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The Press And Health Promotion In Bangladesh

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The Press and Health
Promotion in Bangladesh

As in all developing countries health is not given a top most priority in the over-all development planning of Bangladesh. It naturally comes after food or feeding the millions that gets precedence over all other problems. However, keeping with the guide-lines of World Health Organisation Bangladesh has chalked out plan for Health for everyone by 2000 AD This is naturally reflected in news coverage and editorial policy of the media.

It should be kept in mind that broadcast media plays more important role in health education or in creating sanitary and health awareness among the people who are mostly illiterate. On the other hand the print media influences the urban people and the policy-makers. In this respect the press in Bangladesh plays a significant role.

There had recently been certain significant steps taken by the government of Bangladesh in the health sector where the reflection in the press and support from the media were quite necessary. One was the revolutionary drug policy wherein many useless and costly drugs were banned. Others were anti-epidemic, children's immunisation, breast-feeding and oral rehydration drives. The press always rise to the occasion in the form of systematic campaigns. Besides that reporting on health and sanitary problems and health education have been occasional and infrequent. In this respect a survey was made by Mrs Sheema Moslem, a researcher of Press Institute of Bangladesh about quantum of news on health subjects and health related problems.

Two daily, one English and one Bengali newspapers and two weekly magazines were scanned for the survey during a limited period.

For a three-month period in 1985 following is the chart of health-related news published in two daily newspapers. News of national interest only are included in the survey.

Table - I

Newspaper	Col-in space	frequency
Bangladesh Observer	272.4	22
Dainik Bangla	377.4	22

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Following is the subject-wise analysis in percentage of health related news.

Table - 2

Subjects Newspaper	Health Education	Population	Development news	Public Health	Problem analysis	Total
Bangladesh Observer	5.60	8.97	12.13	31.27	42.03	100
Dainik Bangla	27.67	--	23.25	14.72	34.36	100

The above health related news have been divided into five parts (1) Education: these news items refer to information about sanitary measures, guidance for prevention and general health-care.

- (2) Population : The news and features relate to motivation and information about family planning measures.
- (3) Development : News and features about government efforts to setup health centres, hospital facilities and rural health programmes.
- (4) Public Health : Activities of government, national and international agencies for providing drinking water, cleanliness drives, sanitation programmes etc.
- (5) Problems : Analytical criticism and suggestion for improvement of health-care facilities, stories relating to medicine, doctors, clinics etc.

It is evident from the analysis that critical and constructive suggestion about health problems were given maximum coverage by the newspapers followed by information on public health. One of the main problems, population, has been focussed more in the electronic media than in print media as it is aimed primarily at rural population.

There are columns on health problems in some of the daily newspapers giving primary health lessons which have not been included in the analysis. In fact in some of the newspapers this column written by specialists is quite popular.

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The column deals with general health knowledge, preventive and curative measures, and instructions for first aid. In a country like ours a health seminars, workshops and training programmes make good copies for the newspapers. Following is an analysis of coverage of such news :

Table - 3

Newspaper	Seminars, workshop etc	Health Education	Health Problem
Bangladesh Observer	41.49	5.60	52.91
Dainik Bangla	31.07	28.10	40.89

Interestingly, the above news occupy the front and back pages of the newspapers while features and other news are placed in the inner pages.

There had been major controversies over the drug policy of the government that banned many patent drugs manufactured by multi-nationals. The opinions for and against this policy made interesting news, features, statements and leading articles. Even advertisements for and against the policy also occupied major space in the newspapers for a long time.

Periodicals

The weekly newspapers played more effective role in educating people and formulating their opinion on health issues. These periodicals even brought out special issues covering major incidents. Besides that, particular issues extensively covered major health issues like cancer, heart disease, drug policy, sanitation etc. Besides the major weeklies there are two periodicals which are entirely devoted to health issues -- one is Gon-Shaisthy (Health for All) in Bengali and another is Pulse, meant for specialists only.

Comparing with the over-all standard and general news coverage in the press, it can be said that the press in Bangladesh is quite conscience about health problems and they are projecting them with objectivity. This is true even if we are to sadly point out that there are no specialist writers or reporters in the newspapers who can write on health and health only.

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