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Research Article

ROLE OF MEDIA IN PROMOTING PUBLIC HEALTH A MIX METHOD STUDY IN ISLAMABAD

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Abstract:

Background: To expose high proportions of large populations, Mass media campaigns are widely used. This research study was conducted to explore the role of media including print and electronic regarding their health promotion of masses. Some 'life threatening report' or some sudden outbreak of disease is considered as Health news.

Objective: To determine the contributions of journalists of Islamabad in the last 06 months in health related issues and the barriers faced by the journalists in promoting public health.

Methodology: Primary data collection was done through a semi structured questionnaire using the mix method study design which was distributed among 62 journalists of Islamabad through convenient sampling. The study was completed in two [02] months. Data analysis was done through SPSS version 20 and transcription and thematic content analysis for qualitative part. In inferential analysis students t-test and while chi-square or fisher's exact test for grouped data was carried out. 95% confidence interval with a significance level of p-value <0.05 is used for all analysis.

Results: A semi structured questionnaire was used. Qualitative study was also used to get the in depth results along with quantitative part. When it came towards contributions in health promotion in various fields e.g. in health policy, Global health, healthy life styles and exercises etc. These areas have got much coverage. There are different stake holders who play their roles and take initiative for health related programs on media. Some important facts came forward about reporting of certain diseases, and this research study showed that most of them have been frequently reported. Polio 82%, HIV aids 74%, vector born [dengue] 73%. Diarrheal diseases 73%, as most frequently reported diseases Diabetes, family abuse/violence & environmental issues have been reported too. Electronic media has talked and shown a lot about smoking and exercises. Print Media has written a lot about obesity, child health, female health, cold and fevers as well in their weekly regular supplements too. So far mental health, stress, depression, and cancers have been the areas less covered

Conclusion: Mass media campaigns can produce positive changes or prevent negative changes in health-related behaviors across large populations. Over all the mass media, is an effective way to persuade target audiences to adopt new behaviors, and to remind them of critical information.

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INTRODUCTION:

Health education is incorporated in public health programs only as a public relations expeditions [1]. There is no single interpretation of health communication. "Health communication, like health education, is an approach which attempts to change a set of behaviors in a large-scale target audience regarding a specific problem in a predefined period of time"[2]. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention defines health communication as "the study and use of communication strategies to inform and influence individual and community decisions that enhance health [3]."

Considering the wide scope of health communication, scholars, practitioners, and policy makers' perceive the connotation of health communication to public health [5]. Much of the public's understanding of health and health policy is not from their direct experience [6]. Media and computer technology affect the healthcare system and individuals [7]. Clearly, media representations of health and illness develops understanding of the experience of illness, health, and healthcare policy-making [8]. "Media can be a conveyance instrument for getting the right information to the right people in the right way at the right time to promote personal change" and that "they can be a cariole for increasing participation in communal and constitutional life and social capital to promote social change" [9]. In today's media rich landscape, and especially with the advancements of Information and Communication Technologies [ICTs], increasing attempts are underway to consolidate mass media strategies into health education, promotion, and disease prevention practices [10]. Despite the fact that journalists recognize the need for specially designed training on health issues, there is lack of such guidance [11]. Journalists believe they need more training to acquire definite skills related to assessing conflicts of interest, interpreting medical research reports, and understanding demography so as to evaluate specific health topics, such as medical research and science, health policy, and business/economics of health care [12].

Previous researches have shown that, regardless of their objective asperity, diseases receiving greater broadcasting in the media are deliberated to be more serious of a disease than those receiving less coverage [13]. A range of computerized health promotion practices have surfaced in the digital era [14]. Journalists are key patron to health literacy—that is, people's capacity to access, assess, and use information for health [15]. Poor health literacy leads to poor health choices, more illnesses, higher health costs, and death [16]. Journalists 'training

rarely focuses on public health whereas public health training programs and systems give low preference to the role of journalists as public health educators [17]. Several views were drawn out in accordance from the study like current training of Indian journalists is dominated by private public relations companies, which have limited understanding of journalism and public health[18]. They accentuate technical skills rather than development of content. Inspections are more about spectacular headlines than thorough inquiry. Public health advocates can never compete fiscal with tobacco industry, but, as has been shown in many developed and some developing markets, media and health professionals can work together to advocate for, and secure commitment to, preventive and corrective action [19, 20]. The prevalence of diabetes in Sri Lanka has increased three-fold over a decade [21, 22]. Much of the focus of public health communication has been on bringing about particular change with relatively little attention to changing public stratagem through mass media [23].

Media can play an important role in promoting public health. It can work through direct and indirect approaches to change the behavior of the whole population. There has been recent evidence that developed countries are applying these theories and in many countries use of this phenomenon has generated very good results. This approach is in its nascent stages in Pakistan and there is need in the current era to indulge the media personnel to give health information to masses.

Objectives:

- To assess the level of knowledge of journalists of Islamabad regarding health related issues.
- To determine the contributions of journalists of Islamabad in the last 06 months in health related issues.
- To identify the barriers faced by journalists of Islamabad in promoting public health.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

Using the mix method study design i.e. quantitative and the qualitative part journalists/media persons of Islamabad were selected as target population because health literacy rate of Pakistan is very low [26%] and general population does not know much about health or role of media in health promotion. Study was conducted in 02 months after getting approval from Ethical Review Board of HSA. A semi structured questionnaire was developed and disturbed among the journalists/media personnel i.e. sixty two [62] questionnaires were filled by the journalists. The sample size was calculated using the

below mentioned formula. Convenient sampling technique was used to identify the target population.

$$n = \frac{Z_{\frac{1-\alpha}{2}}^2 * P[1 - P]}{e^2} \quad [3.1]$$

For qualitative part transcription and thematic content analysis was used. For quantitative part SPSS version 20 was used.

RESULTS:

While assessing the role of media in health promotion and the barriers in its way, certain

important aspects were revealed. Data was gathered from 11 different media Organizations. The Results showed that males are in higher percentage than females in Journalism in Pakistan. [Table 1]

The level of education is most important thing to survive in the journalism field. About 79% of the total participants were Master's degree holders and 8.1% are having doctorate degree. [Table 2]

The cadre of media personnel between ages 30-40 showed more interest in health sector reporting. About 41.9% are from <30 age group and about 46.8% are from 30-40 years of age group. [Table 3]

Table 1: Frequency and Percentage distribution of Gender, Marital Status and Media Organization.

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	
Gender	Male	43	69.4
	Female	19	30.6
Marital Status	Single	28	45.2
	Married	34	54.8
Media Organization	News One	6	9.7
	The Nations	8	12.9
	Airwaves Media	3	4.8
	Radio Pakistan	2	3.2
	PTV	14	22.6
	Geo News	8	12.9
	Dawn News	4	6.5
	Roze TV	2	3.2
	Bol News	3	4.8
	ARY Network	6	9.7
	Dunya News	6	9.7
Total	62	100.0	

Table 2: Level of education, functional area and designation of journalists

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	
Level of Education	Bachelors	8	12.9
	Masters	49	79
	Doctorate	5	8.1
	Total	62	100
Functional Area	Programming	4	6.5
	Broadcast	42	67.7
	Print	9	14.5
	News Reporter	5	8.1
	Radio	2	3.2
	Total	62	100
Designation	Producer	18	29
	Director	2	3.2
	Special Correspondent	7	11.3
	Anchor Person	15	24.2
	Staff Reporter	9	14.5
	Crime Reporter	2	3.2
	Reporter	9	14.5
	Total	62	100

Table 3: Age distribution of journalists, years of experience and journalistic production

Variables	Frequency	Percentage [%]	
Age	≤30	26	41.9
	31-40	29	46.8
	41-50	5	8.1
	>51	2	3.2
	Total	61	100
Year of Experience	<8 years	34	54.8
	9-16 years	22	35.5
	17-24	3	4.8
	25-32	2	3.2
	33-40	1	1.6
	Total	62	100
Journalist Production	Health reporter/editor/producer	20	32.3
	Journalist who occasionally reports on health issues	22	35.5
	Journalists who has never reported on health issues, but would be interested in the filed	17	27.4
	Journalist who has never reported on health issues, with no interest in the filed	3	4.8
	Total	62	100

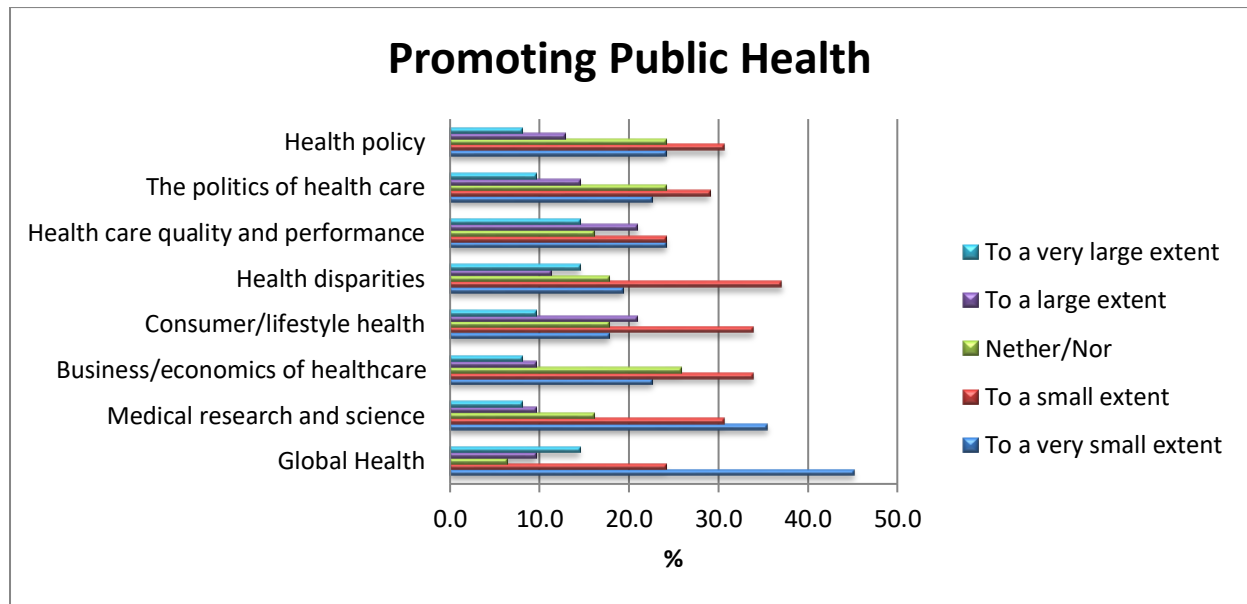


Figure 1 Contributions in health promotion

Contribution in health promotion in last 06 months

Association between last 06 months contributions and initiative for those contributions shows that 38 % journalists said that they had done health related programs during the last 06 months. [Table 4] Impact of those programs couldn't be assessed so far because they don't have any follow-up method to

assess that. Somehow it's their general perception that it created positive impact and awareness among masses.

From the 39 % of respondents who have done any health related programs in the past 06 months, about 29.6 % of journalists figured that the impact of their program was to a large extent i.e. 52.4%. [Table 5]

Table 4: Programs done on health issues and impact of health related programs

Variable	Positive percentage	Negative percentage
Have you done any program on health related issues in last 06 months	39%	61%
Impact of health related program	34%	66%

Table 5: Percentage of impact of health related programs on aired in the last 06 months.

Variable	What was the impact of that program?		
	To a small extent	Neither/Nor	To a large extent
Have you done any program on health related issue in the last 06 months	38.1%	9.5%	52.4%

Table 6: Chi-Square tests in the contribution of health promotion

Chi-Square Tests			
Variables	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. [2-sided]
Pearson Chi-Square	6.730 ^a	2	.035
Likelihood Ratio	6.261	2	.044
Linear-by-Linear Association	.690	1	.406
N of Valid Cases	24		

The probability of the chi-square test statistic [chi-square=6.730] was $p=0.035$, less than or equal to the alpha level of significance of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. That means hypothesis that "impact of the program" is related to "doing program" is supported by this analysis. [Table 6]

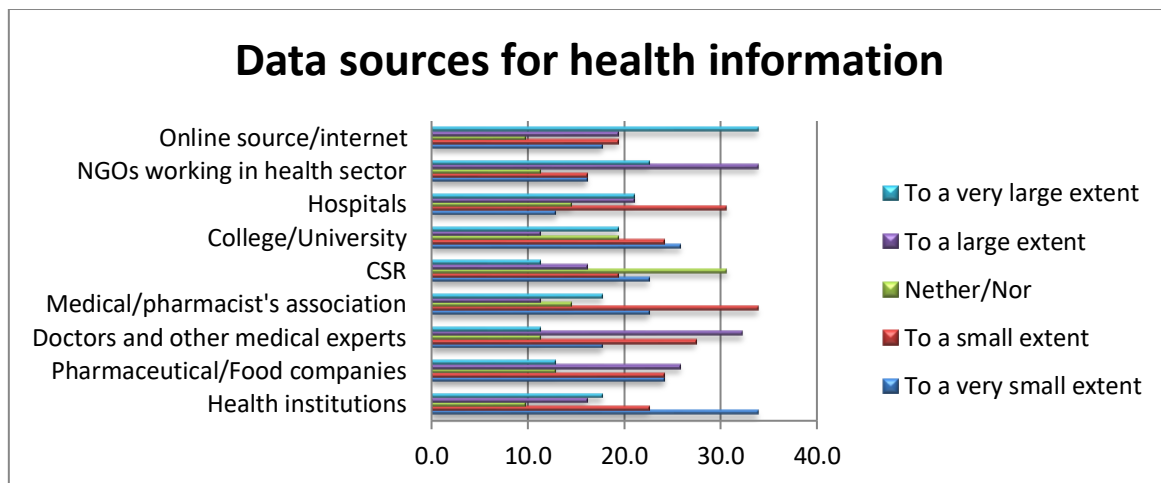


Figure 2 Percentage of various sources of information gathering regarding health related issues

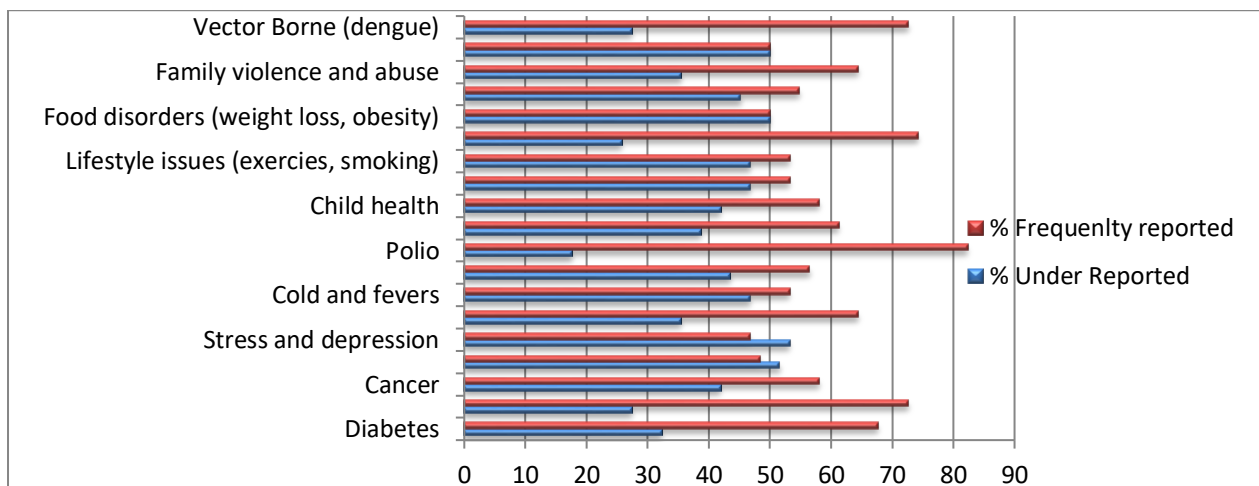


Figure 3 Under-reported and frequently-reported health topics

Barriers in Promotion of Public Health:

Further assessment of self-perceived reporting skills, showed that to a small extent, journalists consider themselves skilled in evaluating statistic in a health research. To a large extent they produce balanced and authentic news with complete description of social context of health research. [Fig. 4]

It was revealed that to a small extent, journalists' let experts' to evaluate the health news before it gets published in the paper. While media organizations do contact health institution to larger extent before broadcasting any health related event or news. [Fig. 5]

Most of the respondents [46%] identified that the production of health related programs is affected by funding or sponsorship to a small extent. [Fig. 6]

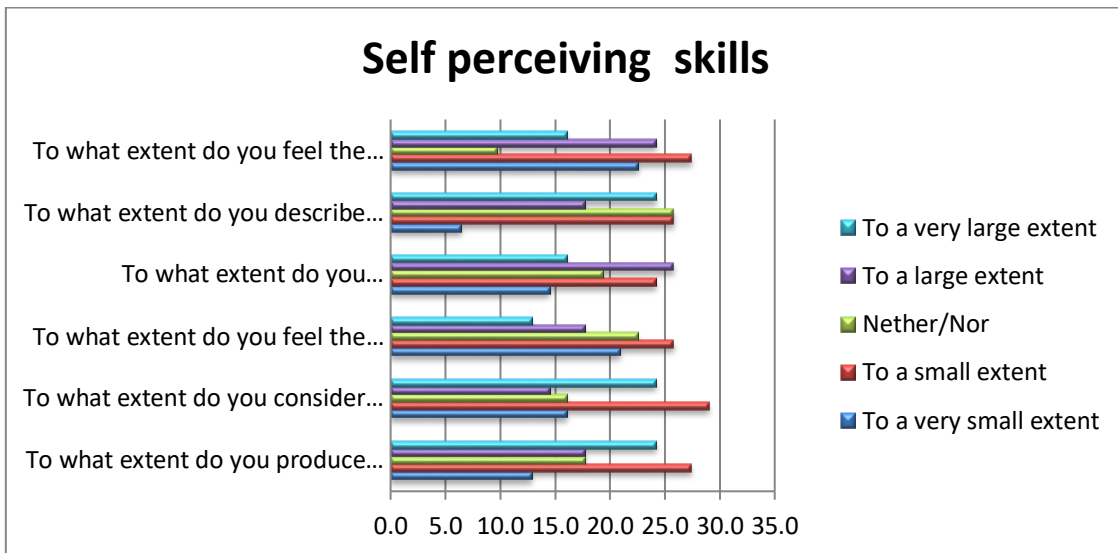


Figure 4 The percentage of journalist's perceived skills in reporting health issues.

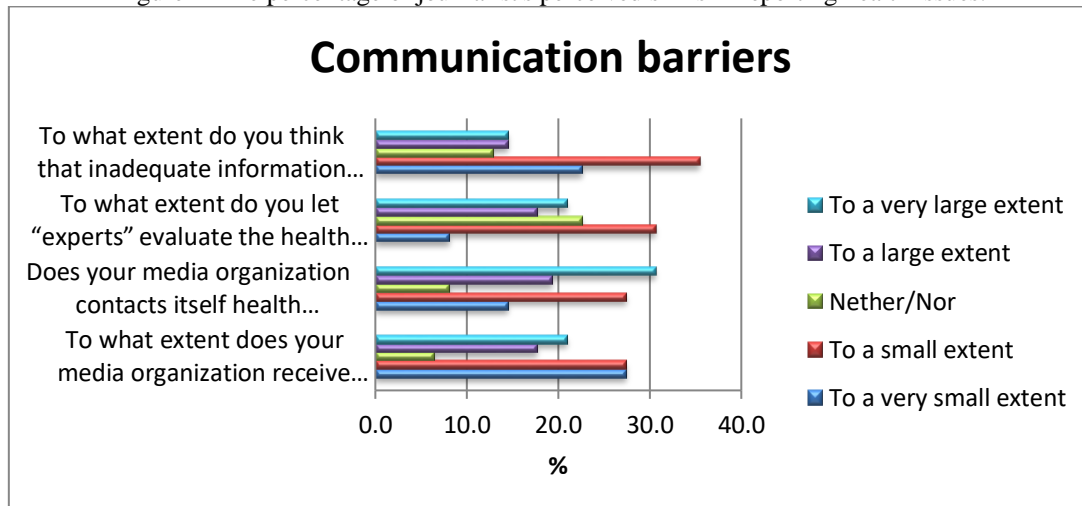


Figure 5: The communication barriers in reporting health issues.

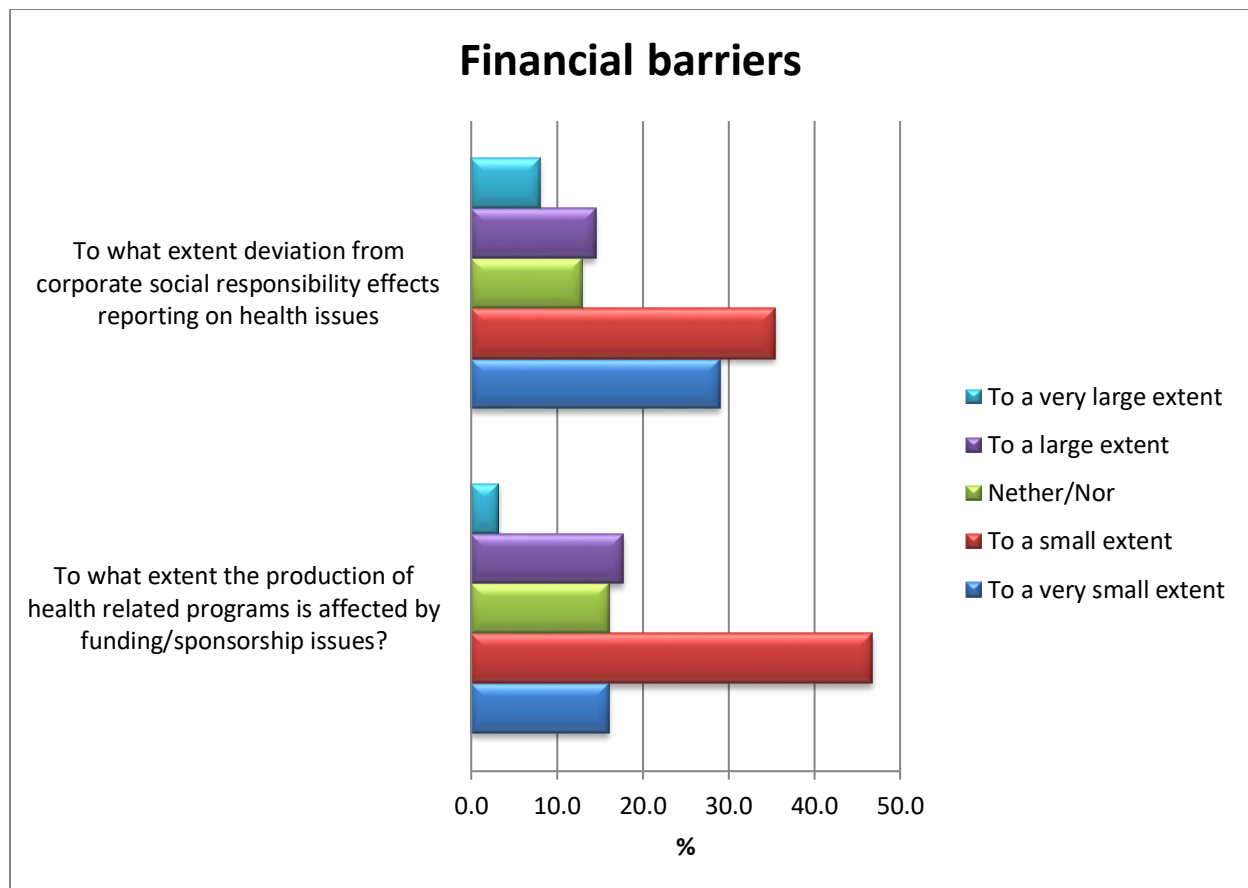


Figure 6: The financial barriers faced by Journalistic.

For the open ended questions 1st transcription and then content thematic analysis was done after making nodes, sub nodes, and then deriving themes from them.

NODES		SUB-NODES	THEMES
What counts as health news?	•	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Life threatening report/event Related with health Reports about deficiencies of hospitals No answers 	Significance of health news
Reasons for under-reporting of health issues?	•	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of interest of public Less knowledge More coverage of politics Efficiently/ frequently reported Lack of interest of stake holders Limited time 	Bottle necks as a consequence under-reporting health issues
Barriers	•	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No answer No barrier Lack of interest of stake holders Corruption Less interest of community/ people Lessened responsibility Less awareness Lack of services and mobility issues 	Hindrance of Media in reporting about health news
how can we bridge the gap b/w media and health professionals or health actors	•	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no gap Health sector must be corruption free More financing Focus on print media Frequent reporting done Role of health sector 	Way forward to create a tie among media and health actors
Impact of media coverage on attitudes and policy makers	•	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive Negative No result 	Does media has some influence?
Comments / suggestions			Enabling factors

Table 6: Nodes, sub-nodes and themes for qualitative analysis

Below mentioned five [05] themes describe the qualitative analysis of the research study

Theme 1: Significance of health news:

Most of the respondents gave the opinion of some news related with health. The next important reply was some 'life threatening report 'or some sudden outbreak of disease is considered as Health news. Some of the respondents had a consensus on general knowledge about health being considered as health news. Many of the respondents weren't having any opinion to be shared regarding the significance of health news.

Themes 2: Bottlenecks of under- reporting health issues:

When inquired about reasons for under reporting of health issues, then most of the media representatives had an opinion that there isn't any issue relevant to this. They said media has reported regularly and efficiently where ever and whenever it is needed. Media has played its role well there is no under reporting kind of thing and for media it is not difficult to report any issue. they one report when it is worth to do that more over it is technically not possible to do health reporting all the time. Moreover, the next important reply from media representatives was about less interest of public. It's not demand of public to report health issues all the time. Technically it's not possible particularly when it comes to entertainment channel or some other print media they have got limited slots for different things. Health is not the mere issue. Few of them stated that if there is under reporting then the reason is perhaps more slots of politics. It gets more coverage and space. Few left behind with their reservation that it is not necessary for media to take the responsibility for reporting health issues. Medical or health research centers should do it on their behalf through different capacities.

Theme 3: Hindrance of media in reporting about health news:

When views were taken about the barriers faced by media personals then most of the respondents didn't give any answer. Many others were having a strong opinion that there are no barriers, health news have been frequently, effectively and immediately reported whenever needed. Rest of the responsibility relies upon government to create awareness among masses through several other ways. Some respondents stated that sometimes our social culture and norms play a role as barrier. Few others claimed that prevailing corruption all around is the culprit for many issues which shows the decreased sense of responsibility. Few others said that perhaps there is lack of interest of stakeholders while few had a response for blaming community or public in regard

to this. Their less interest sometimes could be the barrier.

Theme 4: Way forward to create a tie among media and health actors:

In response of a question how can we bridge the gap between media and health actors then most of the media representatives stated that in their opinion there is no gap. Government can do all even on its behalf. Even media has reported about many issues like discrepancies in health department and hospitals but there isn't much response from government. In their opinion health news already gets enough space in both print and electronic media. Media has already played its role well while in uplifting public health, health department or ministry of health needs to play its efficient role. Health sector must be corruption free. More budgets should be invested to provide proper service delivery in hospitals and at primary health care level. Some other representatives said that health sector must have a proper follow up plan for certain advocacy campaigns to give better results. Few of them said perhaps seminars and workshops can play some role.

Theme5. Influence of Media:

Impact of Media on attitude of people and policy makers; another important open ended question. Most of the media personals said that it has a positive impact. Many were having that perhaps there is no impact but there wasn't any answer regarding negativity. Most of the respondents claimed that media has nothing to do with policy making; it is a long process starting from moving resolution to ending till legislation and implementation. Sometimes it is considered help full for advertising certain health campaign only.

DISCUSSION:

Media channels, including print journalism, advertisements, fiction films, television shows, documentaries, and computer technology affect the healthcare system. With minor variations, they all are targeted at the same objective; empowering people with knowledge so that they can take care of their health by themselves [24]. This research study was conducted to explore the role of media including print and electronic regarding their health promotion of masses. It also helped to assess the level of knowledge of journalist about health related reports and their contributions for health related event and programs in the interest of community, over all with a goal to promote public health through media.

Health journalism education was explored through closed ended questions, it showed the journalist

productions and contributions in health reporting, 32.3% of journalists are full time health reporters/editors/producers and also there are 4% of journalists have never reported on health issues. Journalists who occasionally reports on health issues are 35% and journalist who have never reported on health are 27.4 %. Most of them didn't receive any training on health reporting/journalism. When the open ended questions and their thematic analysis were seen then Most of the respondents gave the opinion of some news related with health. The next important reply was some 'life threatening report 'or some sudden outbreak of disease is considered as Health news. Some of the respondents had a consensus on general knowledge about health being considered as health news. Many of the respondents weren't having any opinion to be shared regarding the significance of health news. Similar results shown by a study while saying journalists are key patrons of health literacy [25].

When it came towards contributions in health promotion in various fields e.g. in health policy 24.2% journalists never contributed in any health policy related issue. They have been frequently given coverage to certain health stories like above all global health 45.2%. They have been frequently doing programs on consumer/health life style. Some slots have been given to medical research and science too. Many programs have been done regarding this in during last six months e.g. polio, measles campaign, poor hospital services etc. Impact of that program was neither good nor bad, could not rule out this due to poor follow-up. Mainly initiative of certain programs is taken by the media but sometimes they are sponsored by some NGO and occasionally by corporate social responsibility. Assessment shows that 38 % journalists had done health related programs during the last 06 months. Impact of those programs couldn't be assessed so far because they don't have any follow-up method to assess that. Somehow it's their general perception that it created positive impact and awareness among masses. In 2013, a research study conducted in India explored the same results [26].

There are different stake holders who play their roles and take initiative for health related program on media. This study showed 33.3% programs done by the initiative of ministry of health. 19.0 % initiative was taken by NGO's and community, while 4.8 % initiative was taken by health experts, corporate social responsibility and other sources sometimes media itself Further assessment of this research study regarding self-perceiving reporting skills showed that to a small extent, journalists consider themselves skilled in evaluating statistic in a health research. To a large extent they produce balanced

and authentic news with complete description of social context of health research but mean while they can better do it with trainings seminars and workshops. According to research project conducted in 2010, in Europe, similar results found regarding trainings and self-perceiving skills of journalist [27].

Some important facts came forward about reporting of certain diseases, and this research study showed that most of them have been frequently reported. Figure shows Polio 82%, HIV aids 74%, vector born [dengue] 73%. Diarrheal diseases 73%, as most frequently reported diseases Diabetes, family abuse/violence & environmental issues have been reported too. Electronic media has talked and shown a lot about smoking and exercises. Print Media has written a lot about obesity, child health, female health, cold and fevers as well in their weekly regular supplements too. So far mental health, stress, depression, and cancers have been the areas less covered. Literature shows the similar results in a study conducted in Sri lanka in 2006, which showed that media played an important role in underlying prevention by raising the profile of diabetes and non-communicable diseases [NCDs] [28].

Information about financial constraints was also gathered. Results showed that to a small extent the production of health related programs is affected by funding or sponsorship. It is actually more about the need of time. For instance when it is required like in many epidemic or outbreaks then media doesn't wait for funding. It plays its role well and quickly respond and aware people keeping in mind its national responsibility. Moreover, to a very small extent, deviation from corporate social responsibility effects reporting on health issues. Similarly, previous researchers have shown that the diseases receiving greater broadcasting in the media are deliberated to be more serious and more adumbrative of a disease than those receiving less coverage [29].

Impact of the Media on attitude of people and policy makers; another important open ended question. Most of the media personals said that it has a positive impact. Many were having that perhaps there is no impact but there wasn't any answer regarding negativity. Most of the respondents claimed that media has nothing to do with policy making; it is a long process starting from moving resolution to ending till legislation and implementation. Sometimes it is considered help full for advertising certain health campaign only. Similar results found in the study conducted in 2010 , where TV talk shows influenced the policy makers at district level.

When inquired about reasons for under reporting of health issues, then most of the media representatives had an opinion that there isn't any issue relevant to this. They said media has reported regularly and efficiently where ever and whenever it is needed. Media has played its role well there is no under reporting kind of thing and for media it is not difficult to report any issue. they one report when it is worth to do that more over it is technically not possible to do health reporting all the time. Moreover, the next important reply from media representatives was about less interest of public. It's not demand of public to report health issues all the time. Technically it's not possible particularly when it comes to entertainment channel or some other print media they have got limited slots for different things. Health is not the mere issue. Few of them stated that if there is under reporting then the reason is perhaps more slots of politics. It gets more coverage and space. Few left behind with their reservation that it is not necessary for media to take the responsibility for reporting health issues. Medical or health research centers should do it on their behalf through different capacities. Similar results found in the study showing health promotion through mass media [30].

CONCLUSION:

It is concluded that mass media campaigns can produce positive changes or prevent negative changes in health-related behaviors across large populations. It was assessed too that what contributes to these outcomes, such as concurrent availability of required services and products, availability programs and policies that support behavior change. Finally, this study proposed areas for improvement like efficient role of Ministry of National Health Services Regulations & Coordination, Government and other health departments to get better results in public health and health promotion. It was also concluded that trainings of journalists in health reporting should be taken into account and skills to critically evaluate the news whether it should be printed/broadcasted or not and the validity and authenticity of the news should be measured according to certain rules and regulations. According to journalists Pakistani media is playing their role in promoting public health wherever and whenever needed and they cannot runs shows and publish repots all the time due to less demand from population. Population's behavior needs to be changed so that at least if there is a needs on health promotion is on airing they should listen to it carefully and act on it accordingly. This fact cannot be denied that in today's era media is the biggest forum for health promotion and to reach out the masses throughout the country to deliver the message. In this regards policy level

management can help a lot in changing the behavior, skills and reporting abilities of journalists and then the population.

Recommendations:

- Monitoring an evaluation of health sector must be there to play its role for public health
- Media should report on disparity in health sector, for further improvement and better services.

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