The ethics of reporting on HIV/AIDS in three major South African newspapers

Abstract

English: In the study, the researcher explores the issue of ethics of reporting on HIV/Aids in three major South African newspapers, namely Mail & Guardian, The Star and Daily Sun. The researcher argues that deontological and social responsibility ethical approaches are the necessary foundation upon which ethical decisions ought to be based, regarding the coverage of the pandemic in the media. The researcher establishes that journalists have to be bound by duty, which is a key concept within the ethical paradigms which are being proposed. The position that the researcher maintains is premised on the fact that journalists have a responsibility to society, especially because HIV/Aids is killing millions of Africans. And since there is no known cure for the disease, the media have a powerful role to play in ensuring that issues relating to the disease are reported consistently and regularly, since the media have an enormous influence (Retief 2002: 5). Using quantitative and qualitative content analysis as a research design, the researcher examined specifically four main ethical violations levelled against the media. It was found that in the newspapers studied, they had, on average, one story per issue; there is a gross dearth of stories which were humanised; the language of reporting, especially the use of some metaphors, had negative connotations, some positive, and one was political. Regarding sensationalist headlines and text, very few examples were found. One of the major recommendations is that stories on HIV/Aids ought to be humanised, and the narrative genre of news writing offers a solution.

Afrikaans: In hierdie studie ondersoek die navorser die kwessie van die etiek rakende verslaggewing oor MIV/Vigs in drie groot Suid-Afrikaanse koerante, naamlik Mail & Guardian, The Star en Daily Sun. Die navorser argumenteer dat die etiese benaderings van die deontologie en sosiale verantwoordelikheid die noodsaaklike grondslag bied waarop etiese besluite rakende die nuusdekking van die pandemie in die media gebaseer moet word. Die navorser stel dit dat joernaliste 'n verpligting het, wat 'n sleutelkonsep is binne die etiese paradigma wat voorgestel word. Die posisie wat die navorser inneem, berus op die feit dat joernaliste 'n verantwoordelikheid teenoor die samelewing het, veral aangesien MIV/Vigs reeds tot die dood van miljoene mense in Afrika gelei het en aangesien daar geen kuur vir die siekte is nie. Die media vervul 'n kratige rol om toe te sien dat daar voortdurend en konsekvent berig word oor kwessies wat met die siekte verband hou aangesien die media 'n enorme invloed het (Retief 2002: 5). Deur middel van kwantitatiewe en kwalitatiewe inhoudsanalise het die navorser onderzoek ingestel na die vier belangrikste etiese oortredings wat voor die deur van die media gelê word. In die koerante wat bestudeer is, was daar gemiddeld een berig per uitgawe; daar is 'n oormaat stories wat verpersoonlik is; die taal van die beriggewing, veral die gebruik van sommige metafore, het negatiewe konnotasies, sommige positief, en een was polities van aard. Min voorbeelde van hoofopskrifte en teks is gevind waar sensasie 'n rol gespeel het. Een van die belangrikste aanbevelings is dat stories oor MIV/Vigs 'n menslike gesig gegee moet word, en dat die narratiewe genre van nuus 'n oplossing bied.
Thus, in the South African context, AIDS-related stigma poses a major challenge to the efficacy of risk reduction interventions for PLWHA and other risk groups. Related to stigma was the extent of othering of the disease, with notions of the virus spread by being promiscuous (especially for women), gay or black. In line with these perceptions, reports of AIDS-related stigma in the Western Cape province of South Africa is such that HIV/AIDS is called “ulwazi” which means “that thing” [23]. “That thing” not only implies that there is no cure, but also suggests that it is a stigmatised illness that cannot be referred to by name [24].

Africa; women account for 59 percent of adults aged 15 and over who are said to be living with HIV/AIDS in Africa; South Africa has one of the highest number of children (globally) under the age of 15 living with HIV/AIDS (estimates ranging from 180,000 to 280,000); 2.5 million people in Africa receive Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) medications for the treatment of infection by retroviruses, primarily HIV; an additional 8.7 million of those infected are in need of ART; there are 15 million AIDS orphans in the world, 13 million of whom are in Africa. Assessing HIV/AIDS communication There is evidence that behaviors are changing in many African countries as seen in the decline of HIV prevalence. Mananja et al. (2010) conducted a study in Uganda (1996-2007).