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Beyond Diagnosis: Framing Family Planning in Uganda's Print Media¹

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Abstract

Family planning promotion through the press is a popular development strategy in Africa. However, few studies have examined how print media content on family planning is framed. Premised on the framing theory, this article examines how two newspapers, namely *The New Vision* and the *Monitor* in Uganda frame news on family planning. A summative content analysis was conducted on 45 articles using pre-determined diagnostic frames that define a problem, prognostic frames that offer a solution and motivational frames that call for action. The findings reveal that most news adopted the diagnostic frame yet more motivational and prognostic news framing could stimulate the demand for family planning services.

Key words: Family Planning, Diagnostic Framing, Prognostic Framing, Motivational Framing, Print Media

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Introduction

Rapid population growth is a serious concern for a number of developing countries as it threatens to jeopardize several development goals. The past two decades have witnessed renewed global advocacy on family planning in sub-Saharan Africa (Dockalova, Lau, and Marshall 2016), so as to reduce high fertility in the region. The use of modern family planning methods, comprising long and short-term contraceptives² is integral to enabling governments achieve national and international development goals.

Effective and consistent use of modern family planning methods enables couples to realise desired birth intervals, ideal family size, and a decline in fertility (Ankomah, Anyanti, and Oladosu 2011; Jain 2001). The use of modern contraception and family planning services is also directly beneficial to realizing the sustainable development goals at the individual, community, national and global levels. Family planning can have a major impact on health, wealth, and education by preventing unwanted pregnancies, lowering maternal and child mortality risks, helping safeguard the environment, supporting the rights and empowerment of women and girls and increasing food security for people around the world (Starbird, Norton, and Marcus 2016; UNFPA

2017;³ World Health Organization 2018⁴).

The mass media is central to the promotion of modern family planning and is considered a major source of information and communication about family planning issues to the public (Alege, Matovu, Ssensalire, and Nabiwemba 2016; Bongaarts et al. 2012; Islam and Hasan 2016). Research suggests that the use of mass media platforms such as radio, television, newspapers, billboards, magazines, and digital technologies can increase the uptake of family planning methods by providing accurate information, building self-efficacy and promoting attitudes and social norms that support the use of modern contraceptives (Ajaero, Odimegwu, Ajaero, and Nwachukwu 2016; Health Communication Partnership 2012⁵).

Family planning programmes often link the mass media with approaches like interpersonal communication, community mobilisation, entertainment

² Examples of short and long-term modern contraceptive methods include contraceptive pills, implants, injectable hormonal contraceptives, intrauterine devices, male and female condoms, tubal ligation and vasectomy (World Health Organization 2018).

³ UNFPA (2017). "Family Planning: The Right Investment to Drive Uganda's Socioeconomic Transformation." *Issue Brief* 03. Kampala, Uganda. United Nations Population Fund. Retrieved 18 November 2019 (https://uganda.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/familyPlanning_BriefEdit%20%284%29.pdf).

⁴ World Health Organization (2018). "Family Planning/Contraception." *Fact Sheet*. Geneva, Switzerland. World Health Organization. Retrieved 18 November 2019. (<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/family-planning-contraception>)

⁵ Health Communication Partnership (2012). "The Health Communication Partnership Uganda Final Report-May 2012." Baltimore: John Hopkins University. Retrieved 18 November 2019. (<https://www.malecircumcision.org/resource/hcp-uganda-final-report-may-2012>).

education and investment in service delivery for better impact (High-Impact Practices in Family Planning 2017;⁶ United Nations Children's Fund 2005). In view of this lies the potential of the mass media to influence positively the acceptance and consistent use of modern family planning methods by women and men of reproductive age.

The Government in Uganda has repositioned family planning highly on its development agenda (Ministry of Health 2014, 2015), with the mass media as a key stakeholder in promoting family planning to the public so as to achieve the country's development goals. Uganda has one of the fastest growing populations in the world with a growth rate of 3.2 per cent and a total fertility rate of 5.4 children per woman (Uganda Bureau of Statistics and ICF 2018). This rate is higher than the total fertility rate worldwide estimated at 2.4 children per woman (Population Reference Bureau 2019).

Despite evidence on the benefits of family planning, modern contraceptive use in the country remains low at 35 per cent and far from the Government of Uganda's target of reaching 50 per cent modern contraceptive prevalence by 2020 (Ministry of Health 2014). In comparison, other African countries, such as Kenya (62.3%), Egypt (59.7%)

and Rwanda (50.2%), have already registered a 50 per cent modern contraceptive prevalence rate (Cahill et al. 2018).

Whereas there are many influential factors, low contraceptive use and high fertility rates in Uganda have been partly attributed to inadequate information on family planning (Ministry of Health 2014; Population Secretariat 2018). As such, the government's key strategies on population management identify the mass media as central to the delivery of appropriate information on family planning to the public for desired behaviour change (Ministry of Health 2014, 2015). Given the important role ascribed to the mass media in publicizing family planning, this article draws on the framing theory to establish what information the print media presents to the public.

Understanding the framing of news on family planning is crucial given that the way news is reported has implications on how the audience understands the importance of a problem and its probable solutions (Stevens & Hull 2013). This enquiry will also show how Uganda's print media – specifically on how information about contraceptives is framed – are contributing to efforts by various stakeholders to ensure family planning promotion in the country.

Health news in the press reaches the public via a particular lens through which journalists, editors, and other actors frame issues reported in the

⁶ High-Impact Practices in Family Planning (HIPS) (2017). "Mass Media: Reaching Audience Far and Wide with Messages to Support Healthy Reproductive Behaviors." *Brief*. Washington, DC: USAID. Retrieved 18 November 2019. (<https://www.fphighimpactpractices.org/briefs/massmedia/>).

media. The framing of health news in print media is crucial because the way news is characterized has an impact on how people understand and deal with the issues in question (Koon, Hawkins, and Mayhew 2016; Lacey and Longman 1999).

Framing as a theory of communication denotes how the media packages and presents information to the public. According to Robert Entman (1993:52), the process of framing involves selecting given aspects of a text to be communicated and making it more salient so as “to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.” As part of the framing process, journalists frequently use news frames to help present large amounts of information in coherent understandable and interpretative packages when covering intricate issues (Kim and Wills 2007).

This conceptualisation implies that frames provide patterns of interpretation that enable the recipients to easily make sense of the information they receive. Research further suggests that framing is not only done by journalists but also by other actors such as policy experts and activists. Different actors can deliberately package and frame policy ideas so as to assure the public that certain policy notions entail acceptable solutions to given problems (Campbell 1998; Murphy and Maynard 2000).

Framing can also be done by social actors and individuals to drive an agenda through the media (Vliegenthart 2012). In this regard, such actors serve as media sources, whose agenda becomes part of the frame building system that generates and conveys specific frames to the public through news stories. Perspectives of the framing approach present evidence on the efficacy of mass media framing of health issues. Framing research shows that the mass media are an influential part of the social environment since they identify and prioritize certain issues based on the nature of their coverage (Gallagher and Updegraff 2012; Morrison Sutton, and Mebane 2006).

Similarly, a study of newspaper coverage of health issues in Ghana confirmed that when stories are effectively framed, they can be very good sources of empowerment and help direct people towards improving their health (Diedong 2013). Likewise, Renita Coleman, Esther Thorson, and Lee Wilkins (2011) who tested the effect of framing in health news stories noted that public health framing made readers supportive of public policy changes and encouraged them to change their own health behaviour.

A study on women’s reproductive health in Uganda noted that the effect of any particular media message depends on the way information is framed (Anholt and Health Journalist

Network in Uganda 2017⁷). This study observes that through framing, media reflects how health is understood and shapes society's health behaviour (Anholt and Health Journalist Network in Uganda 2017).

Regular exposure to a particular news frame has also been shown to establish a dominant discussion among the public and policy makers (Arroyave 2012; Finnegan and Viswanath 2008). These viewpoints further bring to bear how media's decisions on framing health news could shape public consciousness about family planning related information.

By drawing attention to how the media frames health news, the framing approach gives insights on how stories on family planning should be articulated in the media so as to achieve the most impact. The concept of framing is generally attributed to the frame analysis work of sociologist Erving Goffman who articulated that people tend to categorize and communicate their experiences based on guiding frames of reference (Goffman 1974).

Later theorists, Robert Benford and David Snow (2000), applied Goffman's ideas to classify three framing elements commonly used in social movements, which can also be found in media texts. Namely, diagnostic frames that identify a

problem and attribute blame and causality; prognostic frames, which specify what needs to be done to solve the problem as well as who should do so, and motivational frames, which call for corrective action and assigns responsibility for such action.

Whereas these frames are predominant to social movements, they have been employed in frame identification processes examining media content. Accordingly, these frames form part of the recent concepts and definitions of media framing (Roggeband and Vliegenthart 2007; Vliegenthart 2012). However, the application of these frames to news stories on family planning is relatively unexamined. Nonetheless, they provide a methodical and conceptually explicit way of examining extant frames in media texts on family planning. Against the backdrop of the framing approach, this article adopted the diagnostic, motivational and prognostic frame alignment categories by Benford and Snow (2000) to conduct a descriptive content analysis of print news articles from two major dailies in Uganda.

While there is abundant literature about how exposure to mass media messages influences audience awareness, attitude and behaviour with regard to family planning (Andi, Wamala, Ocaya, and Kabagenyi 2014; Gupta, Katende, and Bessinger 2003; Islam and Hasan 2016), literature on how mass media frames such information appears replete. Yet, the quality of information the media

⁷ Anholt, Rosanne and Health Journalist Network in Uganda (2017). "Writing Women's Reproductive Health: A Uganda Study." Kampala. Health Journalist Network in Uganda". (<http://hejnu.ug/writing-womens-reproductive-health-a-uganda-study/>).

conveys to the public is important since it could affect people's family planning choices which would eventually impact the health outcomes of individuals, families, communities, and the nation.

Methodology

In order to examine how the print media in Uganda portrays issues of family planning, a summative approach to qualitative content analysis was conducted. A summative content analysis entails identifying and counting certain words or content in a text with the purpose of understanding the contextual use of words or content (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). This approach was selected because it goes beyond mere word counts to include interpretation of content and context associated with the use of the word or phrase (Bengtsson 2016; Hsieh and Shannon 2005).

We examined print news articles from two major English language newspapers; the *Monitor* and the *New Vision*, with top circulation countrywide (Uganda Business News 2020⁸), published between July 2014 and July 2015. Media coverage of family planning is usually high in the month of July when World Population day is commemorated.

The principal researcher and one trained coder conducted a manual search for articles on family planning from a data set comprising 790 newspapers (*Monitor*: 395 copies) and (*New Vision*: 395 copies) published daily during the study period. The unit of analysis was an article derived from sections of the newspaper categorized as news, features, editorials, special reports, health segment, women's segment, commentaries from the public, and paid for supplements on family planning that were authored by in-house journalists.

The newspaper segment from the latter included a rider stipulating that the content, though paid for, did not ineludibly reflect the views of the funding agency. Other paid for content in form of advertisements was not included in the analysis. Articles whose headlines, sub-headlines or pull quotes contained any of the following key words; family planning, population, contraceptives, contraception, fertility, birth spacing, birth control, childbirth, maternal health, reproductive health and pregnancy, were selected.

These articles were read in-depth to identify only those mentioning "family planning" or "contraceptives." In total, 45 family planning-related articles (20 *Monitor* newspapers and 25 *New Vision*), were selected for the subsequent frame analysis. The resulting data set of articles were then coded by the principal investigator using a deductive coding framework derived from Benford

⁸ Uganda Business News (2020). "Circulation Falls for Uganda Newspapers in Fourth Quarter of 2019." Kampala, Uganda. Kabalega Media. Retrieved 1 April 2020. (<https://ugbusiness.com/8425/circulation-falls-for-uganda-newspapers-in-fourth-quarter-of-2019/>).

and Snow's (2000) frame alignment categories of diagnostic, prognostic and motivational frames. Each article was read in totality to determine the frequency of mentions of the aforementioned frames and a description of key variables relevant to each of the pre-determined framing categories.

Findings

Diagnostic, motivational and prognostic frames were derived from the 45 articles published in the newspaper segments of the *Monitor* (*M*) and *New Vision* (*NV*). These comprised editorials (*M*=02, *NV*=02), health section (*M*= 07, *NV*= 01), national news (*M* =04, *NV*= 07), public commentary (*M* = 05, *NV*= 04), special reports (*M*= 02, *NV*= 01), supplement (*M* =00, *NV*= 07), and women section (*M*=00, *NV*= 01).

Diagnostic frames emerged as the clear front runner in terms of frequency of mentions with over a half of the articles (220 mentions, 51.8%) in *Monitor* and *New Vision* reporting on the prevalence and causes of low uptake of family planning in Uganda. Of these, *Monitor* had (117 mentions, (53.1%), while *New Vision* had (103 mentions, 46.8%). Directly after were motivational frames (107 mentions, 25.2%) representing the articles in both newspapers that called for corrective action to the prevalent problem of low modern contraceptive utilization in the country.

Of these, *Monitor* had (59 mentions, 55.1%), while *New Vision* had (48 mentions, 44.8%). The least represented category in both newspapers were prognostic frames (97 mentions, 22.8%) which reported on the on-going strategies by government and other players to promote the use of family planning as a solution to the existing problem. Of these, *Monitor* presented with (44 mentions, 45.3%), while *New Vision* registered (53 mentions, 54.6%).

Most family planning articles in both *Monitor* and *New Vision* used diagnostic frames to present information on the prevailing situation in Uganda with regard to population growth and family planning. The articles framed Uganda's high population growth rate due to high fertility as a development problem in the country. Three common themes emerged from the diagnostic framed articles.

The most dominant themes in the news coverage reflected the low uptake of family planning (*M*=51.9%, *NV*=48%) and the causes of low prevalence of family planning in Uganda (*M*=53.6%, *NV*=46.3%). In contrast, the least represented theme in the diagnostic category was on the impact of low prevalence of family planning in the country (*M*=5.4%, *NV*=4%).

Both newspapers described Uganda as experiencing an increased number of unwanted pregnancies; a persistently high total fertility rate; high maternal and child mortality due to frequent childbirth; a high-unmet

need for family planning and a rapid and unplanned population growth. For example, a commentary writer in the *Monitor* reported observed: “In the last 10 years, the fertility rate in Uganda has remained persistently high, averaging 6.7 births. Uganda has one of the world’s fastest growing population and experts say the country’s public services are finding it hard to cope” (Oramire 2015:9). Similarly, the *New Vision* in a news story reported:

Uganda’s population is 34.9 million people ... which is one of the highest in the world and this rate is projected to rise to 54 million in 2025 and expected to reach 130 million in 2050 (Wandera 2015:7).

By framing the country’s rapid population growth as a development problem, the news stories portrayed how such exponential growth was bound to cause a scarcity of resources in Uganda. The print media mainly attributed this situation to lack of access to family planning information and services. For example, a news article in the *Monitor* reported:

... more than half of Ugandan women have no access to modern family planning methods as the number of unwanted pregnancies remain high in both rural and urban areas [...] this has been attributed to ignorance about family planning and contraception (Ainebyoona 2015:5).

Other contributory factors to Uganda’s high fertility situation were attributed to conflicting messages against family planning from opinion leaders as well as male resistance and, gender-based

barriers to family planning uptake. For example, the *New Vision* reporting on male resistance to family planning, recounted: “most men in rural areas still refuse their wives to use family planning methods claiming that they may make them too fat or thin and also bleed for longer days during their menstrual periods” (Agaba 2015:14).

Women were also portrayed as either not using family planning or doing so discreetly due to spousal disapproval. In other instances, women were depicted as victims, vulnerable to abuse by their partners if they used contraceptives. An anecdote from a special report in the *Monitor* describes a similar context and elucidates the predicaments some women face when they use contraceptives inconspicuously:

‘I opted for an implant,’ Ayite recalls. It was put under my arm but because my husband was not happy with me taking birth controls, when he saw my hand, he used a razor blade to cut through my skin and removed it [...] he threatened to cut off my arm should he ever find anything like that (implant) (Mutebi 2015:15).

Comparably, a story in the *New Vision* narrated how a woman could not use contraceptives since she hoped to bear a son after producing five girls:

‘I feared that my man would leave me for another woman in search of a baby boy.’ Unfortunately, he still left me for another woman after doctors advised me to stop conceiving because of the risk of complications (Kiwawulo & Kiwuuwa 2015:26).

These news representations illustrated the centrality of the press in the construction and presentation of women's narratives and perceptions of family planning based on their lived experiences.

Some of the aforementioned problems were framed as contributing to Uganda's high and unplanned population growth hence exacerbating the country's development challenges. These include poverty, hunger, land conflicts, unemployment, environment degradation, political instability, civil disobedience, high dependence burden and poor service delivery in health, education, and infrastructure development. For instance, a feature from a supplement in the *New Vision* illuminated the aforesaid circumstances in the country:

Uganda is one of the countries that have been ranked as demographically vulnerable, according to the set of challenges that are associated with rapid population growth. The challenges include hunger and malnutrition, poverty, water scarcity (Mugisa 2015:43).

In the same way, a commentary in *Monitor* reported:

... as a matter of fact, our population is increasing at an alarming rate, outstripping service delivery and this has to be controlled in order to avoid adverse effects on the country's economic, social, political, and environmental aspects (Musana 2015:11).

By profiling the challenges linked to the country's fast-growing

population, the press created an interface between news reporting and drawing the public's attention to pertinent development issues worthy of their attention.

Furthermore, both newspapers visibly constructed the low uptake of family planning services with a gender bias reflecting this as largely a women's domain given some of the narratives that manifested in the articles. Such phrases that drew analogies to females included: "unwanted pregnancies", "women have unsafe abortions", "teenage pregnancies", "high fertility", "high maternal mortality", "women's unmet need for family planning", "women to inject themselves", "burden to women", and "frequent child birth". As such, the press risked conveying misleading stereotypes in their discourse about family planning by deploying frames that promoted a gender bias.

We found motivational framing as the second most prevalent frame in both *Monitor* and *New Vision*. Motivational frames in the articles emphasized family planning as a means to deal with the problems stemming from a rapid and unplanned population growth. The articles prescribed actions that needed to be taken by different stakeholders including government, development partners, health workers and individuals, so as to ensure increased and consistent uptake of family planning.

The dominant call-to-action among the articles with motivational

frames in both newspapers implored government (29.9%) to sensitize the masses on the benefits of modern contraceptives so as to influence their knowledge, attitude and behaviour, and improve access (27.1%) to family planning services. A commentary in the *Monitor* noted:

... we need to appreciate the fact that majority of our people (including decision makers) do not correlate population to development, and we therefore, have to continue sensitising the masses on the interlinkages between the two and encourage couples to have small manageable families (Musana 2015:11).

Relatedly, a call to action targeting the government, in the *New Vision* recounted:

... you should invest in family planning and address all the gaps there, education to create a strong labour force, encourage investments, reduce mortality rate so that women are not forced to keep producing to replace those who have died (Ariba 2015:6).

Consequently, such motivational-framed stories suggested a multipronged approach that government and other actors could undertake to curb Uganda's high fertility rate.

Though not predominant, a few articles (11.2%) mentioned the importance of reinforcing positive male norms by sensitising men on the benefits of family planning. A writer in the *Monitor* recommended:

... there is an urgent need to educate men on the advantages

of family planning methods as well as educating them on gender equality such that they can realise that women and men are equal partners with equal rights (Nabuunya 2015:10).

Another report in the *New Vision* goes ahead with a similar argument that strengthens this recommendation when it reported:

... behaviour change communication interventions targeting both women and men especially in rural areas are urgently needed in order to increase demand for reproductive health services and commodities (Wandera 2015:7).

Such motivational frames further prescribed actions, premised on a rights-based approach, that both men and women could adopt so as to ensure their consistent uptake of family planning.

From a gender perspective, the tone of motivational frames in several articles was women-centred in comparison to those articles (11.2%) that accentuated male involvement in family planning. Motivational framed articles in the *New Vision* mainly portrayed family planning as a means to improve on the health of women, children and their families as well as avert unwanted pregnancies.

An editorial in *New Vision* supporting the provision of self-administered injectable contraceptives for women argued, "the rationale behind wide spread use of contraceptives by women is that if women can gain more control

over their sexual choices then it is likely they will have fewer children (Editorial 2014b:12). For the *Monitor*, articles primarily framed family planning as a means to avoiding unwanted pregnancies and reducing the economic burden on families and the country.

Accordingly, an editorial in the *Monitor* weighed in on how population control could avert poverty affirming:

... population is the worst kind of violence ... if Uganda does not stem population growth, it cannot stop the growing tide of people living and suffering and dying in poverty. Control population growth and you can control – perhaps even cure-poverty (Editorial 2014a:10).

The presence of motivational frames in the editorials of both newspapers is suggestive of the special publicity accorded to family planning news by the editors who underscored the importance of family planning to the health and financial well-being of families.

The least manifest motivational frame in *Monitor* (2%) and *New Vision* (2%) was the call on government to ensure a favourable policy environment to support family planning in Uganda. A feature in *New Vision* challenged the government to harness Uganda's national development plan to enable citizens access sexual and reproductive health services; "to address health sector challenges, Vision 2040 should empower communities to take charge of their health by

promoting healthy practices" ((Kizza 2015:46, July 16). Although the press under reported policy actions, the manifest motivational frames on policy brought into play the national development plan, which could prompt government policy responses to family planning.

Prognostic frames were the least reported in the articles on family planning in *Monitor* (54.6%) and *New Vision* (45.3%). The articles herein essentially framed solutions to low family planning uptake by presenting the benefits of family planning utilization as well as the on-going strategies employed by different stakeholders to promote the uptake of family planning in Uganda. As was previously mentioned with motivational frames, the core themes arising from prognostic frames in the *Monitor* and *New Vision* further reinforced the significance of family planning as improving the standard of living of women, children and their families, as well as averting unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions. Both the *Monitor* and *New Vision* reported on the health and economic benefits of family planning in reference to the President of Uganda's support of family planning. A news article in the *Monitor* quoted the president as having said:

... family planning is good for the mother so that her health is not ruined by having too many children, parents have children they can afford to look after so that they do not grow like wild plants. The family would spend

less on children and their needs. In turn, they would save and make wealth (Ayebazibwe 2014:3).

A similar news story in *New Vision* profiling the president's support for family planning quoted him as having said that, "family planning is good for the health of mothers and children and for the family welfare because it saves wealth" (Vision Reporter 2014:3). The editors' choice to quote the president who is an opinion leader privileged prognostic-framed information. Additionally, the president's endorsement of family planning gave more emphasis on the health and economic benefits of family planning. Elucidating more on the benefits of family planning, another article in the *New Vision* noted:

Fewer children reduce the economic burden on woman and their families thus allowing them to spend more on each individual child, thereby improving nutrition and health, access to education and better living standards. It also frees women from the burden of looking after several children which enables them to access employment thus contributing to increased income at household levels (Asiimwe 10 April 2015:11).

In principle, such prognostic frames that illuminated the health, economic, and social benefits of family planning were presented as mechanisms that could influence the fertility decisions of women and men.

Regarding the on-going family planning promotion strategies, both newspapers reported the current

undertakings by development partners and government to promote family planning uptake among the masses as the most eminent among the on-going strategies. The *New Vision* (6.1%) primarily adopted prognostic frames to describe family planning promotion interventions as being supported by development partners, private sector players and government respectively.

Development partners and private sector players were presented as providing funds to facilitate family planning services, information, innovations, good practices and contraceptives to communities, especially in hard-to-reach areas. For example, a story in *New Vision* reported about an initiative by a development partner:

UNFPA established the Maternal Health Thematic Fund to increase the capacity of national health systems to ... ensure safe motherhood ... having access to family planning (contraceptives) so that mothers can get pregnant when they are ready and want. Also so that there is no unwanted pregnancies" (Birungi 17 October 2014:34).

By describing the on-going work by development partners, the reporters and editors highlighted their role in promoting family planning in Uganda.

In contrast, articles in the *Monitor* (6.1%) mainly presented policy-based perspectives, which highlighted the policy framework created by the government in Uganda to support family planning programmes

if operationalized optimally. A news article in the *Monitor* titled "Government launches Shs 620b family planning scheme" (Ainebyoona 2014:6) stood out as emblematic of government's commitment to dedicate more funding for Uganda's family planning interventions by launching a National Family Planning Costed Implementation Plan.

Relatedly, a commentary article in the *Monitor* alluded to making policy provisions by the National Population Secretariat more functional:

... the National Population Council Act that was accented by the president needs to be expedited. The council is mandated to formulate policies to give strategic direction on the implementation of the objectives of the National Population Policy (Musana 2015:11).

Such prognostic framing created a narrative that called on the government to make extant policy provisions for family planning more functional. Whereas *Monitor* framed government initiatives more from a policy-enabling perspective, *New Vision* mostly framed government interventions as increasing investment in family planning programmes so as to improve access to good quality family planning services countrywide. An excerpt from an article in the *New Vision* read:

... the government intends to reduce the unmet need to 10% by 2020, increase the number of modern contraceptive prevalence to 50% the Government estimates that such

a move would cost \$235million" (Mugisa 16 July 2015:43).

Another article in the *New Vision* with the headline "Uganda hailed for increased funding to family planning" mentioned that "USAID has commended the leadership in Uganda for achieving and surpassing its commitment to increase the level of annual government funding for family planning supplies from three million to five million dollars" (Ssejjoba 2014:10). In so doing, the press framed news storylines that were national indicative of the political and financial support accorded to family planning programmes by the government.

A greater part of family planning articles from *Monitor* and *New Vision* used diagnostic frames that featured the current problem of low utilization of family planning in Uganda, its causes and consequences on the country and its citizens. The fact that diagnostic frames appeared consistently predominant in both newspapers resonates with an observation by Jesus Arroyave (2012) that journalists tend to use the same themes for stories of similar nature. Although such diagnostic framing is critical in emphasising the severity of a public health issue, previous research reveals that the approach can backfire if individuals perceive it as unsolvable (Simpson 2017; Witte 1994). Nonetheless, an opportunity for balanced framing exists if the media could accord more inclusive analytical coverage to issues on family planning by capturing both causality

and solutions to the problem in-depth. This view is supported by scholars (Schwitzer et al. 2005) who argue that journalists covering health news have a responsibility to mirror a society's needs and issues comprehensively and proportionally.

Moreover, our findings show that whereas the severity of the problem dominated how news was framed in both newspapers, there was little attention paid to the impact of low prevalence of family planning on the country. Ironically, this should be one of the strongest justifications for the need to utilize family planning. In reporting consequences, the media should have focused on issues such as human lives lost due to frequent childbirth, as well as the social, economic, political and environmental impact of rapid uncontrolled population growth on the country.

Lack or low emphasis placed focus on impact and solutions offered could negatively affect how the audiences understand family planning issues. Communication for change professionals believe that journalists, in writing attention-grabbing stories, often negate important information (Hillier 2007; Uzuegbunam 2013). In the same way, previous research observed that media constraints of brevity and simplicity hamper the careful documentation of news that would be necessary (Barnhurst & Nerone 2009; Larsson et al. 2003). This article suggests that both newspapers perhaps represent the aforementioned views given their

widespread focus on diagnostic framing and less attention to prognostic and motivational framing.

Prior research on reporting health-related issues in the media found that a common framing device in the news media is to report a health story in a way that underscores the consequences of the issue rather than its prevention (Arroyave 2012; Slater, Long, Bettinghaus, & Reineke 2008). Veritably, the dominance of diagnostic frames in both newspapers overshadowed the motivational and prognostic frames that proposed possible solutions and strategies against the problem of low or non-utilization of family planning. This approach resonates with the framing theory (Entman 2004) that highlights how journalists emphasize certain features of an issue and understate others.

It is, therefore, critical for the media to avoid approaching issues of family planning from mainly a diagnostic frame. Like Lawrence (2004) opines, the way that a public-health-related issue is framed defines the degree to which public attention and public policy can be exerted. We find it pertinent that the press should rather widen the scope of reporting to provide a broader and balanced representation of prognostic and motivational frames as well. The latter could provide insights on possible actions to address the contextual, structural and behavioural issues exacerbating limited use of family planning in Uganda.

Furthermore, much as prognostic framing reflected the print media's awareness of gender issues relevant to family planning decision-making at the household level, they barely focused on promoting male involvement in family planning in their motivational and prognostic framing. Both newspapers became purveyors of incomplete news and missed an opportunity to grab the attention of such a critical audience because they did not adequately highlight male involvement. Yet, enhancing male involvement is a key strategy in both government and global family planning promotion initiatives, particularly considering the gender imbalance in our social cultural context in Africa.

This kind of omission in news framing provides a preview of how an important issue on male involvement may remain invisible to the public because media paid little attention to it. Evidence shows that receiving information about family planning from the media plays a significant role for male involvement in embracing modern family planning (Kabagenyi et al. 2014; Koffi et al. 2018). Therefore, this article bolsters the need for media to take cognizance of the importance of gender roles and norms in family planning decision-making. They should frame information in ways that endorse an empowering discourse that promotes spousal communication, joint decision-making and uptake of modern contraceptives.

Whereas both newspapers reported on the current government's initiatives to promote family planning, the quality of coverage was deficient. It was not enough to report on established policies and funding initiatives but rather they should have presented more comprehensive analytical information on them. For instance, both newspapers could have investigated deeper for evidence on budgetary allocations for family planning, availability of family planning services, the geographical distribution of these services, as well as the cost and quality of these services.

The media could have urged government to act on existing gaps that hinder family planning uptake if they framed news in an accurate and compelling manner. Indeed, Schwitzer et al. (2005) clarify that journalists have the responsibility to investigate and report on the citizen's needs in a balanced manner. A view that is corroborated by the Population Reference Bureau (2017)⁹ which elucidates that the media is critical to holding leaders accountable for their commitments and ensuring that they spend public resources wisely and fairly so as to improve lives their people. Given that media attention is critical to setting the development agenda, such news could potentially prompt policy and decision-makers

⁹ Population Reference Bureau (PRB) (2017). "PRB, PACE and Zambia. Opportunities for Engagement." Washington DC. PRB. Retrieved November 19, 2019. (<https://www.prb.org/resource-guide-zambia/>).

to advance more resources for family planning services and products.

Conclusion

This article has provided insights on construction of news frames in a Ugandan context by analysing how family planning news was framed by the print media in Uganda. Striking differences were noted in media representation of diagnostic, motivational and prognostic frames. It is recommended that media should frame information in ways that could positively influence the quality of information on family planning disseminated to the audience. Motivational and prognostic framing is likely to be more effective than diagnostic framing at stimulating the desired behaviour change and creating demand for family planning services, since the former provide concrete solutions to the issues that inhibit family planning uptake.

The findings from this study are valuable to media practitioners, policy makers and other stakeholders engaged in using media to promote family planning and similar communication for development initiatives. The implication is that media coverage must be monitored constantly, so as to understand how family planning issues are framed, what is emphasized, what is ignored and what solutions are offered. Such information is crucial to assessing the quality of information disseminated to readers and how the audiences learn about family planning. With better quality information, the citizens should be empowered to make informed decisions on family planning such that there is better balance between resources available and population growth at both the household and national levels. Ultimately, this should contribute to improved living standards and enhance national development.

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