



# Brief Analysis of News Reports on HIV/AIDS in Taiwan, 2008

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## Abstract

Since the news media has become one of the most influential sources for social education, the majority of people contact and probe HIV/AIDS issues from the news media. For a long time, public sectors and NGOs have been launching campaigns set to raise the HIV/AIDS awareness and thus to decrease the infection possibilities. Measures have been taken to erase the long-term stigma against people with HIV/AIDS.

In this report, news pieces are sampled as raw materials for analysis. The selected news stories are categorized into eight types, and next, they have been processed with basic statistical methods. There have been totally 730 news samples detailed and interpreted in this analysis.

This report is intended to represent the imagines people conceive regarding HIV/AIDS issues through the news media. In addition, to detect the news media's attitudes toward HIV/AIDS issues, there is also a comparison between the positive-toned news stories and the negative-toned news pieces.

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The conclusion of this report indicates that the infection rates are inclined to be reduced by diffusing news, while, however, the long-term stigma against people with HIV/AIDS is not apt to alter despite the positive-toned news presentation.

**Keywords:** HIV/AIDS, HIV/AIDS news, news analysis

## **Introduction**

Since the first person with HIV/AIDS was diagnosed in 1986, there have been more than 16,000 people with HIV/AIDS in Taiwan up to date. Meanwhile our society stepped into the age of information explosion from the news media, which have been greatly influencing people's concepts and values.

In the early stage, experts in public health were the main source of the HIV/AIDS news, while "sex and shame" [3] was the government's announcement in its prevention procedures. Most people with HIV/AIDS feared and refused to confess their HIV-positive status. [4]

However, lack of key news sources on HIV/AIDS issues did not actually caused the news media to lessen the amount of news reports on HIV/AIDS issues. On the contrary, the number of HIV/AIDS news stories in the news media was on the increase. The news ranged from "medicine/health," "society/community", "public welfare", "world/international" to even "opinion/tribune."

HIV/AIDS news reports between 1984 and 1999 has been categorized into six periods [11]: 1. HIV/AIDS as an "imported" disease from the Western world (late-1984 to mid-1985); 2. HIV/AIDS as a gay men's disease (mid 1985-late 1988); 3. HIV/AIDS intruding family units (late 1988 to mid 1991); 4. HIV/AIDS as an "imported" disease from



South and Southeast Asia (mid 1991-early 1993); 5. identity shifts for HIV/AIDS (early 1993-late 1996); and 6. fights for human rights of people with HIV/AIDS (late 1996-late 1999).

The changes in the six periods reflected the complexity and variability of HIV/AIDS issues in Taiwan. Later on, academics in the fields of humanities and sociology initiated researching HIV/AIDS news content and its communication effects from the news media on HIV/AIDS issues<sup>1</sup>.

This analysis report is conducted by Persons with HIV/AIDS Rights Advocacy Association (PRAA), Taiwan, an NGO founded by people with HIV/AIDS for defending and striving for human rights of people with HIV/AIDS in work, in study, in housing, and so forth. PRAA has been engaging in the supervision of HIV/AIDS laws and policies from public sectors. PRAA aims to help enact appropriate laws and regulations and to help enforce fair policies.

To get close to the real images in people's mind on HIV/AIDS issues, PRAA has been collecting HIV/AIDS-concerned daily news since 2000. From 2002 on, PRAA has been inviting the other HIV/AIDS-related NGOs to vote on "Five Key HIV/AIDS News Reports of the Year" at the year's end for spotting the trend in the future.

In this brief report, PRAA attempts to interpret the findings in the statistical data, and expects to give suggestions for the news media to report correct information and to detach stigmatized messages in the HIV/AIDS news presentation.

<sup>1</sup> Studies on HIV/AIDS are mostly focused only on medication, as is likely attributed to the nature of HIV/AIDS as a disease. Nevertheless, the phenomenon has relatively restricted developments for HIV/AIDS research in the other research fields, such as politics, economics, and sociology.

## Methods of Analysis

The majority of the news samples are collected from the main large newspapers in Taiwan, including *China Times*, *United Daily News*, *The Liberty Times*, *United Evening News*, and *Apple Daily*. The rest of the news stories are published by public sectors, including Centers for Disease Control (CDC), National Health Command Center of CDC, and Public Health Bureau, etc. A small amount of the broadcast news are also discussed.

It is noteworthy that, to clearly present HIV/AIDS news in Taiwan, this report is not set to contain international news on HIV/AIDS issues from the sources mentioned above (Here China, Macao and Hong Kong are labeled as international areas). For example, the news on The Nobel Medicine Prize in 2008<sup>2</sup> is not sampled.

In total, 730 HIV/AIDS news pieces of Taiwan, between January 1 and December 10, 2008, are sampled for the analysis. PRAA refers to the news categorization from a highly-reputed academic publication, *Image Construction Effects from News Media on HIV/AIDS* (Mei-Ling Hsu, 2001)<sup>3</sup> [2]. The 730 HIV/AIDS news stories collected are encoded into the following eight types: “prevention work”, “advocate campaigns”, “case reports”, “HIV/AIDS-related research”, “attitudes towards people with HIV/AIDS”, “human rights of people with HIV/AIDS”, and “others”.

PRAA especially separates the “social events” type from “others” into another new type. Next, PRAA analyzes the data with basic descriptive statistics, and then, PRAA interprets the three most-numbered types by

2 Françoise Barre-Sinoussi, Luc Montagnier, Harald zur Hausen were co-awarded the Nobel Medicine Prize in 2008. The two French scientists, Françoise Barre-Sinoussi and Luc Montagnier, found HIV in early 1980s, and the German scientist, Harald zur Hausen, found HPV.

3 From pp. 74-75.



comparing positive-toned news reports with negative-toned news pieces. PRAA intends to conclude the findings of HIV/AIDS in Taiwan of 2008 and to set the results as policy references for HIV/AIDS prevention and media cooperation.

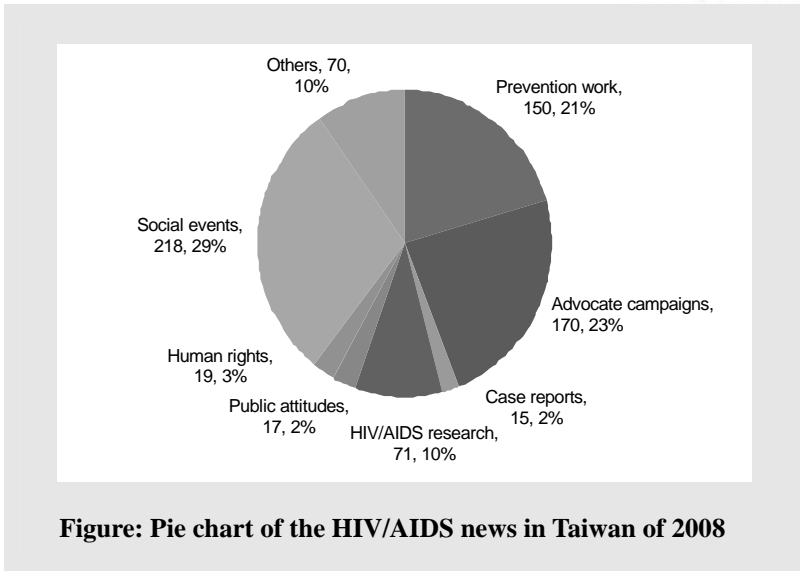
## Results of Analysis

### 1. The Statistics of HIV/AIDS News in Taiwan of 2008

**Table 1: HIV/AIDS news categorization in Taiwan of 2008**

Categorization Types	Cumulation
<b>1. Prevention work, divided into four sub-types :</b>	150
(1)HIV/AIDS controlling, such as policies, budgets, measures in prison or on campus, provision and advocate for condom use, etc.	79
(2)Epidemic information on HIV/AIDS, including the demographic characteristics of people with HIV/AIDS, infection trends and regions.	22
(3)HIV/AIDS-related obligations and responsibilities, such as the duty from people with HIV/AIDS with their family, community, and the government, assistances for the underdeveloped countries, teamwork for HIV/AIDS, etc.	28
(4)HIV-screening, including blood donation, blood transfusion and screening methods.	21
<b>2. Advocate campaigns:</b> anti-HIV/AIDS campaigns, including press conferences, symposiums, film festivals, dramas, competitions, quiz shows, and the viewpoints from relevant spokespersons or celebrities.	170
<b>3. Case reports:</b> news on the personal or community levels, including criminals, homosexuals, drug users via injection, the general public, volunteers, and NGOs, etc.	15
<b>4. HIV/AIDS-related research:</b> medical research on HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment, such as medical findings, transmission routes, medical knowledge, infectious sources and medications, etc.	71
<b>5. Attitudes towards people with HIV/AIDS:</b> facts and opinions from the general public, health-care workers, family or friends toward people with HIV/AIDS.	17
<b>6. Human rights of people with HIV/AIDS:</b> the right in employment, medical cares and services, protection in privacy, in anti-discrimination, and in mental health counseling, etc.	19
<b>7. Social Events</b>	218
<b>8. Others:</b> items not classified in the types above.	70

The news amount of each type are as follows: social events (218), advocate campaigns (170), prevention work (150), HIV/AIDS-related research (71), others (70), human rights of people with HIV/AIDS (19), attitudes towards people with HIV/AIDS (17) and case reports (15).



A total of the 538 news are sorted into the most-numbered groups, which stands for 74 percent among all the samples. A further analysis is required to evaluate the effects of the news media on HIV/AIDS issues. In addition, the content of the news messages is supposed to be read out.

The first of the following two analyses is to explain the statistical results in the “social events” type. The other is to probe reporting attitudes from the news media by compiling the most-numbered samples into positive-toned pieces and negative-toned stories. Both of the analyses are designed to provide a clear context for effects and consequences of news



diffusion on HIV/AIDS issues.

## 2. The Analysis on the Results of “Social Events” Type

The hypothesis is not conducted in the report that the high percentage of the HIV/AIDS news in “social events” type affects a large number of audiences. However, in general, the audience, both apparently and potentially, has more contacts with HIV/AIDS messages from the news of social events.

Compared to the other types of HIV/AIDS news stories, news reports of social events focus on the daily routine. Soap-opera plots, novel-like circumstances, and sensational conversations are usually described in such the news reports. News reports in the type of social events mostly highlight the fact that some people have HIV/AIDS, without providing educative information. Such the news pieces not only fail to clarify false messages but also show as false messages themselves. As a consequence, it is likely that the audience conceives negative impressions on HIV/AIDS issues.

The following are the features of the HIV/AIDS news of social events:

### (1) False-centered or misleading news reports:

In the type of social events, the news cores are either falsely correlated to HIV/AIDS issues or intentionally stressed on the characters with HIV/AIDS, even if HIV/AIDS should not be the theme or the focus in the news.

Here are some typical examples: “AIDS patient hurts himself in public” (*United Daily News*, Jan 4, 2008); “Car thief involved in accident,

AIDS patient caught” (*China Times*, Jan 12, 2008); “Electric cable thievery, three thieves with HIV” (*The Liberty Times*, Jan 22, 2008); “AIDS man committing charcoal-burning suicide” (*China Times*, Feb 27, 2008); “AIDS suspect scares policeman” (*China Times*, Apr 6, 2008); “Drug peddler with AIDS robs convenience store” (*China Times*, Apr 26, 2008); “AIDS patients in car accident scare policeman” (*United Daily News*, Aug 27, 2008).

(2) News reports on needle-sticks, bites, or spits from people with HIV/AIDS:

In this kind of news reports, incorrect information on HIV/AIDS issues is widely presented. Also, ridiculous connections between improper behaviors and HIV/AIDS infection are made. Right transmission routes are rarely mentioned.

Here are some typical examples: “AIDS drug peddler spits, policeman fires a shot, subdues the peddler” (*United Daily News*, Jun 16, 2008); “AIDS drug peddler spits, deters the policeman” (*U-Paper*, Jun 16, 2008); “HIV drug peddler holds methadone in mouth: leak in HIV/AIDS prevention” (*China Times*, Jun 27, 2008); “Policeman bitten by thief with HIV” (*United Daily News*, Dec 1, 2008).

It is concluded that news reports in the two types mentioned above are the most frequent in the “social events” type: 41 false-centered or misleading news reports, and 45 news reports on needle-sticks, bites, or spits from people with HIV/AIDS.

From PRAA’s long-term work experience in phone-counseling, the days when news reports on needle-sticks, bites, or spits from people with





HIV/AIDS are presented in the news media, those calling-in show the most concerns, worries, and even anxieties on the content. In addition, false-centered or misleading news reports are inclined to construct stereotypes that “people with HIV/AIDS are bad guys” in the long term.

### **3. Explanations for Positive-toned News Messages and Negative-toned News Reports**

If HIV/AIDS news reports in the “social events” type are viewed as the negative-toned, then news reports in the types of “prevention work” and “advocate campaigns” can be labeled as positive-toned news reports for information correction or for viewpoint balance.

According to the statistics, the amount of the positive-toned news (320 pieces) is actually more than that of the negative-toned news (218 pieces). At first sight, it seems that the audience is likely to contact more positive-toned messages than negative-toned ones. However, correct conception and right awareness are not necessarily conveyed just because of the more number of the positive-toned news reports. The main reason lies in that the positive-toned news reports cannot equivalently balance the effects of the negative-toned news stories.

The following is the comparison between the positive-toned news (in the “social events” type) and the negative-toned news (in the “prevention work” and the “advocate campaigns” types).

Table 2: Comparisons between positive-toned news and negative-toned news

	Negative-toned news	Positive-toned news
Categorization types	Social events	(1) Prevention work (2) Advocate campaigns
News content	(1) Needle-stick news (23 pieces) (2) Bite-or-spit news (22 pieces) (3) Robbery or burglary (36 pieces) (4) False-focused or misleading news (5 pieces)	(1) Policies for reducing harm from drug addiction (27 pieces) (2) Advocate activities for condom use (29 pieces) (3) Advocate activities for HIV-screening (19 pieces) (4) Concert for orphans out of HIV/AIDS (43 pieces) (5) Dr. David Ho's lectures on campus (11 pieces) (6) Care for babies with HIV (24 pieces)

Obviously, the positive-toned news reports focus on educating the public to prevent from getting infected with HIV/AIDS. By contrast, the negative-toned news stories focus on illegal or improper behaviors of long-stigmatized characters, including adults with HIV/AIDS, drug users, suspects, criminals, and even the unemployed<sup>4</sup>.

However, educating the public to prevent from HIV/AIDS infection is apparently not correlated to the stereotypes that people to do with HIV/AIDS are troublemakers. Furthermore, the seemingly positive-toned news rather form another negative implication---“Do not get infected with HIV. If you have HIV, you will be a bad guy.”

<sup>4</sup> It has been questioned if the constant connections between “people with HIV/AIDS” and “criminals and suspects” in the news reports have caused people with HIV/AIDS to be labeled as crime-committers. The aspect demands further examination.



In addition, news messages on HIV/AIDS prevention, such as policies for reducing harm from drug addiction, advocate activities for condom use and for HIV-screening, fail to solve public doubts from reading the needle-stick, bite-or-spit news.

In other words, positive messages on HIV/AIDS in the news media cannot relieve the public fears for HIV/AIDS infection. Such the crucial problem should be the first concern for social educational projects on HIV/AIDS issues in the future.

In the “advocate campaigns” news, care-showing activities come in the highest percentage and focus on babies with HIV/AIDS. Arousing sympathy is likely to be the intention of the news in this type. Nevertheless, it is reviewed by some critics that such the sympathy appears only for “innocent children” and “victims who accidentally get infected with HIV/AIDS,” not at all for “adults with HIV/AIDS” and “people who have HIV/AIDS because of ill behaviors.” Similarly, such the viewpoints require further investigation into attitudes of the public towards HIV/AIDS.

To sum up in a simple example, when a reader may read a positive-toned news report on the HIV/AIDS-caring advocate activity on one page, yet he or she may read a negative-toned news story on a robber with HIV/AIDS committing a crime on another page. For the audience in Taiwan, he or she has been accustomed to accepting such the cognitive conflicts, as similar situations have been occurring any time in the news media [1].

## **Conclusion**

With considerable effects for message diffusion, the news media is the vital source for social education. The majority of the public contact and receive HIV/AIDS issues via the news media. Moreover, HIV/AIDS-related governmental sectors and NGOs highly depend on the news media to advocate and propagate knowledge for HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment [5-10]. Therefore, the news media are supposed to assist social work on HIV/AIDS in reducing infection rates and in altering stigmas and stereotypes against people with HIV/AIDS.

In this report, by analyzing statistics of HIV/AIDS news reports in Taiwan of 2008, it is found that HIV/AIDS issues on prevention and treatment can possibly be improved by means of the news media. However, it is nearly impossible to get improved in rejection and misunderstanding against people with HIV/AIDS.

To cope with the current HIV/AIDS situations in Taiwan society, the communication effects of the news media cannot be over-emphasized. PRAA offers the following suggestions based on the findings in the report:

1. The organizations concerned, especially the public sectors or the experts, must formally, actively, instantly respond to those news reports that may cause anxiety or panic among the public.
2. The HIV/AIDS-related work organizations must immediately correct false or misleading messages in news reports, especially those on transmission routes, to dissolve irrational doubts of the public.
3. The HIV/AIDS-related service systems must develop effective strategies to tackle social demands reflected in the news reports and the



negative effects brought by the news media.

4. The public sectors and NGOs on HIV/AIDS social service must provide the media workers with basic but sufficient HIV/AIDS education to help the news media raise their reporting quality.

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