the media in reporting and framing HIV/AIDS issues within the context of a growing epidemic is well recognised. Press reporting and analysis plays an important role in developing public understanding of key elements of the epidemic, and also promotes 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 play an important role in mediating response to HIV/AIDS policy issues, and provide a forum for discourse. This role has been well evidenced in media engagement of controversies such as Sarafina 2, Virodene, the HIV/AIDS causality debate, amongst others.

During the 13th International AIDS Conference in Durban various presentations were made regarding the role of the media. Whilst locating the media as central to social response to the epidemic however, the vast majority of participants raised concerns and negative perceptions of the media response. Examples of how this was articulated include:

- “AIDS journalism often falls short because it fails to integrate the following three elements – 1) the perspectives of people living with HIV/AIDS; 2) the larger cultural, economic, and political context which shapes the epidemic; and 3) the science of HIV’ (Shoofs, M. 2000).
- “...journalists have tended to shy away from taking a proactive response to HIV advocacy, under the guise that they must remain ‘unaffected’ and stand-alooft commentators on the issue’ (Falobi, O. and Bamigbetan, K. 2000).
- “To contribute effectively to AIDS prevention and care, the media have to change their role into an advocacy role and promote the dignity and rights of people with AIDS and other marginalised groups’ (Riyadi, S. 2000).
- “...information about this problem in the mdia is centralised to the big cities, is limited, and very often lacks objectivity or seriousness’ (Medina, A. 2000).

In the light of these perspectives it is clear that it is important to problematise and analyse the role of the media in relation to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The comments outlined above are located within formal studies drawn largely from the perspectives of authors working in the HIV/AIDS field. It is however also important for systems of media production to be closely understood. For example, Foreman and Deane note that ‘High quality media coverage of AIDS depends on the presence of motivated and informed journalists in a country, and of the sensitisation of a range of personnel throughout the media hierarchy. The formation of new media networks on AIDS may have a powerful role to play in stimulating high quality reporting’ (Foreman M. and Deane J. 2000), and Hernandez and MacDonald (1991) who note ‘Careful informal development of media contacts in formats designed to meet their specific needs can make a difference in the media’s overall coverage of AIDS’.

HIV/AIDS media training and support interventions

Interestingly there have been a number of developments both in South Africa and internationally that have sought to foster informed reporting of HIV/AIDS in the media, particularly the press. In South Africa over the past decade there have been various consultations and workshops with media producers that have promoted sharing of perspectives and information between HIV/AIDS workers and media workers. (For example, various consultations that formed part of formal and informal workshops conducted by the Beyond Awareness Campaign, as well as courses offered

by Institute of Advanced Journalism (IAJ).) In 1999 two specialised South African interventions were also initiated to provide pre-packaged information to the press related to health and HIV/AIDS. These were:

- The Mediaworkers Project of the Beyond Awareness Campaign, Department of Health, which developed articles and photographs related to HIV/AIDS social action;
- Health-E, a donor funded project, which developed articles related to health issues including HIV/AIDS.

Both projects made information available through internet websites – www.spinpro.co.za and www.health-e.org.za respectively – and promote material through regular e-mails to a user database. The Mediaworkers Project objectives included:

- active promotion of social action around HIV/AIDS – particularly successful interventions;
- redefining visual representation of HIV/AIDS through photographic documentation of social action and related HIV/AIDS issues;
- documenting the ‘history’ of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in South Africa.

The project also provided specialised training in HIV/AIDS reporting and programming to radio producers through a series of workshops.

The objectives of Health-E, include:

- producing news and analysis for print and electronic media regarding health policy and practice in South Africa;
- focussing on health issues affecting the poor and disadvantaged.

Another southern African initiative, drawing support from UNAIDS, is the Harare-based Southern African AIDS Information Dissemination Service (SafAIDS), which prepares regular Media Information Packs on the regional HIV/AIDS situation. On a regular basis SAFAIDS prepares information packs for journalists, which are made available on subscription. The contents of the packs are prepared by experienced HIV/AIDS reporters. In 1998 this organization held a workshop, in conjunction with UNAIDS, at which heads of department from southern and east African media, communications and journalism training centres came together to develop some regionally relevant guidelines for reporting and investigating HIV/AIDS issues. Copies of the workshop proceedings (Stally 1998) are available on request.

Understanding press response to HIV/AIDS in South Africa

Assessments of the response of the South African to HIV/AIDS issues is often coloured by anecdotal information, or generalisations drawn from extreme examples of inaccurate or sensationalised treatment of particular issues. Appropriate understanding and analysis can however only be drawn from systematic analysis of press treatment of the HIV/AIDS issue.

This research draws on a systematic collation and analysis of HIV/AIDS reporting in the South African press during two time periods – September and October 1999, and January and February 2000. National and regional publications were reviewed and the sample comprised 10 weekly and 14 daily publications. Circulation of the publications ranged from approximately 15 000 copies to 500 000 copies with the combined total circulation being approximately 1-million for daily papers and 1,6-million for weeklies.

Articles for the relevant periods were derived via a professional ‘clipping’ service. Each article was then entered into a database and categorised according to various criteria.

Categorisation included analysis of broad subject, theme, angle, and source of information. Content of selected articles were then analysed to provide insight into trends in reporting particular subjects. A total of 1 056 articles were included in the analysis.

Because the present research focusses principally on the actual reporting of HIV/AIDS, editorial comments and Letters to the Editor are not included. The issues at stake are not editorial policy but, as discussed later, the pragmatic environment of news gathering and writing. This is not, however, to deny the importance of both editors' inputs and those of letter-writers.

Table 1: Overview of publications surveyed

Publications	Circulation Sept/Oct 1999	Circulation Jan/Feb 2000
Daily		
Beeld	110 119	104 165
Burger	122 913	115 576
Business Day	44 516	45 050
Cape Argus	77 279	79 243
Cape Times	48 594	51 126
Citizen	25 085	33 863
Daily Dispatch	37 927	37 371
Daily News	64 370	68 532
Eastern Province Herald	38 446	35 838
Evening Post	18 033	15 468
Natal Witness	26 627	26 558
Pretoria News	25 085	26 908
Sowetan	211 630	192 006
Star	162 703	168 013
Weekly Newspapers		
City Press	323 612	246 604
Independent on Saturday	73 069	75 896
Mail and Guardian	33 031	37 240
Rapport	343 665	340 023
Saturday Star	135 496	141 754
Weekend Argus (Sat & Sun)	108 294	115 493
Sunday Independent	40 462	42 653
Sunday Times	457 511	504 845
Sunday Tribute	106 466	112 440
Sunday World	27 456	43 873

Source: A.B.C Jul-Dec 1999 / Jan-Jun 2000

INTRODUCTION

Print media frequently attract more attention than they in fact devote to issues that are more important than the importance attached to the media. If this reads a little clumsily, it is principally because under a range of possible circumstances the print media are not always in a position to meet the ideals ascribed to the conceptions of press freedom or freedom of expression. In the present research, it is clear that the SA print media are not doing full justice to the impact and scale of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in this country not to mention Africa as a whole.

This is not to deny that all the titles examined actually *reported* on HIV/AIDS issues. The *selected* volume of reporting recorded for the two two-month periods under review is impressive. What is noteworthy, however, is the extent to which media organizations appear to report reactively and not proactively or investigatively.

It is acknowledged that the structure of news media does place certain restraints on the individual newspapers' capacity to support investigative journalism. However, it is time to ask whether news media should not be proactive by developing specialist HIV/AIDS desks focussed on seeking out the untold facts and stories that official and commercial sources filter out of their press releases.

Literature on Journalism and HIV/AIDS

The contemporary South African print media operate within a very different political and social environment to that which existed under the previous apartheid dispensation. It is also important to note that reporters in the corporate media sector are under considerable pressure as a result of profit-driven (ie. cost-effective, or low cost) story-production. Individual journalists who desire to, and are capable of, producing informed and well-researched features on HIV/AIDS issues often have to rely on agency sources because their workload does not afford them time to carry out the necessary research. On the other hand, this does not appear to be the case in general: the reigning newsroom environment does not seem to encourage consistent in-depth reporting, and this is in spite of a growing body of readily available literature both for reporters and about HIV/AIDS journalism.

There is a large body of work on the capacity (or purported lack thereof) for print media to engage with social issues like HIV/AIDS. Much of this work tends to be critical in nature and also not to treat HIV/AIDS as a topic in its own right. It was found that very little material was readily available for the working journalist to consult when faced with compositional, terminological and ethical problems in writing about this issue. However, bibliographic information resources did reveal material that can enable reporters to deal with the disease as a topic. When interrogated for specific titles or resources using the keywords 'AIDS (Disease) and 'Journalism', however, there was a remarkable paucity of material dedicated to these topics in combination (Bock 1992; Fausto Neto 1991; Cook 1991).

A review of publications under the more general keyword selection 'AIDS' and 'Media', reveals a considerable body of material. These include books, articles in academic and professional journals, and proceedings of the various International AIDS Conferences. For the average newspaper, access to all this material through the Internet – either as complete copy or in abstract form – should not present any major problem. Using a suitable selection of these sources should enable newspaper institutions to create suitable resource units that make hard copy versions of the material available for consultation in the newsroom. Practically all journals will make available copies of individual articles, while other copies may be available from

authors; either way this can save companies the perhaps considerable cost of journal subscriptions. On the other hand, local journalism and media journals like *Ecquid Novi* (Potchefstroom University), *Communicatio* (University of South Africa), *Communicare* (Rand Afrikaans University) and *Rhodes Journalism Review*, all contain occasional articles that touch on AIDS reporting. Given that a significant number of practising journalists in the South African media have graduated from these institutions, the industry could exploit alumnus links to gain access to relevant material.

In a review available articles, books or conference proceedings under the 'AIDS' and 'media' keywords are many useful items that deal with issues of news gathering, information distribution, news writing, and reader education. Under these headings, some indication of the various materials that have addressed the relevant aspects of the media and HIV/AIDS is provided.

News gathering

The problem of relevant news sources for HIV/AIDS reports and reporting involves several classes of information providers. One possibility consists of alternative media like activist-produced video (Juhasz 1996). Specialist dedicated regional wire services figure as an alternative (Koudaogo and Sebgo 1996), while such organizations which also provide other services like databases feature strongly (Bertrand et al. 1996; Medina 2000). Several items stress the role that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can play as expert sources for journalists (De Bruyn 1994; Giacomini 1996; Moulik and Jana 2000). Aside from NGOs acting as sources, they can also act as commissioning agents for both freelance and employed journalists in the successful production of specialist articles for distribution to the press and other NGOs (Mohan 1996). A particularly relevant paper describes the methods that *Playboy* magazine in Brazil employed prepare a major article on men's risk behaviour (Lemes et al. 1994), detailing the wide variety of sources the magazine used to gather data for the article. The quality of news gathering about government policy and its implementation is the subject of a paper by A.R. Roda (1996), detailing an initiative carried out on AIDS reporting in the Philippines. Finally, a neglected issue that receives considerable coverage in the literature is the whole question of the media utilising people living with HIV and AIDS as sources (Schoofs 2000; Sergeant and Ariss 1993; Signorile and Voelcker 1989; Treurnicht 2000).

Information Distribution

Although information distribution can overlap with news gathering, the latter tends to depend somewhat on the information that is already in circulation and available to reporters. Where individual reporters (or the general cadre of journalists in media-starved regions) are misinformed because of a lack of available information, so their news gathering will tend to be limited. This leads to the general need for quality information about HIV/AIDS so that particular issues can be properly reported (Arredondo et al. 1989). An example of how this kind of information should be gathered and collated is the research into how media reached the married women of Bombay (Mumbai) (Chatterjee 1998). Getting this kind of data to the reporters at the coal face, however, can be difficult in areas like west Africa; to improve the quality of journalists' information about HIV/AIDS, therefore, information distribution in Nigeria was improved when local reporters formed a professional organization with the task of 'mobilising journalists to an awareness and actualisation of their role as behaviour change agents in the context of HIV/AIDS' (Falobi and Bamigbetan 2000). In a similar manner, a government project was initiated in South Africa to link media

professionals with HIV/AIDS activists and workers in order for 'social action to be documented, recognised and actively promoted in the news media' (Parker 2000). But partnerships need not be confined to media and government in the effort to improve information flows. In Cameroon, for example, local journalists and media workers formed a partnership with the NGO SidAlerte International which has improved the transfer of local news to international news organizations; raised the media profile of AIDS workers and activists, and of PWAs; and co-operative groups from the media, medical and NGO sectors have developed a database for media information (Talom et al. 1998).

News writing

Reporting on AIDS requires writing that is informative in ways that do not encourage 'fear and anger' (Lupton 1994). Similarly, media writing needs to avoid the earlier 'disarming lack of consensus among those people who can do the most to influence the spread of AIDS' that, in the early days of the epidemic, led the 'people at greatest risk for AIDS and for spreading the disease [to] distrust the accuracy and objectivity of the media' (Reardon and Richardson 1991). Thus there is an ongoing need for 'quality media coverage of AIDS depends on the presence of motivated and informed journalists in a country, and of the sensitisation of a range of personnel throughout the media hierarchy. The formation of new media networks on AIDS may have a powerful role to play in stimulating high quality reporting' (Foreman and Deane 1996). The quality of writing must, where necessary, confront and break away from attitudes encouraged by the reigning political order. In Bulgaria, for example, it took several years for media writing to move away from 'a latent repressiveness: only monogamous sex, only marital sex. This freedom without alternatives shaped an unfree, that is, irresponsible individual, who is motivated to act aggressively when the panic returns, e.g. the number of HIV-positive grows to an extent likely to be dangerous for everyone' (Anguelov and Deyanov 1990). Even in countries where state repression is not as open as was the case in Bulgaria, media should 'evolve their own models' to 'highlight linkages between policy, programmes and community perceptions' so that communities at risk can make the most of public policy (Chinai 1996). Initiatives to encourage reporters to avoid sensationalistic covering of AIDS which makes it difficult to make accurate information available are necessary, which should encompass audience research as a tool for educating reporters (Kitzinger et al. 1991). These can include special workshops initiated by government to bring media workers closer to PWAs and sex workers as a way of improving understanding of the epidemic (Hernandez and MacDonald 1991), or through the establishment of a dedicated resource and specialist training centre (Riyadi 2000). There are still areas of concern in the field of AIDS writing, for example the way news items stress the 'medical model' at the expense of the 'public health model', which leads to underexposure of information about, and the progress of, public initiatives for fighting AIDS (Westwood and Westwood 1999).

Media and Education

Materials relevant in this category can be seen to fall under three different classes: case studies, review studies, and analysis. In general the first class covers studies of the effectiveness of newspapers as education media in or for specific communities, regions or countries (Brashers et al. 1998; Duffues 1989; Hirose et al. 1996; Naryan 1996). Several other case studies have focused on the possibility that the regular media alone do not provide the necessary and sufficient means to change behaviour, and examine programmes or projects that have integrated newspapers and other media with broader educational and communications efforts (Convisser et al. 1991; Hartfield et

al. 1989; Lusakulira et al. 1989). An especially interesting case study, which looks at the particular issue of individuals suffering from AIDS panic and media coverage of AIDS, finds that 'the referral rates of AIDS panic cases were highest in the earlier months when the level of media activity was low and decreased during the months following intense publicity about AIDS' (Soni and Windgassen 1991). Among the review studies, most follow the general perception that media are an important influence in AIDS education and that research will reveal the best messages with which to change risk behaviour (Helguera et al. 1990; Nyazema and Machekanyanga 2000; Satomura et al. 2000). Others have reviewed findings that either anticipate or show a need for cross-media cooperation and the linking of media to other levels of communication (Gardner and Savelyeva 1994; Nakityo and Mugenyi 2000; Wellings and Field 1997). Items that principally analyse the educational effectiveness, or the audience reception, of media suggest that raising public awareness of AIDS-related issues requires more than just the right media message. Although the media have 'played a greater role in the AIDS epidemic than in the context of any previous health issue, the impact of the mass media is widely varied and imprecise,' despite the fact that 'most people learn nearly all they know about AIDS from newspapers, magazines, radio and television' (Netter and Brown 1992). Indeed, analysis of how health and other public officials have had to deal with public perceptions suggests further that 'the role of the mass media in determining individual attitudes to AIDS is also quixotic and often varied' (ibid), which gives some credence to the findings of the more limited project of Soni and Windgassen (1991). An historical analysis of European AIDS campaigns (Wellings and Field 1996) notes 'how difficult it was to put forth the messages to the general public when many of the images that had to be used seemed to be more appropriate for private rather than public viewing,' which we suggest is another indication that the emphasis on media as a measure against AIDS needs reviewing before newspapers can begin to influence matters decisively.

Regular publications specifically geared to the training of journalists in the reporting of HIV/AIDS were not identified. This is not to say, however, that there is no awareness of this need at a regional level, nor that efforts are not being made to address it. Among the materials available is the *AIDS Media Training Module* used in the University of Zimbabwe Media and Journalism curriculum (Gecau, Zhuwarara, Musa and Mutere, n.d.). This includes a complete division dealing with the ways that journalists can develop greater sensitivity towards the local dimension of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the African environment. This includes designing the package to 'build alternative world views into the dialogue' between media and citizen, 'thereby guaranteeing the balanced representation of perspectives' (Gecau et al.: 62).

A search of South African university and technikon-based journalism and media courses showed that the Rhodes Journalism School has made some provision for approaching HIV/AIDS reporting as a 'topic for discussion' among other professional and ethical issues.

FINDINGS

Reporting on HIV/AIDS is principally sourced from press releases, press conferences and wire services. The number of reports generated from newspapers' own inquiry and based on primary information sought out independently of official sources, falls far below the number generated on the initiative of instances outside the news room.

Items ranked by source

Source	N	Percentage
Govt: National	63	25%
NGO: National	18	7%
Organisations: Business	17	7%
Columnists	17	7%
Multisourced	16	6%
Statutory Organisations	16	6%
Universities	16	6%
International Organisations: UN	15	6%
Govt: International	12	5%
Govt: Provincial/Local	12	5%
Research Report:	12	5%
NGO: Provincial/Local	9	4%
Individuals:	8	3%
Political Party	8	3%
Organisations: Other	6	2%
Hospital:	5	2%
Media Organisation	3	1%
NGO: International	2	1%
	255	100%

A sample of 25% of the reviewed articles served as a basis for analysis by predominant source of information. This analysis reveals that national government is by far the most prominent source of information, with a quarter (25%) of all articles sourced in this way, and government (including provincial, and local) making up almost a third (30%) of the sources of articles. In contrast, national NGOs served as sources for only 7% of articles, and with provincial/local NGOs included the total was 11%.

A large proportion of all articles were derived through government events/junkets and through spokespersons. The analysis of sources overall also indicates only a small proportion of articles are sourced through specific motivations of journalists or their publications. At best, such motivation was reflected in the proportion of articles by columnists who had commented on HIV/AIDS (7%).

Interestingly, the vast majority of articles were not written by dedicated health reporters, but included staff reporters and political reporters, amongst others. Wire services accounted for over 20% of articles published.

It follows that when sources are scarce, stories are scarce. This was particularly noticeable during the first part of the Jan-Feb 2000 sample. In the period 1-10 Jan the frequency of HIV/AIDS related items was a fraction of the frequency during the remainder of the sample period, and similarly in relation to the Sep-Oct 1999 sample.

Clearly, when the government, business and other media liaison and public relations departments are on vacation, news items dry up accordingly.

It is interesting to explore some specific examples of focus areas of reporting. For example:

- The total emphasis on ministerial or departmental awareness initiatives, for example the Minister of Education's announcement about a planned HIV/AIDS awareness campaign in schools and on campuses;
- The reporting emphasis on state provision of anti-retroviral drugs;
- The twin series of reports on both the issue of rape and 'rape insurance' and the Mother-to-child Transmission (MTCT) debate.

Kader Asmal's Education Initiative

Although this story only made headlines in nine instances, these all occurred on the same day (2 September 1999) in titles across the country (*Pretoria News, Cape Argus, Sowetan, Eastern Province Herald, Daily News, Natal Witness, Burger, Daily Dispatch, and Citizen*). There was no follow-up in any of these titles, whether in the form of information solicited from educational institutions, or as commentary or feature articles based on the adoption or debate about this kind of policy. However, it is worth noting that the *Mail and Guardian* (which did not cover Asmal's announcement) did produce a feature article on the extent of peer-based learning about sex and sexuality in schools (3 September 1999).

The Anti-Retroviral issue

This story recurs throughout the sample, but on three occasions gave rise to widespread reporting and highlights the relationship between reporting and the profile and origin of the news source. On the first occasion, the State President made a statement calling into question the safety of the anti-retroviral drug AZT (29 October 1999). Despite this issue being well understood by the medical and AIDS community, the headlines in five of the six articles that day made no reference to the scientific position (*Business Day, Cape Argus, Natal Witness, Daily News and Die Burger*). Also, only one headline mentioned the relevant drug company's response to the statement – the East London *Daily Dispatch*. On the following days, one story appeared in *Beeld* about the ongoing legal argument about the patent rights issue concerning anti-retroviral generic drugs, amongst others (30 October 1999). Then on Sunday 31 October 1999 three titles carried articles that effectively continued the response of 29 October (*Sunday Times, Sunday Argus and Sunday Independent*).

Thereafter, sporadic reports on the issue of AZT appeared (*Business Day* 12 January 2000; *Rapport* 16 January 2000; *Business Day* 18 January 2000; *Daily Dispatch* 20 January 2000), all of which reported rejection of the claims made against the drug. Then the Minister of Health announced that she was unable to accept the findings of an investigation into the safety of AZT, triggering a six articles in the newspapers on 9 February 2000 (*Daily Dispatch, Daily News, Natal Witness, Star, Citizen, Evening Post*). On 10 February 2000, the *Pretoria News* carried the story for the first time, and the *Evening Post* carried a story on the response to the announcement by a non-governmental health body. The very last item to cover AZT in our selection appeared on 24 February, when the *Natal Witness* carried a story headlined 'Miss Universe calls for wider use of AZT.'

Rape and MTCT

These two issues are intertwined with those we have examined above, but the newspapers dealt with these in a rather different fashion. There were, needless to say, plenty of reports based on government announcements; much of the anti-retroviral debate centred not on the provision of drugs to sufferers generally, but on the issue of prophylactic provision for rape survivors and as a measure against mother-to-child transmission (MTCT) of HIV. On the other hand, these were issues where some attention was paid to other sources. There were three occasions when this issue received attention in more than one title on the same day.

Beginning with a story in the *Mercury* of 8 September 1999, by far the most attention was paid to the state's announcement that consideration was being given to making HIV testing compulsory for suspected rapists and other sex offenders. This story attracted eleven articles in other titles on 9 September (*Citizen*, *Star*, *Sowetan*, *Business Day*, *Beeld*, *Eastern Province Herald*, *Daily Dispatch*, *Cape Times*, *Volksblad*, *Burger Eastern Cape*, *Burger Western Cape*). After this the story appeared just once more, in the *Sowetan* of 18 February 2000.

The second story that attracted such concerted attention was the announcement by an insurance company of the introduction of a policy for women, which made provision for HIV prophylaxis in the event of policy-holders suffering rape: twelve stories appeared in six titles on 12 October 1999 (*Pretoria News*, *Natal Witness*, *Cape Times*, *Star*, *Eastern Province Herald*, *Citizen*, *Mercury*). On 13 October the *Star* carried two items, one commentary and one feature. Finally, the *Daily News* of Durban carried a critical commentary piece on the issue.

The MTCT issue attracted considerable attention throughout January 2000. Although much attention was focused on the more general debate that raged about the State President's interventions (see above), this issue is treated separately because of the main focus of the story. The ongoing skirmishes between the Ministry of Health and an Eastern Cape employee (Dr. Costa Gazi) who just co-incidentally was also the Pan Africanist Congress spokesperson on health, provided stories that ran throughout the second of the sample periods. Four stories appeared on 11 January 2000 (*Business Day*, *Burger*, *Beeld*, *Daily Dispatch*), with the *Evening Post* providing a follow-up on 12 January 2000. Further stories relating to the relationship between Dr. Gazi and the Ministry, as well as his comments on state policy, appeared in *Rapport* (16 January); *Sowetan* (20 January); *Daily Dispatch* (21 January); *Pretoria News* (21 January and 4 February).

These sample issues indicate that reporting in a majority of newspaper titles did not incorporate a significant effort at following up on previously announced official initiatives. It is noteworthy that the efforts of the East London-based *Evening Post* provided items based on follow-up material. Except for the focus on Dr. Gazi, who it appears the newspapers had clearly developed as an attractive and somewhat iconoclastic news source, little effort at sustained writing on the issues was produced. The selected issues could provide much material for sustained research and reporting on the social, behavioural, and cultural impacts of both prophylaxis and the withholding thereof, but no such effort seems to have been made.

Frequency of selected high-profile sourced items to overall coverage

	September 1999	October 1999	January 2000	February 2000
Asmal's Initiative	6	0	1	0
Anti-retrovirals	1	9	4	12
Rape and MTCT	12	10	9	2

Emphasis and orientation

Much emphasis is laid on the efficacy or otherwise of state interventions in the HIV/AIDS pandemic, with a corresponding lack of emphasis on interventions in which the state is not involved. Although there are reasons to consider the press as a sort of watchdog on authority, this is not the sole function of media. Many non-governmental interventions are newsworthy, and there are some that the press do indeed cover.

Reports (or their headlines) occasionally failed to reflect information accurately – for example, statistical data about demographic projections. In one instance, a report detailing project drop in national *population growth* rate was headlined to suggest that the statistic reflected a comparable drop in *total population* (Business Day 17 January 2000). On other occasions, monetary values were reported differently in different titles (see for example Stally 1998:11-12). Although this was not a prevalent problem, the fact that it did occur on a few occasions does suggest that newspapers do not always follow up on reported statistics or expenditures. Further research may well identify whether this problem is a result of reporting, sub-editing or other functional shortcomings when it occurs. It must be also be accepted however, that in statistical research generally, and forecasting (including AIDS impact) analyses in particular, researchers are often at variance and there are most certainly no agreed upon standardised numbers. Equally, statistics such as the ante-natal statistics are a poor reflection of HIV-prevalence nationally, and should be viewed critically.

There is a continued and perhaps growing reliance among newspapers on wire-service outputs, public-relations communication, or official press-releases for many of their items. Clearly there is a culture of passive news reception in South Africa's newspapers, and this reflects a growing trend globally. This trend does not just exemplify the sometimes over-exaggerated hold that advertisers have over newspapers. In addition to commercial pressures, there is the additional *financial* pressure of shareholders, themselves usually large corporate financial entities. The consequent need for financial efficiency has apparently encouraged a trend towards centralization of news services and low cost 'news' development that is generally antithetical to investigative reporting.

These trends have been noticeable in the operation of Independent Newspapers' coverage, where local titles in the Western Cape or KwaZulu-Natal frequently carry headline items prepared in centralized newsrooms in Gauteng. Fewer journalists seem to be working outside the editorial premises and actually seeking out and going to the people who are active in newsworthy contexts. Especially with a regional and international issue like HIV/AIDS, analysis suggests that far more can be done.

For example, most titles carried the an announcement by Cosatu that its leadership had undertaken to undergo voluntary HIV testing as an example to the leadership of other organizations. No further news was generated on this, most probably because there was no newsdesk for which researchers keep track of what follows from such announcements, so that editors can assign reporters to engage the story. There is no indication that any reporter actually contacted Cosatu leadership to ask what had

come of the tests, or even whether the tests had been carried out at all.

Although there is a cost involved with dedicated AIDS journalism, it does not follow that this cost must fall on shareholders' potential dividends or earnings. Most large newspapers have specialized motoring supplements in-house. In these instances, there is plenty of advertising to be had from the motor industry, precisely because specialist motoring supplements are likely to attract a significant number of readers who are in the market for some or other motoring commodity (or motor vehicles or spares).

Running a specialised HIV/AIDS 'desk' may well require some above-average marketing, yet this should not be an insuperable challenge. When major commercial groups like Pick'n'Pay, or strategic sectors like the gold mining industry, can make the effort to provide anti-retroviral treatment to staff who are rape survivors and to seropositive workers respectively, then there is some reason to expect that they and/or other sectors may find supporting dedicated commercial media reporting on HIV/AIDS will have a similar marketing effect.

The implications are discussed below, but for the present it is worth emphasizing that the pandemic is carrying on independently of what newspapers or news sources do about it. HIV/AIDS and the associated complications, personal, social, cultural and economic, are realities that do not depend on media reports to make their impacts. People who read the newspapers, and those who cannot read at all, are equally at risk; it is vital that reporting strategies include following this reality independently of what official and other sources say.

There is a strong reliance on official sources in government and in commerce and industry for newsworthy stories. Based on the review of sources of information the non-governmental and community-based sectors are under-represented in terms of their value as sources. Clearly however, such organizations do not always have the resources and/or expertise to make relevant information proactively available to the media, and this contributes to their lack of profile. The necessity for active 'public relations' is clearly demonstrated in the contrasting case of businesses and unions. For example, some 7% of HIV/AIDS articles were business sourced, whilst considerably less than 1% were union sourced.

Where titles made independent efforts to report AIDS, the volume and quality of reporting is correspondingly higher, with the quite natural accompanying potential for some level of misrepresentation under pressure of deadlines or because of the unavailability of balancing sources for comment.

The Independent Group's *Reconstruct* supplement, and frequent dedicated articles in the *Mail and Guardian's* 'Monitor' section, seem to be the only instances of newspaper groups in which some independent specialized attention is paid to the broader contextual implications of the HIV/AIDS issue. Because of the reach of the Independent Newspapers Group, however, the *Reconstruct* supplement tends to respond only to those issues that the supplement's news room responds to. Although the items that appear there are often representative of the broader geography of southern Africa, it remains one national title distributed to local titles in the group. Credit must however also be given to titles such as the Sowetan and Cape Times who have utilised openly HIV positive columnists to highlight HIV/AIDS issues.

With regard to more specialised focus, it is therefore pertinent to ask whether the various local Independent Group titles should not establish local HIV/AIDS desks to round off the national and regional coverage provided by *Reconstruct*. Similar reservations could be made about the *Mail and Guardian's* 'Monitor' section, although this title now also carries a regular weekly 'HIV/AIDS Barometer' summary on its review page.

Press organisation factors

The findings indicate that the general news gathering and news writing practices of the large South African corporate newspapers have some way to go in shaking off the effects of their earlier monopolistic organization. Using Graeme Murdock's (1982: 118-150) conception of corporate control, white males tend to continue dominating the media industry at the level of *operational control*. However, developments since 1994 have given rise to many changes in the arrangements for *allocative control*. Corporate media ownership now rests not only in a significant minority shareholding of black empowerment institutions, but there is also a significant level of foreign ownership.

This has shifted the political focus of print media away from the predominantly *ideological* editorial strategies that marked news reporting under apartheid, toward a more *pragmatic* approach. Titles no longer operate within large multi-sectoral monopolies, as occurred for example with the relationships between SA Associated Newspapers and the Argus Group, on the one hand, and the South African gold mining industry on the other. The other notorious monopoly was that whereby most Afrikaans-language newspapers were owned by a single major insurance company, Sanlam.

With the 'unbundling' of these monopolistic cross-ownership arrangements after 1994, media groups do not have the ideological comfort zone that their owners' profits provided for them and within which they could take more or less (un)popular ideological editorial standpoints in their reporting strategies (see, for example, Tomaselli et al. 1987; Tomaselli and Louw 1991; Louw 1993). Under this broad, if sketchily described, dispensation, titles in the English-language press largely followed a strategy of opposing apartheid on liberal representative government principles, while their Afrikaans-language counterparts tended to more or less slavishly occupy the ruling party's ideological standpoint.

This ideological climate changed when apartheid officially ended in 1994¹. News resources have become more ideologically homogeneous, in the sense that there are fewer alternative political and economic news services to those offered by the major international wire services. In South Africa, as in Central and South America, there had been a vibrant alternative press sector. Newspapers, wire and distribution services emerged to serve a highly pluralistic sector that presented a predominantly collectivist viewpoint (see Tomaselli and Louw 1991). As the international support for this alternative sector has shifted to the state, so the titles and wire services have either collapsed or had to reinvent themselves as more commercial and less collective operations necessitating a different approach to the political economy of reading (Tomaselli and Shepperson 1999).

The upshot of all this has been that news gathering has suffered from the streamlining and downsizing of newsrooms in the major daily and weekly titles. The average journalist has fewer options when building his or her sources, as the alternative news agencies either collapsed or became absorbed into larger press organizations. However, the experienced personnel from these agencies have not disappeared, and some have continued to provide alternative copy on matters of general interest as freelancers, while titles like the *Mail and Guardian* have repositioned themselves as quality alternative newspapers that retain an independent

1. Since the early 1980s, the National Party government had been quietly scrapping several of the laws that had received sustained ridicule and opprobrium both locally from the English media and internationally. Among the earliest of these manoeuvres was the repeal of the Mixed Marriages Act, and of the notorious Section 16 of the Immorality Act. Shortly thereafter, a successful court challenge against the Group Areas Act led to the changing of residence rules for black people in urban areas. From that time onwards, tinkering with legislation in the guise of 'reform' chipped away at statutory apartheid, but it was only from 1994-95 that complete constitutional change occurred with the election of the ANC to power.

critical edge.

Structural response

Beyond the immediate needs of an individual nation as addressed in Gecau et al., a Southern African initiative (under the auspices of UNAIDS and SAfAIDS) in 1998 produced a report (Stally 1998) that offers a summary of the discussions at a special workshop for heads of media training institutions held in Harare on 9-11 February 1998. Among the recommendations is the suggestion that organizations active in the HIV/AIDS field should co-operate with media freedom and rights bodies like the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA). A further recommendation is that media institutions offer sabbaticals for working journalists, so that individuals can get access to updated techniques and methods they can take back to their jobs (Stally, 1998).

It is not difficult for journalists to attend some form of sabbatical training, provided one does not look too hard at what is on offer. There is a plethora of dot-com journalism training companies on the Internet, few of which seem to offer more than the general journalism basics designed to attract students instead of turn out polished graduates. Yet there are additional or further education and training facilities available. On the basis of the findings of the SAfAIDS workshop, for example, the Institute for Advanced Journalism in Johannesburg has offered courses on HIV/AIDS reporting, with the most recent offering being their July 18 - 19, 2000, 'Human rights - HIV/AIDS' module. Another training initiative is the distance-learning Internet course offered under the auspices of UNAIDS and the World Bank Institute, an element of which will cover economic journalism on 'particular issues, ranging from combatting HIV/AIDS to diversifying exports.'

We were unable to locate any tertiary-level courses regularly on offer for working journalists at any of the South African institutions. However, the NSJ Centre in Maputo, Mozambique (www.sortmoz.com/nsjcentre, formerly the Nordic-SADC Journalism Centre), offers further training not only for journalists, but also for media management and marketing practitioners. NSJ has recently undergone a change of ownership, with regional news and monitoring body MISA a prominent partner. At the time of preparing this report, we were unable to contact NSJ as communications with Mozambique were down; the new contact details after the change of ownership were not yet available.

Conclusions

There is clearly no shortage of mainstream reporting on HIV/AIDS, but at the same time there are shortcomings in the focus and spread of the issues reported on. There are two distinct ways that newspapers can address the kind of problems identified in the present research. On the one hand, individual companies can take steps to establish specialist HIV/AIDS reporting desks. These could be either sub-units of existing health desks; or special desks in their own right.

Either of these options will require investment but, as noted above, the corporate world has taken initiatives that suggest that some larger companies might be open to persuasion for covering some of the costs. As already noted above, such a desk could operate on much the same lines as the motoring desks of most large titles. On the other hand, newspapers (and media in general) could make use of the various in-service or professional upgrading training options available.

On the basis of this research it is strongly suggested that the following recommendations in the Workshop Report (Stally 1998) be examined with regard to implementation:

- that organizations active in the HIV/AIDS field should co-operate with media freedom and rights bodies. Among these are, for example, the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) and this kind of collaboration would enable the focus of HIV/AIDS reporting to expand “to promote media understanding ... [for example] if a story is spiked, then the spiking becomes a story” (Stally 1998: 29); and
- that media institutions offer sabbaticals for working journalists, so that individuals can get access to updated techniques and methods they can take back to their jobs (Stally 1998: 29). It is not difficult for journalists to attend some form of sabbatical training. On the basis of the findings of the SAfAIDS workshop, for example, the Institute for Advanced Journalism (IAJ) in Johannesburg has offered courses on HIV/AIDS reporting. The most recent offering was the IAJ “Human rights – HIV/AIDS” module (July 18 - 19, 2000). Another training initiative is the distance-learning Internet course offered under the auspices of UNAIDS and the World Bank Institute, an element of which will cover economic journalism on “particular issues, ranging from combatting HIV/AIDS to diversifying exports.”

In reviewing the data gathered for this research it is clear that there is a great deal more that can be said about the nature of reporting HIV/AIDS, and the necessities and orientations of this within the context of a life-compromising health issue. Clearly publications in South Africa have shifted from an ideological orientation where particular social issues and agendas are pursued (for example, reporting and analysing the manifestations of apartheid), to a situation socially oriented ideology is less emphasised. Interestingly, in the context of apartheid, the myriad of laws governing the political sphere of communication forced reporters and photographers to operate at grassroots level, whereas the current dispensation is more tolerant of formal political focus, and thus grassroots emphases seem to have been lost. This is not to say however, that the press has adopted a critical position vis-a-vis HIV/AIDS, for clearly such a position is taken only in a few instances.

It would clearly be of benefit for media formations to explore their role in the response to the epidemic, and particularly to critically examine a role that could be played. It is hoped that this research provides some direction for such exploration.

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