

## Unveiling the Silent Epidemic: Exploring Infant Mortality in Pakistan through the Lens of Education and Media Psychology

Ms. Fatima Kiran<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Asbah Zia<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D. Scholar & Lecturer, DHA Suffa University, Karachi, fatima.kiran@dsu.edu.pk

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, DHA Suffa University, Karachi, asbah.zia@dsu.edu.pk

\*Corresponding author, e-mail: fatima.kiran@dsu.edu.pk

### Abstract

*Pakistan is a developing country where the health care system struggles to provide better care. In Pakistan, the percentage of GDP spent on the Health sector is one of the reasons among the other factors that halt in decreasing the infant mortality rate (IMR). In the country, thousands of Infants die due to a lack of decent healthcare facilities. This study examined how news media in Pakistan framed the issue of increasing the Infant Mortality rate. The methodology used in this article to investigate the data are content analysis and discourse analysis of three Pakistan newspapers, Daily Dawn, Daily The News, and Daily Express Tribune, from 1st January 2022 till 31st December 2022. The researchers coded Editorials in Genetics, Behavioral, Societal, Health Care, and Multilevel Causes to better understand how newspapers framed the issue for both cause and issue. The most influential newspapers of Pakistan remain unsuccessful in surging pressure on Government officials for policy reforms and better healthcare facilities to curb the issue of Infant Mortality in the country.*

**Keywords:** *Infant Mortality rate, Newspapers coverage, Media Psychology, Content analysis, Education.*

### Introduction

It is important to distinguish injustice from misfortune especially in mortality, not all the deaths are misfortunate events rather some are undoubtedly injustice with one person from another person or the institution.

Infant mortality, the death of infants before their first birthday, is a critical global public health concern (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023). In developing nations, the mortality rates among neonates (birth to 28 days) and infants (up to one year) pose significant challenges. However, there is a promising opportunity to enhance perinatal health information available to women and subsequently improve neonatal and infant mortality by providing access to resources through mass media channels (Mounts, Ngange, & Achidi, 2011). Pakistan, as a developing country, grapples with the challenge of high infant mortality rates, highlighting the urgent need to address this issue. The media plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions and policy discussions surrounding infant mortality. However, the extent to which the media effectively covers this issue in Pakistan remains largely unexplored.

Pakistan is the developing country where health care system is struggling to provide better care. The country with the population of approximately 200 million people have numerous health issues out of which Infant Mortality is the alarming one.

According to UNICEF 2015 report on Maternal and Newborn Health Disparities in Pakistan, approximately every day 14900 babies were born in Pakistan and 671 babies dies each day before reaching to their first month. The infant mortality rate is 46 deaths per 1000 live births (Unicef, 2015). In 2015 UNICEF published its Global Assessment report that highlighted Pakistan new born baby is 50 times likely to die in its first 30 days of life than a baby born in Iceland, Japan and Singapore (Unicef, 2015). The question here emerges that why an infant in Pakistan get sicker and die sooner than the rest of the world?

Social injustice in health can be define in two ways. First it is the denial and violation of basic Human Rights of specific community or group in the society. Secondly it refers to discriminatory policies and actions that detrimentally affect the society in which people live (Unicef, 2015). Pakistan amalgamate the sustainable development goals in its national development agenda in 2015 (Ministry of Planning Development and Special Initiatives, 2023). The goal number three is good health and wellbeing, where it is mentioned that dedicated steps are required to decline infant mortality in the country. In 2023 Pakistan is still lacking in comprehensive national level health policy or development program to curb infant mortality.

Mass media being the fourth pillar of state have some serious responsibilities in advocating and framing deteriorating infant mortality rate and public health policy issues of Pakistan in their content. How social

issues are covered in the news media profoundly affects how Government, concern institutions, legislators and citizen understand and relate to social problems and solutions for change.

Understanding how the media portrays and discusses infant mortality in Pakistan is essential for several reasons. Firstly, it provides insights into the level of public awareness and understanding of this critical issue. Secondly, it sheds light on the role of media in shaping public opinion and influencing policy discourse around infant mortality. Thirdly, it highlights any potential disparities or biases in media coverage, such as variations based on geographic location, socioeconomic factors, or ethnicity.

Media psychology research has a remarkably extensive history spanning close to a century. Throughout this time, scholars have delved into the study of how audiences choose, interpret, respond to, and thoughtfully engage with media content (Raney, Janicke-Bowles, Oliver, & Dale, 2020). Positive media psychology is built upon the principles of positive psychology, which focuses on scientifically studying the factors and mechanisms that foster positive development in individuals (Gable & Haidt, 2005).

Education is inherently suited as an establishment dedicated to fostering personal development and acquiring knowledge (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009). Media technologies have demonstrated their ability to facilitate personalized learning, boost motivation, and enhance individuals' belief in their capabilities. In 2011 to address the persistent gap between African Americans and Whites in infant mortality rates, researchers conducted a study despite the overall decline in such rates in North Carolina. The researchers concluded that the higher education amplifies racial disparities in infant mortality at a multiplicative level. This could be attributed to factors like increased stress, limited economic resources, and inadequate prenatal care quality experienced by African Americans compared to other racial groups (R Din-Dzietham & I Hertz-Picciotto, 2011).

The researchers combined all available phases of the Indonesian DHS to investigate the impact of maternal education on the decline in infant mortality over a span of 36 years (1980 to 2015). The study reveals that improved maternal education accounts for 30% of the reduction in infant mortality. However, this relationship weakens significantly when considering factors like paternal education, fertility variables, and urban residence. After accounting for these factors, the net effect of maternal education on infant mortality declines to just 15% (Schellekens, 2021).

Unveiling the dynamics of newspaper discourse on infant mortality can contribute to the development of targeted interventions and policy recommendations to address this pressing public health challenge. By identifying gaps, misconceptions, or areas of neglect in media coverage, stakeholders can work towards improving awareness, advocating for appropriate resources and interventions, and fostering social and policy changes to reduce infant mortality rates in Pakistan.

“A Death in the Family” – A Case Study of Newspaper Influence on Health Policy Development conducted by Kim Walsh-Childers in 1994 indicates that an Alabama newspaper's series on infant mortality and of subsequent changes in related state health services shows that the series helped increase public support for policy changes to reduce infant mortality and created pressure on the governor and legislators to make those changes (Walsh-Childers, 1994).

In 2006 Esther Thorson studied *Print News and Health Psychology: Some Observations* and describes result as Health news in American print journalism creates influence in both individual and policy levels (Thorson, 2006).

A research conducted in 2010 by Annice E. Kim, Shiriki Kumanyika, Daniel Shive, Uzy Igweatu and Son-Ho Kim on *Coverage and Framing of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities in US Newspapers, 1996–2005*. The result of the study shows that how issues are covered in the news media profoundly affects how Americans understand and relate to social problems and solutions for change and in turn public opinion shapes Government policies (Kim, Kumanyika, Shive, Igweatu, & Kim, 2010).

Warner and Joanne Rains perform an investigation on *Public Policy Regarding Infant Mortality: Rhetorical Criticism of the Mass Media* and stated that the media created the issue and expanded infant mortality to a wider public, but the media message was tempered by the strongly-held societal values of self-reliance, individual responsibility, and avoidance of governmental intervention (Rains, 1995).

Denetra Walker and Kelli Boling's 2022 study on media representation of Black maternal mortality revealed that journalists recognized the value in incorporating the perspectives of marginalized groups. While the

journalists were mindful not to adopt a biased advocacy position, they emphasized the importance of giving voice to Black women and their experiences to underscore the significance of the issue (Walker & Boling, 2022).

Sarah Gard Lazarus<sup>1</sup>, Terri Miller, Philip J. Hudson, Terri McFadden, Gretchen Baas and Sadiqa Kendi concluded in their study that In the news media, Sudden Unexpected Infant Death (SUID) received significantly less attention compared to other causes, with only 1.9% (10 out of 525) of cases mentioned. In comparison, drowning accounted for 8.1% (17 out of 211) of cases, motor vehicle crashes (MVCs) accounted for 11.4% (74 out of 649), homicides between ages 1-18 accounted for 14.7% (59 out of 402), fire-related deaths accounted for 20% (11 out of 55), and homicides under age one (infant homicides) accounted for 25% (15 out of 59). Furthermore, news media coverage of White infant deaths was 2.5 times higher than that of Black infants, across both SUID and homicide cases (Lazarus, et al., 2022).

As in the case of several other developing countries, the child birth increased significantly in Pakistan without commensurate reductions in morbidity and mortality. Comparatively in Pakistan there has been very little work done by print media on Infant Mortality issue in the context of projecting severity and covering challenges faces by Health system in creating effective Public health policy.

Through a comprehensive analysis of newspaper discourse on infant mortality, this research seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the narratives, perspectives, and framing surrounding this critical issue. The findings can serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, healthcare professionals, media practitioners, and researchers, enabling them to develop evidence-based strategies to tackle the multifaceted challenges associated with infant mortality in Pakistan.

### **Objective of the Study**

The objective of this research is to examine the extent of print media coverage given to important health issues such as infant mortality and public health policies. The study aims to analyze the type of discourse used in covering the topic of infant mortality and the frequency with which it is published, in order to shed light on the prominence of this issue for policymakers and other stakeholders.

### **Problem Statement**

Ensuring health and proper nutrition for children is a fundamental right protected by national and international agreements that Pakistan has ratified. Similar to other developing nations, Pakistan faces significant challenges in reducing its infant mortality rate. In 2016, Pakistan had the highest Neonatal Mortality Rate (NMR) globally, surpassing even countries like Central African Republic, Afghanistan, and Somalia. Shockingly, one out of every 22 babies born in Pakistan did not survive the first month of life (UNICEF, 2018). Various factors contribute to the poor survival rate of newborns in Pakistan, including inadequate nutrition for pregnant women, the presence of untrained midwives in rural areas, economic hardships, and a deficient healthcare infrastructure coupled with ineffective public health policies. Unfortunately, the issue of infant mortality receives insufficient attention and recognition from the government, the healthcare sector, and other relevant institutions, including the media.

### **Theoretical Framework of the Study**

The theoretical framework of this study has been chosen under considered judgment of researchers. Following is the theory that has been examined:

### **Framing Theory**

Framing refers to the cognitive framework that individuals possess to interpret and understand the social world, and the media plays a role in shaping and influencing those cognitive frameworks (Baran & Davis, 2012). Tewksbury and Powers conducted a research on The Effects of Frames on Readers and suggested that the core concept of framing does not revolve around the choice of topics or issues to be covered by the media, but rather on the specific methods employed to present and shape those topics or issues (PRICE, TEWKSBURY, & POWERS, 1997).

Applying the concept of framing to the context of infant mortality and public health policies in Pakistan, it becomes a useful tool for examining how these issues are portrayed in the editorials of Daily Dawn, The News, and Express Tribune. Framing helps us to understand the particular perspectives, narratives, and emphasis that are employed in presenting these topics to the readers.

By analyzing the framing of infant mortality and public health policies, we can gain insights into the underlying assumptions, biases, and priorities that shape the media coverage in these newspapers. This analysis allows us to examine how these issues are framed, whether as a silent epidemic, a matter of social injustice, or an exaggerated concern. Understanding the framing choices made by these newspapers provides valuable insights into how the public perceives and interprets these critical issues.

### **Agenda Building**

Agenda building theory is defined as a process in which reciprocally media, Government and citizens influences each other on the matter of public issue and policy (Baran & Davis, 2012). In this study researcher examine the Editorials of three most influential newspapers of Pakistan to better understand how rigorously these newspapers build an agenda to mitigate the rate of infant mortality and dire need of public health policy reform.

### **Fairclough's Discourse Analysis Theory: Understanding Power and Ideology in Language**

Discourse analysis plays a crucial role in understanding how language is used to shape and construct social realities. Among the prominent scholars in this field, Norman Fairclough has made significant contributions with his discourse analysis theory. Fairclough's approach provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing the role of language in power relations, social practices, and the reproduction of ideology.

#### **Critical Discourse Analysis:**

At the core of Fairclough's discourse analysis theory is the concept of critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA focuses on the relationships between language, power, and ideology. Fairclough argues that language is not neutral but serves as a site for the exercise of power and the dissemination of ideology (Fairclough, 1992). CDA aims to uncover hidden power structures and dominant ideologies that shape social practices through linguistic analysis.

#### **Three-Dimensional Model:**

Fairclough's discourse analysis theory incorporates a three-dimensional model, which consists of text analysis, discursive practice analysis, and social practice analysis. Text analysis examines the linguistic features and structures within a specific discourse. Discursive practice analysis examines how discourses are produced, reproduced, and circulated in various social contexts. Social practice analysis investigates the broader social, cultural, and historical contexts that influence the production and reception of discourses.

#### **Language and Power:**

Fairclough emphasizes the role of language in power relations. He argues that power is exercised through language in multiple ways, including discourse structures, rhetorical strategies, and the use of specific terminology (Fairclough, Discourse and social change, 1992). Power operates not only through overt coercion but also through more subtle forms, such as framing, legitimization, and silencing. By analyzing language use, Fairclough's theory uncovers how power is exerted and maintained in different social domains (Fairclough, Discourse and social change, 1992).

#### **Ideology and Hegemony:**

Fairclough's discourse analysis theory also addresses the role of ideology and hegemony. He argues that discourses reflect and reproduce dominant ideologies, which are shaped by powerful social groups (Fairclough & Wodak, Critical Discourse Analysis, 1997). Ideologies are ingrained in everyday language use and contribute to maintaining social hierarchies and inequalities. Through discourse analysis, Fairclough unveils how ideologies are naturalized, normalized, and legitimized through linguistic practices, perpetuating dominant power structures.

#### **Social Transformation:**

Fairclough's discourse analysis theory aims to go beyond mere description and critique. It seeks to contribute to social transformation by promoting critical awareness and challenging oppressive language practices. By analyzing and exposing hidden power relations and ideologies, discourse analysis can foster

critical consciousness, empower marginalized groups, and contribute to more equitable and inclusive social practices (Fairclough, Critical Discourse Analysis, 1996).

Norman Fairclough's discourse analysis theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex relationship between language, power, and ideology. Through critical discourse analysis, Fairclough's approach enables us to uncover the hidden dimensions of language use, expose dominant ideologies, and contribute to social transformation. By applying Fairclough's theory, researchers and scholars can gain valuable insights into the ways language shapes and reflects social realities, ultimately paving the way for a more just and inclusive society (Fairclough, Critical Discourse Analysis, 1996).

### **Method**

Research methodology is a systematic approach used to effectively address a research problem. It can be regarded as the scientific study of how research is conducted in a methodical manner (Kothari, 2004). This paper adopted both Qualitative and Quantitative approach of content analysis to investigate. The authors examines the opinion side of the Daily Dawn, Daily The News and Daily Express Tribune newspapers of year 2022. The reason to choose these newspapers to study the coverage of Infant Mortality problem in Pakistan is because Daily Dawn has been considered as most influencing newspaper in directing polices of state on various issues and The News and Express Tribune are most popular newspapers among general public. A content analysis was conducted on newspapers editorials about infant mortality and public health policy issues. The editorial section is considered as a heart and soul of the newspaper that have its influence on the government officials and policy makers of the country, it also reflects the position of the newspaper on particular issue.

### **Unit of Analysis**

In this study following are the unit of analysis.

- ❖ All Editorials of the newspapers on infant mortality issue.

Discourse analysis of newspaper content based on:

- ❖ Genetics
- ❖ Behavioral
- ❖ Societal
- ❖ Health Care
- ❖ Multilevel Causes
- ❖

### **Results & Discussion**

#### **DISTRIBUTION OF INFANT MORTALITY CONTENT IN NEWSPAPERS FROM 1<sup>ST</sup> JANUARY 2022 TILL 31<sup>ST</sup> DECEMBER 2022:**

**TABLE: 1**

<b>NEWSPAPERS</b>	<b>NUMBER OF EDITORIALS PUBLISHED IN 2022</b>
Daily Dawn	02
Daily The News	00
Daily Express Tribune	00

Out of the three newspapers examined, Daily Dawn published the highest number of editorials on infant mortality in 2022, with a total of 2 editorials. This indicates that the newspaper dedicated some attention to addressing the issue of infant mortality during the specified period. The data shows that Daily The News did not publish any editorials specifically focused on infant mortality throughout the entire year of 2022. This suggests that the newspaper did not actively cover or prioritize the topic of infant mortality during that time. Similar to Daily The News, the data reveals that Daily Express Tribune did not publish any editorials concerning infant mortality in 2022. This implies that the newspaper did not contribute to the discussion or coverage of infant mortality during the given timeframe.

Overall, the analysis of the data indicates varying levels of attention and coverage given to the issue of infant mortality among the selected newspapers in 2022. While Daily Dawn showed some engagement by publishing two editorials on the topic, Daily The News and Daily Express Tribune did not allocate editorial space to address the issue of infant mortality during that year.

**DISTRIBUTION OF INFANT MORTALITY CONTENT BY CATEGORIES IN NEWSPAPERS FROM 1<sup>ST</sup> JANUARY 2022 TILL 31<sup>ST</sup> DECEMBER 2022:**

**TABLE: 2**

CAUSAL EXPLANATION	NUMBER OF PUBLISHED EDITORIAL IN 2022
Genetics	00
Behavioral	00
Societal	00
Health Care	01
Multilevel Causes	01

The data shows that none of the newspapers published any editorials specifically addressing the role of genetics in infant mortality during the entire year of 2022. This suggests that genetic factors related to infant mortality were not a prominent focus in the newspapers during that time. Similar to genetics, none of the newspapers published any editorials discussing behavioral factors in relation to infant mortality in 2022. This indicates a lack of emphasis on the behavioral aspects contributing to infant mortality in the selected newspapers during the given period. The data reveals that none of the newspapers published any editorials highlighting societal factors associated with infant mortality throughout 2022. This suggests that the newspapers did not extensively cover or explore the societal influences on infant mortality during that particular year. The data shows that one editorial was published across the selected newspapers addressing the role of health care in infant mortality in 2022. This indicates that there was some attention given to examining the impact of healthcare factors on infant mortality during that period. The data indicates that one editorial was published across the selected newspapers discussing multilevel causes of infant mortality in 2022. This suggests that there was limited coverage exploring the various interconnected factors contributing to infant mortality.

Overall, the analysis of the data reveals a relatively limited focus on the specific categories related to infant mortality across the selected newspapers in 2022. There was minimal coverage on genetics, behavioral factors, and societal influences. However, there was some attention given to health care factors and multilevel causes of infant mortality.

Overall results suggest that Pakistan's top most influential newspapers completely discourage the severity of infant mortality issue. The daily Dawn with two editorials and Daily The News and Daily Express Tribune with zero editorial throughout the year shows negligence of newspapers from such serious issue of human life.

The total numbers of editorial published in the newspapers are not enough to create attention for the government and awareness for the general public about infant mortality issue. However, Pakistan is among the countries with highest infant mortality rate recognized by UNICEF and the rate is not declining due to absence of serious efforts to mitigate the mortality rate.

Consistent with previous research done on Infant Mortality rate and newspapers content by Childers, Thorson, Kim, Kumanyika, Shive, Igweatu, & Kim have suggested that newspapers coverage can have profound effects on mitigating the rate of infant mortality as well as creating awareness among general public and forcing government for better health care system and policy so that the human life can be safe with on time arrangements.

**Conclusion**

This study primarily focuses on the issue of the Infant Mortality Rate in Pakistan. The findings of the content analysis conducted on three reputable English newspapers indicate a lack of sufficient attention

given to the issue of infant mortality. The low number of editorials dedicated to this crucial matter raises concerns about the lack of priority given by the Government and the health sector in Pakistan to address the high IMR and implement effective policies to reduce it. Additionally, (Hamid, 2010) the decentralization of power to provincial governments through the 18th amendment in the constitution has not resulted in significant improvements in the healthcare system, particularly in maternal and newborn health, across the different provinces of Pakistan. This further highlights the need for enhanced efforts and interventions to improve healthcare facilities and reduce the infant mortality rate in the country.

It is concluded that newspapers like Daily Dawn, Daily The News and Daily Express Tribune failed to foreshadow the upcoming challenges related to infant mortality to the Government and Health sector officials. Newspapers have to be socially responsible by giving extensive editorials on infant mortality issues concerning pushing the Government for better health policies to mitigate the mortality rate and Health sector officials to provide the best health facilities so that we can save the most precious lives of our future generation. Media psychology empowers individuals to become critical media consumers by promoting media literacy. Individuals can make informed choices and safeguard their mental well-being by understanding media effects.

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**Pakistan journal of media Sciences (PJMS)**, Vol.4, Issue: No2. (2023), pp. ....

P-ISSN: 2709-5401, E-ISSN: 2709-5401

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