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Role of Newspapers in Health Policy Making in Punjab

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This paper looks at the role of newspapers in health policy making in Punjab, the largest province of Pakistan in terms of population, with nearly 56% of the country's entire population. For the inclusive progress of socio-economic facet of the general public, government should give top priority to the investment in the health sector. Health is the second biggest public sector when it comes to physical infrastructure and human capital in Punjab. Health sector of Punjab is faced with numerous anomalies and the government has been undertaking reforms with intervals. Announcement of health policy is an important initiation for government's plan for the advancement of health sector, in this regard how the media and in case of this study, newspapers, impact health policy making. Newspapers provide a channel which is used by the policy makers to make promises and deliver intentions. Public's Feedback is an essential part of this process and is under investigation in this study. Newspapers can set the direction for public's welfare by covering a specific matter and overlooking the other. With regard to this function of the newspapers this research endeavors to discover the role newspapers in health policy making by adopting the technique of content analysis of four sampled newspapers for the period of six months.

Keywords: Punjab, health sector, newspapers, policy making, public welfare

Punjab is the largest province of Pakistan in terms of population with roughly 56% of the entire population of the country (Government of Punjab, 2010). When compared with other provinces of Pakistan, Punjab is the most advanced and affluent province. Lahore being the capital is the nucleus of economic, administrative, political and cultural activities in Punjab. It makes up of 54 percent of the GDP of Pakistan therefore contributing the maximum to the domestic economy (Burki, Pasha et al, 2012). For any government investment in the health sector is essential for the inclusive growth of socio-economic facet of the people. Punjab's health policy is valid for all the public and private sector health institutions functioning in Punjab. Health policy comprises of public health, health care, pharmaceutical policies etc. Announcement of health policy is an important initiation for government's plan for the advancement of health sector. Health is the second biggest public sector when it comes to physical infrastructure and human capital in Punjab as it comprises of 175,000 employees together with around 52,000 Lady Health Workers (Government of the Punjab, 2011). Health sector of Punjab is faced with numerous anomalies and the government has been undertaking reforms with intervals. In spite of the substantial investment in health sector, required augmentation in indicators hasn't materialized.

Previously either there has not been a vibrant health policy or it was not executed effectively. In each health policy

the principal emphasis was on financing the physical infrastructure projects and bringing maximum number of people into the health care system. The substantial lump of financing was used for remedial sector and making structures whereas overlooking the required investment in human capital and development of management systems which are critical to yield any noteworthy outcomes (Government of the Punjab, 2011).

Although studying the process of policy of improvements or reforms one likely to discover that there were flaws in the policy making process and the policy guiding principles were overlooked. Numerous elements influenced the progression of diverse reforms like the absence of resolve by the political leaders, absence of cognizance amongst the general public which caused obscurantism and therefore repelling transformation. The unwillingness of civil service caused feeble leadership and absence of distinct goals weakened the planned sectoral restructuring. Owing to such flaws the execution of reforms were badly affected. In the Eighteenth Amendment, concurrent legislative list was scrapped hence all the roles related to the social sectors comprising of health, education etc. have been transferred to the provinces. Therefore the Federal Ministry of Health came to an end with effect from July 1, 2011 and the provinces are at present entirely accountable for the health sector. Owing to this decentralization the administrative and monetary aspects of the provinces have been amplified enormously as well as the responsibilities. In order to provide reasonable, reachable and justifiable health care to the masses government of the Punjab needs to standardize the complete health care system.

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Public Policy has turned out to be a multifaceted procedure particularly in this information revolutionary era with growing number of people having their stakes being mindful of their right to take part in the policy making process. For any policy choice the simple prerequisite is the accessibility of specifics and facts concerning the matter to be resolved. The policy makers have a benefit of accessibility to confidential and other documents however they still need the opinion of other interested parties particularly the general public. The general public being the main stakeholder in any public policy verdict doesn't have complete information and understanding about public policy matters. The newspapers have a vital role in delivering that information and facts to the common people in a way which is simply engrossed by them. Newspapers can do this by giving platform to diverse viewpoints about a specific public policy issue. Likewise newspapers make available reaction of the general public to the people who make policies. If policymakers pay heed to the public reaction and the public retorts to the media then understanding the scope and amount of influence of media (newspapers in case of this study) on public opinion is significant.

Literature Review

The agenda-setting sway of the news media is not constrained to the initial phase of fixating public attention on an explicit subject. The media also sways the following stage in the process of communication, our indulgence and perspective on the themes in the news. The media reporting of facets of a matter and prominence on these different features makes a considerable difference in how people identify that problem. Consequently media's potential to sway public opinion turns out to be very distinct. Newspapers provide several clues regarding the salience of the topics in the daily news – main story on first page; further front page presentation, big captions, etc. Therefore, for the public's contemplation the news media can set the agenda (McCombs, 2002). People who are in the habit of watching more TV news, reading more newspapers, surfing the net, and paying heed to campaigns, are progressively extra erudite, believing the government, and partaking. The evidence vigorously endorses that the public is not just submissively responding to the political communication being presented to them, in a modest stimulus-response pattern but as a standby they are judgmentally and robustly scrutinizing, discarding and considering the information being offered (Norris, 2000). Printed newspapers are accredited to expand the assortment of public matters, happenings and concerns their readers are conscious of. The fashion in which printed newspapers are styled is thought to charm readers into reading the content of the newspaper as they may not have been absorbed in earlier (Schönbach, de Waal and Lauf, 2005).

If a newspaper is popular and is presenting the news in a striking way, likely readers are enthused to read a specific newspaper as the main information source. Overstatement is also used to attract readers. On the other hand, that is just

not the end of the story. Contending newspapers regularly grab a story which is told by another newspaper and then give follow-up reporting on those stories. These follow-up reportings are merely tempting the readers, if they supplement a bit to the original story just to make it notable. In the sequence, the realities or lies are offered in a compelling way and spin bias is the consequence (Mullainathan, and Shleifer, 2002). From a historic viewing platform, the worth mentioning thing is not that the media to some magnitude is partial or bias but rather now there is a keenness that the media will provide unprejudiced or fair information. Newspapers at the present time ardently contest that they offer anything but impartial and fair reportage. In particularizing the upturn and advancement of the informative press there is a drop in overt bias and a sizeable rise in the facts content of newspapers (Gentzkow, Glaeser et al, 2006). There can be a minute doubt that the media whether it is a molder or sign of transformation, is incontestably a mediator of change. It's this characteristic is accepted by media fabricators and its viewers and grounded on this belief the dominant views on mass media can best be well-thought-out. Media sways social and political changes generally in a democratic configuration where media is thought to function without constraints and express valiantly; messages by media have a prospective for forming knowledge (Kumar, 2011).

Sensible policy involves comprising those out of the government in the process of policy making. This covers inquiring those who are the interested parties of the policy, external professionals, and persons who are to employ the policy. Judicious public policy for instance health policy is erected on knowledge from past experience. Policy making necessitates being a persistent, learning sequence, not as a course of one-off, quarantined initiatives. This necessitates making use of evidences and investigation about the matters being solved (Curtin, 2000). News media commentary on risk (health etc.) essentially all the time appears surrounded by the context of bad news. Surely, even though news media may be important for swaying public view of risk, generally they do not go into specifics of the theme of risk itself. Risk barely seems as the categorical matter of news; relatively, it is highlighted secondarily in reports of calamity and human misfortune. News media typically give consideration to the horrendous outcomes of foreseen risks. Most researchers agree to this fact that, news media coverage of for example health perils; emergency and disaster have a pivotal outcome on public opinion regarding risk (Wilkinson, 1999).

Impact of media on the way the people envisages regarding a public health concern is a result of the framing of that problem. The custom in which a public health problem is framed sways public opinion, influences person's conduct and plays a central role in the improvement of public health policy. The statutory deliberation over tobacco control strategies in the US has been swayed by media's framing of tobacco control subject (Lima and Siegel, 1999). Content analysis used to study smoking ban coverage by six major

newspapers in Ohio shows that newspaper articles offered viewpoint of both sides which were for and against smoking ban, nevertheless opinions pieces favored smoking ban legislation. Most articles gave attention to topics of personal human rights and tobacco companies' distorted promotions of inducement. Costs for looming health problems were reported by the media (Lovejoy, 2007).

The subjects pertinent to public pitch generally carry the reflection into the news media. The selection of news items is well accredited as an agenda setting tenacity of the media. Newspapers are one of the most easiest to get to and economical sources of information, huge number of mixed/neutral news articles advocates that the newspapers desired to inform and apprise the public rather than coaxing them. Such reportage might have facilitated to enable the readers to vote as they were able to decide as informed citizens without being pressurized from tobacco control specialists in trustworthy media sources (Lovejoy, 2007). The news media sway's political results in direct proportion to the existence of a media answer, a customary manner that the news media give coverage to political actors or matters that one can label through a range of different channels. The fiasco to merely segregate news making from policymaking has steered into some academic muddle (Cook, 2006).

Hypotheses

The hypotheses were:

1. Government version is appearing more in the newspapers than public feedback on issues of health policy in Punjab
2. Government version is highlighted more in the newspapers than investigative/news reports on issues of health policy in Punjab
3. Priority in the newspapers is given to writers' opinion than its own suggestions (editorials) on issues of health policy in Punjab

Method

The researchers hypothesized that "Newspapers' coverage of issues of health policy in Punjab is in support of the government as compared to the independent point of view".

Content analysis as a research technique was used for this study. In social sciences it is the method to study the communication content. It can be defined as the study of documented human communications (like books, websites, laws and paintings) (Babbie, 1975). It can also be defined as any method for constructing interpretations by quantitatively and analytically classifying indicated features of messages (Holsti, 1969). Content of 'Nawa-i-Waqt', 'Jang', 'Dawn' and 'The News' was analyzed for this study for six months - 1st January 2011 to 30th June 2011. The rationale for selecting these newspapers is that they are popular and

widely circulated throughout Pakistan. National newspapers of Pakistan constituted the population and the above mentioned four newspapers were the sample. News stories (government statements/stories or investigative/news reports), articles, editorials and letters to the editors/public statements related to issues of health policy in Punjab were coding units of analysis and the paragraphs in them were the contextual units of analysis. Doctors, hospitals and medicines were the areas analyzed under the health policy issues.

Terms were operationalized: Health policy referred to policy related to doctors, hospitals and medicines in Punjab: areas studied under health policy referred to all the doctors working, all the hospitals operating and all the medicines (related issues) being used in Punjab: government statements/stories meant statements and press releases by Punjab government/officials: investigative/news reports meant news investigated and reported by reporters of the sampled newspapers: public feedback meant letters to the editors and feedback of public as reported by the sampled newspaper: writers' opinion meant articles written by writers in the sampled newspapers; newspapers' suggestions meant as included in editorials in the sampled newspapers :the independent point of view includes the public feedback/statements, newspapers' suggestions, investigative/news reports and writers' opinion. After carrying out the inter-coder reliability test the result was 90 percent. One tailed statistical method was used to test the hypotheses; Ho is rejected if the result is more than the value, 1.645.

Nawa-i-Waqt

Health Policy (Hea)

Doctors (D)

Government Statements/Stories (Gs)	23
Investigative/News Reporting (IR)	67
Public Feedback/Statements (Fdb)	3
Newspapers' suggestions (Sug)	3
Writers' Opinion (Wp)	5

Hospitals (H)

Government Statements/Stories (Gs)	5
Investigative/News Reporting (IR)	18
Public Feedback/Statements (Fdb)	12
Newspapers' suggestions (Sug)	0
Writers' Opinion (Wp)	4

Medicines (M)

Government Statements/Stories (Gs)	6
Investigative/News Reporting (IR)	3
Public Feedback/Statements (Fdb)	0
Newspapers' suggestions (Sug)	0
Writers' Opinion (Wp)	1

Jang

Health Policy (Hea)

<i>Doctors (D)</i>	
Government Statements/Stories (Gs)	15
Investigative/News Reporting (IR)	48
Public Feedback/Statements (Fdb)	0
Newspapers' suggestions (Sug)	1
Writers' Opinion (Wp)	7
<i>Hospitals (H)</i>	
Government Statements/Stories (Gs)	5
Investigative/News Reporting (IR)	29
Public Feedback/Statements (Fdb)	0
Newspapers' suggestions (Sug)	2
Writers' Opinion (Wp)	5
<i>Medicines (M)</i>	
Government Statements/Stories (Gs)	1
Investigative/News Reporting (IR)	2
Public Feedback/Statements (Fdb)	0
Newspapers' suggestions (Sug)	1
Writers' Opinion (Wp)	2

Dawn

Health Policy (Hea)

<i>Doctors (D)</i>	
Government Statements/Stories (Gs)	16
Investigative/News Reporting (IR)	64
Public Feedback/Statements (Fdb)	6
Newspapers' suggestions (Sug)	2
Writers' Opinion (Wp)	0
<i>Hospitals (H)</i>	
Government Statements/Stories (Gs)	11
Investigative/News Reporting (IR)	24
Public Feedback/Statements (Fdb)	2
Newspapers' suggestions (Sug)	1
Writers' Opinion (Wp)	0
<i>Medicines (M)</i>	
Government Statements/Stories (Gs)	1
Investigative/News Reporting (IR)	9
Public Feedback/Statements (Fdb)	2
Newspapers' suggestions (Sug)	0
Writers' Opinion (Wp)	1

The News

Health Policy (Hea)

<i>Doctors (D)</i>	
Government Statements/Stories (Gs)	21
Investigative/News Reporting (IR)	41
Public Feedback/Statements (Fdb)	7
Newspapers' suggestions (Sug)	1
Writers' Opinion (Wp)	1
<i>Hospitals (H)</i>	
Government Statements/Stories (Gs)	19
Investigative/News Reporting (IR)	14
Public Feedback/Statements (Fdb)	0
Newspapers' suggestions (Sug)	0
Writers' Opinion (Wp)	1
<i>Medicines (M)</i>	
Government Statements/Stories (Gs)	9
Investigative/News Reporting (IR)	8
Public Feedback/Statements (Fdb)	1
Newspapers' suggestions (Sug)	0
Writers' Opinion (Wp)	0

H1 Newspapers' coverage of issues of health policy in Punjab is in support of the government as compared to the independent point of view

Ho Newspapers' coverage of Issues of health policy in Punjab is not in support of the government as compared to the independent point of view

Total Content (n) = 530
 Government Stories/Statements = 132
 Independent point of view = 398

$$x_1 = 132$$

$$x_2 = 398$$

$$\bar{p}_1 = \frac{x_1}{n} = \frac{132}{530} = 0.249$$

$$\bar{p}_2 = \frac{x_2}{n} = \frac{398}{530} = 0.7509$$

$$H_0 = \bar{p}_1 = \bar{p}_2$$

$$H_1 = \bar{p}_1 \neq \bar{p}_2$$

$$Z = \frac{\bar{p}_1 - \bar{p}_2}{\sqrt{\frac{\bar{p}_1(1 - \bar{p}_1)}{n} + \frac{\bar{p}_2(1 - \bar{p}_2)}{n}}}$$

$$Z = \frac{0.249 - 0.7509}{\sqrt{\frac{0.249(1 - 0.249)}{530} + \frac{0.7509(1 - 0.7509)}{530}}}$$

$$Z = \frac{-0.5019}{0.0264}$$

$$Z = -19.01$$

The result -19.01 is less than 1.645, thus H1 is rejected. Therefore, newspapers' coverage of issues of health policy in Punjab is not in support of the government as compared to the independent point of view

Sub-Hypotheses on Health Policy

H_i Government version is appearing more in the newspapers than public feedback on issues of health policy in Punjab

Ho Government version is not appearing more in the newspapers than public feedback on issues of health policy in Punjab

Total Content (n) = 530

Government Stories/Statements (Government Version) = 132

Public Feedback/Statements = 33

$$x_1 = 132$$

$$x_2 = 33$$

$$\bar{p}_1 = \frac{x_1}{n} = \frac{132}{530} = 0.249$$

$$\bar{p}_2 = \frac{x_2}{n} = \frac{33}{530} = 0.0623$$

$$H_0 = \bar{p}_1 \leq \bar{p}_2$$

$$H_1 = \bar{p}_1 > \bar{p}_2$$

$$Z = \frac{\bar{p}_1 - \bar{p}_2}{\sqrt{\frac{\bar{p}_1(1-\bar{p}_1)}{n} - \frac{\bar{p}_2(1-\bar{p}_2)}{n}}}$$

$$Z = \frac{0.249 - 0.0623}{\sqrt{\frac{0.249(1-0.249)}{530} - \frac{0.0623(1-0.0623)}{530}}}$$

$$Z = \frac{0.1867}{0.0223}$$

$$Z = 8.372$$

The result 8.372 is more than 1.645, thus Ho is rejected. Therefore, government version is appearing more in the newspapers than public feedback on issues of health policy in Punjab

H_{ii} Government version is highlighted more in the newspapers than investigative/news reports on issues of health policy in Punjab

Ho Government version is not highlighted more in the newspapers than investigative/news reports on issues of health policy in Punjab

Total Content (n) = 530

Government Stories/Statements (Government Version) = 132

Newspapers Investigative/News Reports = 327

$$x_1 = 132$$

$$x_2 = 327$$

$$\bar{p}_1 = \frac{x_1}{n} = \frac{132}{530} = 0.249$$

$$\bar{p}_2 = \frac{x_2}{n} = \frac{327}{530} = 0.617$$

$$H_0 = \bar{p}_1 \leq \bar{p}_2$$

$$H_1 = \bar{p}_1 > \bar{p}_2$$

$$Z = \frac{\bar{p}_1 - \bar{p}_2}{\sqrt{\frac{\bar{p}_1(1-\bar{p}_1)}{n} + \frac{\bar{p}_2(1-\bar{p}_2)}{n}}}$$

$$Z = \frac{0.249 - 0.617}{\sqrt{\frac{0.249(1-0.249)}{530} + \frac{0.617(1-0.617)}{530}}}$$

$$Z = \frac{-0.368}{0.0282}$$

$$Z = -13.049$$

The result -13.049 is less than 1.645, thus H_{ii} is rejected. Therefore, government version is not highlighted more in the newspapers than investigative/news reports on issues of health policy in Punjab

H_{iii} Priority in the newspapers is given to writers' opinion than its own suggestions (editorials) on issues of health policy in Punjab

Ho Priority in the newspapers is not given to writers' opinion than its own suggestions (editorials) on issues of health policy in Punjab

Total Content (n) = 530

Writers' Opinion = 27

Newspapers' Suggestions = 11

$$x_1 = 27$$

$$x_2 = 11$$

$$\bar{p}_1 = \frac{x_1}{n} = \frac{27}{530} = 0.0509$$

$$\bar{p}_2 = \frac{x_2}{n} = \frac{11}{530} = 0.0208$$

$$H_0 = \bar{p}_1 \leq \bar{p}_2$$

$$H_1 = \bar{p}_1 > \bar{p}_2$$

$$Z = \frac{\bar{F}_1 - \bar{F}_2}{\sqrt{\frac{\bar{F}_1(1 - \bar{F}_1)}{n_1} + \frac{\bar{F}_2(1 - \bar{F}_2)}{n_2}}}$$

$$Z = \frac{0.0509 - 0.0208}{\sqrt{\frac{0.0509(1 - 0.0509)}{530} + \frac{0.0208(1 - 0.0208)}{530}}}$$

$$Z = \frac{0.0301}{0.01}$$

$$Z = 3.01$$

The result 3.01 is more than 1.645, thus H_0 is rejected. Therefore, priority in the newspapers is given to writers' opinion than its own suggestions (editorials) on issues of health policy in Punjab.

Results and Analysis

After testing the hypotheses results show that the national newspapers are more supportive to the independent point of view if we compare it with government version on the issues related to health policy making in Punjab. This is an indication that the Pakistani press is providing a channel of communication between the policy makers and the public to set the dialogue and discourse on Punjab's health policy issues. It is providing a medium to the academia, intellectuals, civil society and the general public to express their misgivings over matters related to health sector in Punjab. The sub hypotheses results indicate that in the newspapers government side of the story is appearing more than the public feedback. Here the newspapers have to enhance their capacity and spirit to give more space to the general public's viewpoint over government officials on health sector issues in Punjab. It also illustrates that newspapers give more importance to investigative/news reports over the version of the government. This is an optimistic leaning as the investigative/news reports entail all-encompassing inquiry of the issue being considered. Last but not the least it indicates that writers' opinion on issues related to health policy is given prominence over newspapers own suggestions. This is a sign that press is providing a stage on which the specialists, experts and intellectuals can set the direction for Punjab's health sector. Therefore, newspapers coverage of issues related to health sector may lead to rational and judicious health policy making in Punjab.

Conclusion

Subsequently media, in reference to this paper, the newspapers being an important part of the mass media, act as a primary source of information for policy makers and general public. It gives inkling to the policy makers regarding general public's thinking and gives general public the clue about what policymakers are going to do. This type of two ways feedback aids to comprehend viewpoints of the stakeholders and frame rational and judicious health policy

for the welfare of the people of Punjab. The outcome of this study indicates that national newspapers give more importance to the independent viewpoint over the version of the Government of the Punjab on issues related to health policy but it necessitates additional investigation to assess how independent and free is the 'independent point of view'. A free but accountable media can pinpoint the central problems in the society and governance therefore wielding moral pressure on policy makers to redesign/formulate health policy in the best interest of the Punjab's general public.

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