

## The framing of health news in two Papua New Guinea newspapers

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### Abstract

*The National* newspaper and the *Post Courier* newspaper are two of Papua New Guinea's premier print media news outlets producing between 32,000 and 63,000 copies each day. This study looked at both papers over a three month period covering January, March and May in 2014, to analyze how health news is framed. Using quantitative methodology, 490 news stories from both newspapers containing 'health news', were identified and analyzed using Excel. Although health news plays a significant part of news coverage through story placement, use of photos and days of publication; the study identified two frames that both papers employed throughout its reporting of health stories.

The first frame placed its emphasis on positive improvement on health service delivery and the second frame associated health service delivery with national politicians. When combined, both newspapers had National Parliamentarians as the main newsmaker (n=61 stories out of 490 health stories) who were often associated with positive health stories such as launching of new building infrastructure or new ambulances. The second frame was about positive service delivery (56% of all health stories were positive in nature) and the Key Result Areas 1, 2 and 3 of the PNG National Health Plan 2011-2020 had 58% of the total health news stories.

Both news frames are episodic events reporting in nature thus do not build quality of knowledge or improve independent thinking of newspaper readers due to its lack of explanation of the linkages between national policies and national government strategies such as the PNG National Health Plan 2011-2020 in each of the news stories. This study calls for greater effort by both newspapers to improve quality of health news by increasing the use of thematic frames and better news sources in their stories. This study highlights the importance of newspaper readers being aware of how news is framed so that they, as individual Papua New Guineans, can improve their understanding of health issues and contribute to improved health in the country.

**Key words:** health news, newspapers, media, frames

## Introduction

Events cover a wide range of descriptions involving people, animals and things, some marvellous, some mundane, but become news only when their existence is made known (Hodgson, 1984, p. 364). An event which no one knew about cannot be news. Today, news about issues in communities throughout the world are communicated through various platforms ranging from television to radio to the internet. Social issues prompt journalists to write articles that generate knowledge and opinion among readers so those articles create public interest and influence ([Adelman & Verbrugge, 2000](#)). Mass media including newspapers and news websites, even though carefully edited, do more than just bring to audiences events and issues happening in our communities. McCombs (2004) suggested that even their day-to-day selection of news, focuses our attention and influences our perception of what the most important issues of the day are. He states that the mass media's ability to influence topics on the public agenda has come to be called the 'agenda setting role' of the media ([McCombs, 2004](#)). Others such as [Vreese \(2005\)](#), [Kim, Tanner, Foster, and Kim \(2014\)](#), [Jones and Exworthy \(2015\)](#) say, that when news organizations select certain aspects of the real world and make that aspect more important while leaving out other aspects, then this is referred to as the 'framing role' of the media.

Understanding the framing of public health issues and events in the newspaper content is critical to Papua New Guineans. This is critical because as news is framed in a certain way, this can have an impact on how people deal with health issues ([Lacey & Longman, 1997](#)). [Lacey and Longman \(1997\)](#) also said that newspapers are part of the social world and they serve existing patterns of belief and understanding, as well as shape them. They can also create awareness of health matters through straight news stories ([Diedong, 2013](#)).

For example, Adelman and Verbrugge (2000) suggest that newspaper articles concerning diseases provide an opportunity for readers to look further at their social history of the health issue and measures of their impact of the health issue has on society. Diedong (2013) in his research in Ghana about the role of newspapers in health said that problems and challenges in health in our communities can be brought to light by newspapers and also stimulate discussion on them. He also highlighted that if these health stories are 'effectively framed', they can be 'very good sources of empowerment and direction to people improving their health' ([Diedong, 2013](#)).

In this study, a content analysis of public health news in two of PNG's major newspapers over a three month period of 2014 was done. The aim of which, was to discover the content of public health news in the two privately owned newspapers – *Post Courier* and *The National* to see how health news was portrayed in the two newspapers and the framing of the news. The Post Courier produces 32,000 copies daily ([Post Courier, 2013](#)) while The National produces 63,000 copies daily ([Nalu, 2013](#)).

This study sought to answer the key question: *How did the Post Courier and The National frame health news?* with four sub-questions 1) what prominence is given to health news 2) the content of health stories reported 3) the tone of the health stories reported and lastly 4) the presence or absence of the PNG National Health Plan 2011-2020 in these health stories.

## Literature review

### Framing of news

News articles in newspapers communicate ideas, knowledge and define what is news for the public ([Wallington, Blake, Taylor-Clark, & Viswanath, 2010](#)). [Wallington et al. \(2010\)](#) also say that the news media's role is not just in amplifying issues, but also in defining issues for the public, thereby expanding agenda setting from merely drawing attention to a topic to actually articulating points of view regarding that topic when news articles in newspapers are being read, messages are communicated to the reader. [Vreese \(2005, p. 51\)](#) states that communication is not static, but rather a dynamic process that involves frame-building (how frames emerge) and frame-setting (the interplay between media frames and audience predispositions). Firstly, framing, in news, serves as a packaging process, which involves selecting certain aspects of reality and making them more salient, while leaving other aspects out of the package ([Kim et al., 2014](#)). This is important to understand as both frame-building and frame-setting in the news may affect learning, interpretation, and evaluation of issues and events ([Vreese, 2005](#)). Vreese referred to frame-building as factors that influence the structural qualities of news frames. This includes internal factors such as editorial policy, news values while external factors include social movements and interaction between journalists and elites. He also refers to frame-setting as the interaction between media frames and individuals' prior knowledge and predispositions. Vreese highlighted this is important as researchers continue to explore the extent to which and under what circumstances audiences reflect and mirror frames made available to them.

Framing can help people support policies ([Coleman, Thorson, & Wilkins, 2011](#)) and as [Vreese \(2005\)](#) suggests, a person's views on certain issues may be altered based on their exposure to certain frames and the framing of news can shape processes such as political socialization, decision making and collective actions of individuals and groups of people.

### Framing of health news

Understanding of the framing of news is important, particularly in the areas of public health in Papua New Guinea. Under-investment by the government, low health worker numbers and weak leadership & management capacity (Asante and Hall 2011) are only three of many challenges facing the PNG health care system. Newspaper coverage may cover these areas of health in the country identified by Asante and Hall too. In general, news coverage of health may be closely aligned to mortality, prevalence and incidence trends in the population ([Adelman & Verbrugge, 2000, p. 364](#)) or responsibility of health care ([Kim et](#)

[al., 2014](#)) or even can be a reflection of the cultural taboos in place ([Kiwauka-Tondo, Albada, & Payton, 2012, p. 369](#)). Whatever the reason for the news coverage of health, discussion on information such as statistics and policies, and exposure to alternative arguments can raise the quality of people's opinion about health in their country. People who are better informed about the issues are more likely to have established a frame of reference for their opinions and are less likely to be swayed by how other people frame the issues for them ([Chong & Druckman, 2007](#)). Even though exposure to repetitive frames does not systematically strengthen effects on opinion formation, if the timeframe between the exposure to the frames becomes shorter, then it becomes a stronger effect on their opinion formation ([Lecheler & de Vreese, 2013](#)).

### **Frames in health news**

There is a variety of frames used in reporting or producing news, all chosen with the audience in mind ([Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 117](#)) and they may be issue specific or generic in nature ([Vreese, 2005, p. 52](#)). [Gollust and Lantz \(2009\)](#) identified 'social group' frames and 'causal' frames when analyzing newspaper articles on diabetes. They pointed out that in 'social frames', when news highlights a particular social group, this will activate predisposing attitudes about that group in the public's policy considerations. They also identified the 'causes' frames since perceptions of a problem's causes can affect the public's attributions of responsibility. [Kim et al. \(2014\)](#) when examining assessing how the US media framed the 'responsibility' for high and rising cost of health care, stated that rising health care costs can be framed either in a way that stresses the responsibilities of the individuals (i.e., the patients) or in a way that suggests political, economic, or other social forces (i.e., the government, health care providers, insurance companies, and pharmaceutical companies) as being largely responsible.

[Arthur \(2012\)](#) identified 'episodic' frame and a 'thematic' frames as two frames in his study. He describes an episodic frame for a news story focuses on one individual's experiences or one specific event, while a thematic frame explains the issue within a larger societal context. Various studies have collected health news content from news sources from the mass media and analysed them. [Kim et al. \(2014\)](#) collected 531 news stories from 11 news sources in the US with key words such as 'health care cost' or 'medical cost' in searches to find how the media framed responsibility of health cost. [Diedong \(2013\)](#) employed content analysis of 154 news articles from three newspapers in Ghana to investigate the effectiveness of newspapers as important platforms and sources of more in-depth information about health issues. They identified categories of news in their analysis such as 'sources of news', and 'distribution of news'. [Kiwauka-Tondo et al. \(2012\)](#) conducted a content analysis of 365 news articles from two Ugandan newspapers to investigate news ownership and news framing of HIV/AIDS. They identified 14 categories such as story characteristics, year of publication and journalist origin

## Research methodology

[Bowling \(2009, p. 448\)](#) described media analysis is a form of document analysis which could be highly structured and quantitative. This study adopted a content or media analysis similar to previous studies looking at newspapers in Papua New Guinea such as [Rooney \(2003\)](#) who examined the content of ten (10) issues of the Post Courier and the National newspaper, [English \(2004\)](#) examined 12 issues of both newspapers and [Duffield \(2005\)](#) examined 17 issues of both Post Courier and the National. All these researchers looked at samples of the both newspapers' content to draw conclusions at how the media reported various topics such as development, good governance, the economy, politics and crime, among others.

The key research question was: *How did both newspapers frame health news.* In order to understand this question, the research focused on content of these health stories.

## Methods

In this research, data for the content analysis was obtained from two widely read newspapers in Papua New Guinea – the Post Courier and the National newspapers.

Both newspapers run a five day edition each week from Monday to Friday so alternate months were selected to minimise skewed results. The months selected were January, March and May of both papers. Each month was skipped to reduce bias. Sections of news included straight/ hard news, feature articles, editorials, pictures, international and local health news. The key words (inclusion criteria) used to identify health stories were: *health, public health, medical, disease, medical drugs, healthcare, infection and disability*. The exclusion criteria was stories less than 60 words, stories without the key words in them, letters to the editor, special supplements (provincial governments/ corporate news), sports and special pages for health (such as *The National's* Health Watch) to avoid creating a bias for health news.

## Coding

A frequency system ([Bowling, 2009, p. 455](#)) was employed in this study which recorded and counted every occurrence of the measures, then as [Kim et al. \(2014, p. 4\)](#) did in their study, created sub-categories.

- The data collected included measures of prominence (*frequency of reporting, day of week, page number, location on page, photo, news section*). The measure of prominence shows how much emphasis is placed by the newspaper on health news.
- The second data collected was content (*primary news, author, organisation represented by author, local/international news, country of origin, type of news, type of policy*). This content category looks at the components of the news story and how the story is framed.

- The third measure is on the tone of the story (positive or negative). Stories identified as ‘positive’ were stories that had elements of development, progress and improvement, while ‘negative’ stories included disease outbreaks, poor health statistics and mortality.
- The final category was identifying if any key national strategic or policy documents were mentioned in the health stories. Data was recorded manually and kept as a logbook, which was transferred onto an excel file to be analysed.

All these four measures – Prominence, Content, Tone, Presence of key health policies – are deemed as key frame building factors ([Lecheler & de Vreese, 2013](#); [Vreese, 2005](#)).

There were a total of 490 news stories in both newspapers that met the inclusion criteria and were analysed for frames.

### **Ethical issues**

The approval of the research was given ethical clearance by the Divine Word University Faculty of Health Science Research Committee before the commencement of the study.

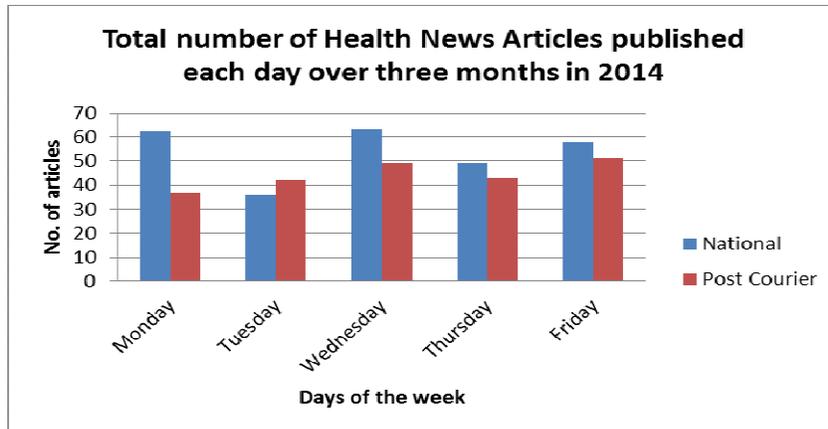
### **Results**

In this study, there were a total number of 108 issues (56 issues of *The National* and 52 issues of the *Post Courier*) from which a total of 490 health news stories were identified in both papers that met the inclusion criteria.

#### **1. Measures of prominence**

##### *Days of the week*

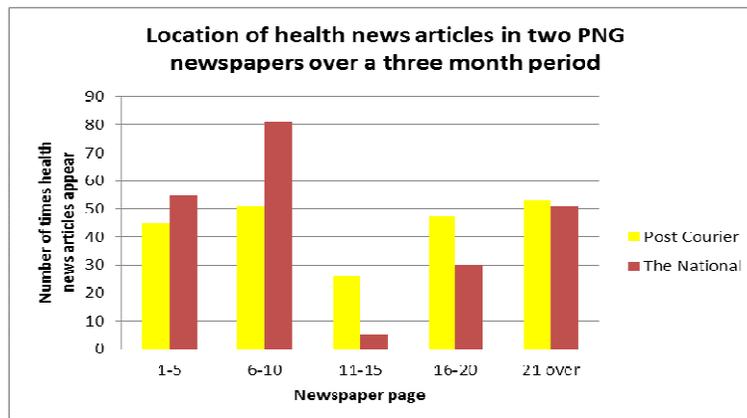
In the *Post Courier*, it was found that the number of health stories, both locally and internationally, began to increase as the week progressed from Monday to Friday, finally peaking on Friday which had just over 50 news stories while Monday had 37 stories. In *The National* newspaper, with the exception of Monday (62) and Wednesday (63), the health stories showed similar patterns of having the number of stories increasing as the days progressed during each day of the week. The graph below (Figure 2) shows how many health news articles are published each day for both newspapers



**Figure 2 Graph showing the total number of health stories in the Post Courier and The National in January, March and May of 2014**

*Page numbers*

In the three months studied, local health news in both newspapers did not occupy the most important pages from the front page to page 5 compared to pages 6 right through to page 10 of both newspapers where the highest number of stories were found (n=132). From page 11-15, the number of health stories declined as other sections such as ‘letter to the editor’, ‘editorials’ and ‘international news’ begin. Figure 3 shows, in terms of story placements, on which pages the health stories we located in both newspapers.

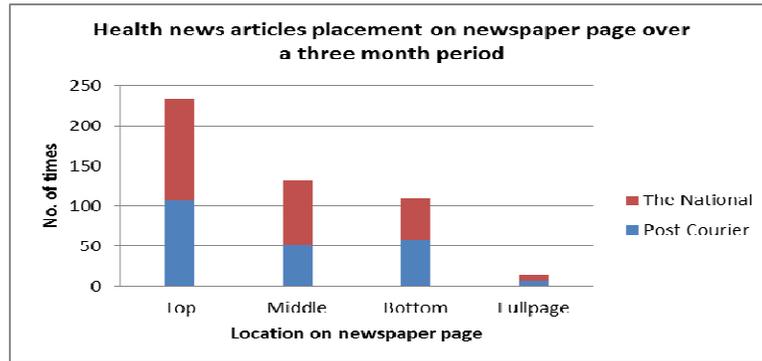


**Figure 3 Graph shows the newspaper pages in which the health news stories appear in the Post Courier and the National newspaper in January, March and May of 2014**

*Location of stories*

Of the 490 health stories in both papers, 48% of the stories (n=235) appeared at the top of the newspapers, 27% (n=132) appeared in the middle of the newspaper, 22% (n=109) appeared at the bottom and 3% (n=14) appeared as full page feature stories or press releases. Figure 4 shows, in terms of story

placements, where each of the health news stories were placed on the on the newspaper.



**Figure 4 Graph showing placement of health news articles in both Post Courier and The National newspaper in January, March and May of 2014**

### *Photos*

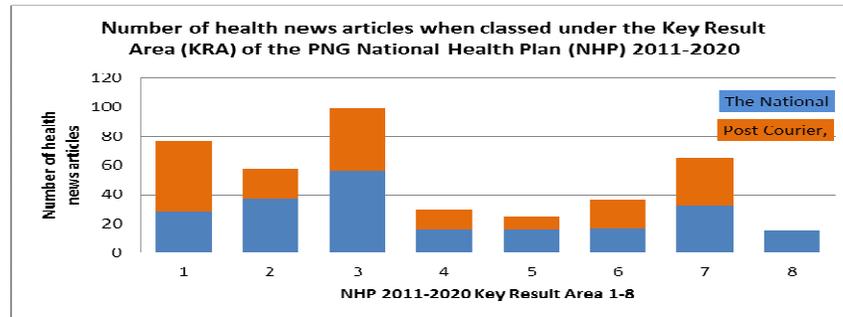
Of all the stories that appear on both newspapers, a total of two-thirds of the news stories do not have photographs to supplement the stories. There were a total of 490 local and international news stories identified in both papers however, 70% (n=349) had no photos accompanying the news stories.

## **2. News Article Content**

### **2.1 Primary News**

To assess the content of the primary health news covered in both papers over the months studied, the stories were grouped into eight categories which were the eight (8) Key Result Areas of the PNG National Health Plan.

When the stories were matched to the Key Result Areas (KRA) of the national health plan, in the Post Courier, 60.11% of the stories focussed on KRA 1, KRA 2 and KRA 3; while in the National, 56% of the stories were about KRA 1, KRA 2 and KRA 3. This means that more than half of the stories found in both newspapers were about improving health service, partnership and strengthening health systems and not about the five priority health outcomes which are KRA 4, KRA 5, KRA 6, KRA 7 and KRA 8 The graph below shows the total number of local health news stories when classed under the National Health Plan's KRAs.



**Figure 5** Graph showing number of health news stories in each paper when matched with the NHP KRAs<sup>1</sup>. The stories were recorded over a period of three months in January, March and May of 2014.

Whether knowingly or unknowingly, the two newspapers focus the reader's attention towards how health is delivered, when and who delivers it thus making people become aware of systems, components and mechanisms of service provision in the PNG Health Care System. This can be seen as evidence of frame-building as sixty percent (60%) of the Post Courier stories focus on the KRA 1,2 and 3 which are the administrative aspect of delivering health while the National newspaper also has a similar focus with 58% of the news stories on KRA 1,2 and 3. This means that over half over the stories in both papers were about improving health service delivery, partnerships and the key components of the National Health System such as ICT, Human Resource, Financing, Health Workforce, Infrastructure, Drugs & medical supplies and Leadership & Governance.

However, less than 43% of the stories in both papers focus on the five priority health outcomes (KRA 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8). In terms of framing, this means that both newspapers focus on the administrative systems and structures in the health care system and provide less than half of the total number of its news stories on priority health outcomes. This also means that stories about priority health outcomes such as child health, maternal health, burden of communicable disease, lifestyle disease and disease outbreaks & emerging population issues are significantly lower on average than stories on administrative aspect of service delivery.

<sup>1</sup> KRA 1 Improve Service Delivery

KRA 2 Strengthening Partnerships and Coordination with stakeholders

KRA 3 Strengthening Health Systems (Health Workforce, Financing, ICT, Infrastructure, Drugs and Medical supplies, Leadership and Governance.

KRA 4 Improve Child Survival (IMCI, Immunisation, Pneumonia, Nutrition)

KRA 5 Improve Maternal Health (FP, Population, Supervised Deliveries, EOC, Adolescent Health)

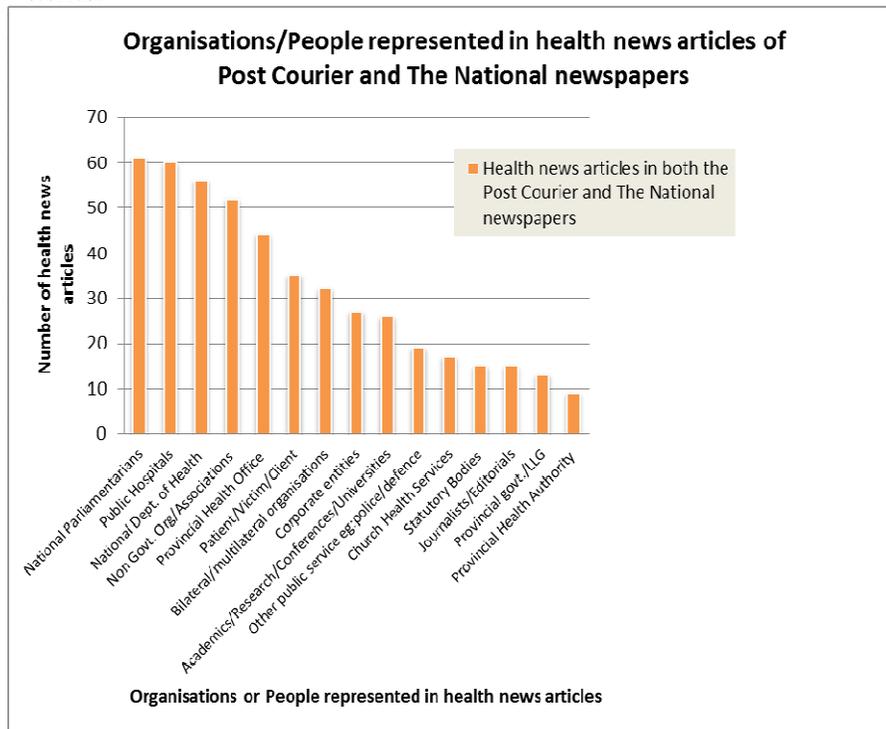
KRA 6 Reduce the burden of Communicable Disease (STI, HIV, Malaria and TB)

KRA 7 Promote Healthy Lifestyles (Health Promotion, Water Supply Sanitation, Non-communicable Disease, Nutrition

KRA 8 Improve preparedness for disease outbreaks and Emerging Population health issues (Institute of Public Health, CDC, CPHL, Climate Change)

## 2.2 Main organisations represented

Each printed newspaper story had a main speaker who expressed their opinion or that of their organisation which they represented. When both local and international stories were analysed, there were 15 categories identified which could field the different people or organisations represented. The top three categories with the highest number of speakers in *The National* newspaper were Public Hospitals (n=33), state politicians (n=30) and provincial health office (n=29) while in the *Post Courier*, the top three categories were state politicians (n=31), National Department of Health (n=28) and public hospitals representative (n=27). Figure 6 shows the combined totals for both newspapers of different organisations or people who were sources of the health news stories.



**Figure 6 Graph showing organisations and people represented in local health news articles in the Post Courier and The National newspapers in January, March and May, 2014**

When both papers were combined with local and international news stories analysed, national parliamentarians topped the list of speakers in all the news stories with 61 stories while public hospitals had 60 stories while the National Department of health had 56 stories. There is minimal reporting from both papers on the Provincial Health Authorities (PHA) in the provinces who have adopted this system.

Although the majority of the news sources are health administrators, as should be, there is a significant trend of national parliamentarians making health news. The findings show that one in every eight news-story is about a national politician making statements concerning health. In the PNG political context, while the minister for health is reported in the newspapers making statements about disease outbreaks, administrative changes or policies; the Open Electorate MPs are reported on development progress in their electorates such as launching of new aid-posts, launching of new ambulances or upgrading health facilities and giving money for health programs.

While an MP is an 'elite' person and as such commands a greater news value, it may be possible to say that both newspapers have begun to, knowingly or unknowingly, associate health service delivery in the open electorates with Open MPs. This can also mean that both papers rely on MPs as one of their major news sources when reporting about health news or that Open MPs have good public relations officers. This is evidence of frame-building of MPs as key administrators of health in their electorates and also sources of funding. This framing may belittle the role of provincial health office at the Provincial Government level who are key administrators and financial delegates of health as outlined in the Health Administration Act 1997 and Organic Law on Provincial and Local Level Government 1995.

### **2.3 Local and International**

Locally, in terms of health news coverage in each province, in the Post Courier, 49% (n=93) of the total number of local health news stories are about health in the capital city, Port Moresby while in the National newspapers, 40% (n=83) of the stories are about health in the capital city. For international news, in the Post Courier, Australia had the most health news stories (9 stories) while in The National, USA had the most health stories (15 stories). China had the second most number of health stories in both newspapers. In all health news articles, including international news stories, twenty-five percent (n=68) of the health news stories in The National newspaper stories had a by-line while twenty- three percent (n=50) of the health news stories in the Post Courier also had a by-line.

### **3. Tone**

When looking at both the international and local news combined, The National newspaper had almost equal number of positive (n=139) and negative stories (n=129). In the Post Courier, there was a large difference between the number of positive stories (n=136) and negative stories (n=86). To see if the tone of the health news stories were independent regardless of which paper the stories ran in, the researcher used the chi-square test in Excel. The null hypothesis was rejected as the p-value was 0.03695 which is less than 0.05 thus it can be said that the tone of the health news stories were dependent on each paper. This means that The National newspaper had more negative stories than the Post Courier

	Negative	Positive	Total
Post Courier	86	136	222
The National	129	139	268
Total	215	275	490

**Figure 7 Cross-tabulation showing tone of health news stories and the two newspapers in January, March and May, 2014**

Observed tone			
	Negative	positive	total
Post Courier	86	136	222
The National	129	139	268
Total	215	275	490

Expected tone			
	Negative	positive	total
Post Courier	97.40816	124.5918	222
The National	117.5918	150.4082	268
Total	215	275	490

**Figure 8 Cross tabulation of Observed tone in both papers and Expected tone in both papers; When calculated using the Chi-square, the p-value was 0.03695 and the null hypothesis was rejected.**

When both papers were combined, 56% of the total stories were positive (n=275) while negative stories accounted for 44% (n=215). When looking at the local health stories, in the Post Courier newspaper, these stories were mostly about Key Result Area 1 which is improving service delivery (n=49 stories). In The National newspaper, most of the stories came from Key Result Area 3 which is Strengthening the Health System (n=56 stories).

#### 4. Policies

In the National newspaper there are 21 instances of a national policy or document mentioned with the story whereas in the Post Courier there are 22 instances of national policy documents mentioned. These policy documents include the *Free Health Care Policy*, *Lukautim Pikinini Act*, *Vision 2050*, *HIV/AIDS Management and Prevention Act* and others. However, the interesting thing is that out of all of these instances of the mention of policies, there are only three news stories out of 490 news stories that mention the PNG National Health Plan 2011-2020, which is the country's key health plan over a ten year period. Interestingly, two of these stories were about the training of nurses in PNG and the third was about a maternal death due to pregnancy.

When combined both newspapers were combined, less than 9% of the health news stories in both newspapers have a government or organisational policy written in the same story.

### Discussion

For the question *How did the Post Courier and the National frame health news?*, this study produced a mixed bag. While the results show that fair prominence is given to health news in terms of story placements, photos and by-lines in both papers, the content was mostly about stories which had a positive tone to it and framed largely around health service delivery and national politicians.

#### **'Political health' and 'service delivery' as frames used in health news**

In terms of the prominence given to health news, it can be seen that most of the stories in both papers are at the top of the paper as lead stories and that 56% of health news in both newspapers were positive in nature. These positive stories focussed on health system improvements, health infrastructure development and better health service delivery. [Robie \(2001b\)](#) argued that to some degree, some Pacific news media already have an affinity for 'development news values'. This development news values included 'progress', 'growth' and 'new'. [Robie \(2013, p. 93\)](#) described countries in the Asia Pacific region such as Cook Islands, Fiji, India, PNG and Philippines has having similar news values who used these positive development news values particularly for nation building. This is particularly important as [Vreese \(2005\)](#) highlighted that news values play a critical role in frame-building of news stories. Well over half of the stories identified in this study were about positive health service delivery thus underlining the importance placed by the two newspapers on health stories that had components of development news values. Even though both newspapers consistently had elements of episodic frames in their health stories, [Lecheler and de Vreese \(2013\)](#) suggested that they could have a strong effect on the public's opinion formation, when repeatedly used.

The findings also show that news stories covered are geared towards administration of health especially the progress of health service delivery rather than focussing on the priority health outcomes of the National Health Plan. Key health outcomes such as emerging health threats and disease outbreaks in the National Health Plan are given minimal coverage.

Lee and Basnyat (2012, p. 130) pointed out that in pandemics such as H1N1 flu pandemic of 2009, thematic frames helped shape the pandemic into a "public" problem that was to be solved through community engagement and participation in prevention and containment efforts. The researchers emphasized that the more thematic the coverage there is, the more likely it is that citizens will see the emerging health outcomes as appropriate for collective action. While both newspapers in PNG frame their stories on episodic service delivery, there is a consistent lack of thematic framing of the wider policy solutions that address other key health outcomes such as lifestyle diseases as

pointed out by [Coleman et al. \(2011\)](#) and [Gollust and Lantz \(2009\)](#). Both [Arthur \(2012\)](#) and [Stefanik-Sidener \(2012\)](#) agree that when the media fail to discuss societal factors, people who are unfamiliar with a health issue may not realize the importance of broader policies and community-level action to prevent and minimize the diseases or health issue's impact when it occurs.

While this research found greater political involvement in the delivery of health services, it can be said that associating health with politics is not a new phenomenon. In 2003, when China faced the outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), China's political system was framed by its newspapers as largely responsible for an inadequate response to the SARS crisis ([Lin, 2012](#)). In 2010, when the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act was passed by the Obama administration, it was a significant milestone in the United States Health Care System and also in US politics. This was because of the policy's influence on patients, health care providers, insurance companies, the government, & pharmaceutical companies and this ensured heated debates during the legislative process ([Kim et al., 2014](#)). However, in this study, the two newspapers have shown national politicians in a positive light showcasing them as deliverers and implementers of health service delivery. [Moala \(2001\)](#) pointed out that the reporting of politics in the Pacific region posed greater challenges for reporters. This, he said, was not because reporters are biased or lacked objectivity but because politics is mixed up with issues like culture and tribal loyalties. This may have a greater impact on the mass media's ability to influence topics on the public agenda and framing of issues as suggested by [McCombs \(2004\)](#), [Kim et al. \(2014\)](#) and [Jones and Exworthy \(2015\)](#).

While the two PNG newspapers may associate health service delivery to national politicians, [Kim et al. \(2014, p. 9\)](#) say that as the media focusses on individuals, it draws public's perception of health away from larger society level health issues. In the case of the US, the larger society issues included unethical business practice and efficient government programs. Kim et al. found out that in the US, because the media had framed the issues towards individuals over a period of time; better public health policies like the Affordable Care Act received opposition and have prevented reform in the health sector.

This, then, highlights the common lack of thematic framing of health news ([Arthur, 2012](#)) as people only read episodes of health news without understanding the context of this news. Systematic issues in the PNG health care system such as government under-investment, inadequate personnel, weak administrative and management systems ([Asante & Hall, 2011, p. 3](#)) are often inconsistently framed thematically as can be seen from this study. [Cullen \(2014, p. 203\)](#) insisted that health news, particularly on diseases such as HIV/AIDS in PNG could not be addressed unless there is an understanding of social determinants of health which provide both a context and a better understanding of communicable and non-communicable disease.

There have been criticisms about PNG journalists not providing background information to their stories and even displaying a lack of 'institutional memory' to provide context for their stories ([Rooney, 2003](#); [Rooney, Papoutsaki, & Pamba, 2004](#)). However, not all the blame could be put on the media for episodic news coverage of health. [Duffield \(2005, p. 13\)](#) highlighted the then managing director of the South Pacific Post, Bob Howarth who pointed out that journalists also blamed the restriction of government sources by saying: "*Our subs block up to four stories a night because we cannot get hold of the other party to get the other view...Most of the government don't have media reps, they don't have mobile phone contacts, some disappear off the face of the earth for weeks*".

### **Challenges in developing better thematic framing**

Providing prominence to health issues by explaining the issues within a larger societal context ([Arthur, 2012](#)) may make readers more supportive of public policy changes and, if done with health news, could encourage newspaper readers to improve their own health behaviors too ([Coleman et al., 2011](#)). [Diedong \(2013\)](#) also highlighted that if these health stories are 'effectively framed', they can be 'very good sources of empowerment and direction to people improving their health. A lack of rich alternative sources of health news may create bias in the representation of health news content ([Coleman et al., 2011](#)). Public health research or scientific studies in health when published as news can be used as authoritative sources of news ([Rooney et al., 2004](#)).

This study also reveals that the four least acknowledged sources of news - Provincial Health Authority, Provincial Government, Statutory Bodies and journalists/editors themselves - are indeed great news sources that can not only amplify health issues but also articulate alternative points of view regarding a topic. In these three months studied, it is important to note that both newspapers published health news from research/conference/academic or statutory bodies such as PNG Institute of Medical Research (PNGIMR) or National AIDS Council Secretariat (NACS) make up less than 5% respectively of the total news stories both from international and local news. This may lead to the suggestion that issues discussed in the news stories are delivered by individuals who lack expertise or are not impartial in the matter being discussed ([Rooney et al., 2004](#)). [Druckman \(2005\)](#) also said that when academic or research stories takes a lesser precedence to politicians; it may also be suggested that the news stories are based on events that happen rather than health issues being examined systematically.

Some health issues like HIV/AIDS in PNG have been already thematically framed. The reporting of HIV/AIDS in PNG newspapers, over a ten year period from 2000 to 2010, has already moved on from episodic reporting to addressing the disease's linkages to the socio-economic conditions and cultural practices ([Cullen, 2010](#)). Thematic framing is already evident in other PNG issues apart from health. [Matbob \(2011\)](#) highlighted the Post Courier's 'advocacy role' in issues such as the NASFUND's 'Jimmy Come Back' superannuation coverage in 2000, the 2004 National Guns campaign and the

2007 Violence against women campaign. The issues, when framed thematically by Post Courier, have resulted in government extradition of Mr. Jimmy Maladina from Australia; changes to the PNG superannuation laws; and compilation of the Parliamentary Report on *Guns Control Report to the Government*, respectively.

The four least acknowledged sources shown in Figure 6 can also frame-build health news by providing the context in which the stories appear. For example, in the health news reported in both papers, there is hardly a mention of these how systems, components and mechanisms in the PNG Health Care System engage with significant policies including the NHP2011-2020. Even though the NHP 2011-2020 emphasises its links with the GOPNG key policy documents such as the PNG National Development Strategic Plan 2010-2030 and Vision 2050, there is a lack of its mention in almost all of the news stories analysed in this study. This is directly related to the very limited number of news stories that have key health and government policies mentioned in them. This study found only three news stories out of 490 health news stories that had a mention of the PNG National Health Plan 2011-2020 and only nine (9) stories were about the recently adopted Provincial Health Authority and its role in the provinces who have taken it on board. In terms of mentioning key policies in the news stories, it is interesting to note that a total of six (6) news stories were about the USA President Obama's Affordable Care Act.

The findings from this study also confirm that there is a lack of consistent representation of health news in other provinces outside of Port Moresby. Numerous studies show that news stories are mostly reported in the National Capital District and other provinces receive very little coverage ([Duffield, 2005](#); [Rooney, 2003](#); [Rooney et al., 2004](#)). In this study, the Post Courier, 49% (n=93) of the total number of local health news stories are about health in the capital city, Port Moresby while in the National newspaper, 40% (n=83) of the stories are about health in the capital city. The result may indicate support for [Rooney et al. \(2004\)](#) who stated that journalists over rely on powerful elites as sources of news and that journalists do not pro-actively find alternative sources to provide balance to stories. It may also be difficult for newspapers to report stories in the provinces due to various factors including crime ([Duffield, 2005, p. 7](#)) or geographical isolation ([Rooney, 2003, p. 122](#)) or have different priorities ([Wallington et al., 2010](#)).

However, some researchers say that consistent representation of health news from other less prominent settings could be improved by finding alternative sources thus providing an avenue for news readers to learn health issues and policy from other authoritative sources than elite powerful sources ([Diedong, 2013](#); [Gollust & Lantz, 2009](#)). This could be done by employing better editorials, commentary and opinion columns from the paper itself to distinguish between fact and opinion in health ([Robie, 2001a, p. 25](#)). The two newspapers could also diversify the content of news by engaging non-government organisations (NGOs) ([Robie, 2013, p. 100](#)) as they may employ experts and generally have a large community based constituencies ([Magick, 2001](#)) or even

utilise the church health service as it runs about half of the PNG Health Care System ([Asante & Hall, 2011, p. 6](#)).

### **Limitations**

One key limitation of this study was the small sample size of three months (January, March and May) of both papers thus this may not be representative of the content of the two newspapers in 2014. However, a month each was skipped to reduce bias of continuity of health issues in the newspapers. The publishing days in each of the three months for each newspaper were counted and analyzed thus, this study period identified significant patterns in the health news reported in both papers.

Future research in this area of framing health news in PNG may need to focus on the media organizations' role in the development of frames. This would require researchers to conduct qualitative interviews with reporters, sub-editors, editors and even newspaper owners to understand the context in which frames are developed and the rationale for these frames in the context of news values, news selection and even editorial preference for news in the two newspapers.

### **Conclusion**

Both *The National* newspaper and the *Post Courier* are significant mass media outlets in establishing key public health knowledge and aid ordinary Papua New Guineans in learning about health issues in their country. However, frame-building of news, especially in the selection of news sources, may significantly frame news that does not improve independent thinking, knowledge and collective actions of Papua New Guineans towards health issues in their country. Key findings such as the framing of politicians as key deliverers of health and framing of positive health service delivery may only influence people's opinion of health without having a clear context in which health occurs. If the readers of these two major news outlets do not have independent ideas on the issues they read about, then they are in a position where can they be easily manipulated by the framing of the news they read. For example, another of the key findings from this research was that there were only three (3) stories out of the 490 stories that mentioned the PNG National Health Plan 2011-2020. With is kind of information available to newspaper readers, this, then, may place newspaper readers outside of the health process, programs and plans in this country thus limiting their contribution to health issues.

Health workers, politicians, aid donors and the wider community all have different views on what represents a minimum standard required from basic health service delivery in Papua New Guinea; how proper health care should be defined and how it should be measured. Unless ordinary Papua New Guineans understand health issues and events in the greater picture of health, which are often outlined in government policies and plans; then governments are not held

accountable in the financial investments they make to achieve the health outcomes in the short term.

Ordinary Papua New Guineans also feed off information in newspapers, so the *Post Courier* and *The National* must make a greater effort in educating ordinary people, through its news stories, about how to judge successes of health investments through the effectiveness of health programs, the practicality of its implementation and its sustainability in the long term.

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