

## COVERAGE OF HIV/AIDS IN MALAYSIA: A CASE STUDY OF THE STAR

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### **Abstract**

Living in a globalized world spearheaded by technological advancement and innovations, media have long been instrumental in imparting various kinds of information towards the populace. Consistent with the overwhelming growth of health communication, it is essential to use appropriate media channels to alarm the public on the severity of various diseases. However, it is a challenge for media practitioners to convey such messages in an explicit context. Veiled messages in news reporting of the disease only may result in uncertain, shallow and ambiguous understanding among the readers. On that account, this study seeks to examine the nature and pattern of the news coverage on HIV/AIDS to generate awareness among the people with more care and responsibility. Based on the 72 articles attributed by The Star, only 61 articles fitted the identified themes. The findings indicate that both themes: government response and community involvement on the issue of HIV/AIDS in Malaysia were prominent in the newspaper in year 2006 compared for the year 2011.

**Keywords:** *Health communication; HIV/AIDS; The Star; themes; government response; community involvement.*

## LIPUTAN HIV/AIDS DI MALAYSIA: KAJIAN KES KE ATAS THE STAR

### Abstrak

Dalam kehidupan yang berteraskan kemajuan teknologi dan inovasi, media telah memainkan peranan penting dalam menyampaikan maklumat kepada khalayak massa. Selaras dengan perkembangan bidang komunikasi kesihatan, adalah penting bagi pihak penyampai menggunakan saluran media yang tepat dalam mengingatkan orang ramai mengenai bahaya sesuatu penyakit. Bagaimana pun, adalah menjadi satu cabaran bagi pengamal media untuk menyampaikan mesej dengan cara yang eksplisit. Mesej yang tersembunyi dalam berita mengenai penyakit hanya akan menambahkan ketidakpastian, kedangkalan dan keaburan dari segi pemahaman dalam kalangan pembaca. Berdasarkan andaian ini, maka kajian tersebut bertujuan menyiasat pola dan keadaan liputan berita HIV/AIDS bagi menyedarkan orang ramai agar lebih bertanggungjawab dan mengambil langkah berjaga-jaga. Berdasarkan 72 artikel dalam *The Star*, didapati hanya 61 artikel dikenalpasti tergolong dalam tema ini. Dapatan kajian mendapati kedua-dua tema iaitu *maklumbalas kerajaan* dan *penglibatan komuniti* mengenai isu HIV/AIDS di Malaysia boleh dikatakan lebih menonjol dalam tahun 2006 berbanding tahun 2011.

**Kata kunci:** *Komunikasi kesihatan; HIV/AIDS; The Star; tema: maklumbalas kerajaan, penglibatan komuniti*

### Introduction

Over the past decade, mass media have done an amazing job in alarming the public on the severity of various epidemics. From tuberculosis to the recent H1N1, using appropriate media, such as broadcast, print, and online media in creating keen awareness, educating and fostering behaviour change against various diseases are vital to prevent the community at large from contracting the infection (Tong JingJing, 2006). In the era of health communication, people are constantly being inundated with news and information pertaining to public health crisis. Various types of media facilitate understanding or/and as abovementioned, alerting people about the susceptibility of various diseases especially highly contagious illnesses to the grassroots. Consequently, mass media is considered an integral part in the interpretation of epidemic and managing the emotional climate of health care (Tong JingJing, 2006). In many cases, public's knowledge and information about any social environmental issue are not only directed

from their personal experience or through interpersonal communication but also associated with exposure to the media accounts (Rahul Gadekar & Aparna Khadikar, 2010). Therefore, mass media is increasingly recognized as a pivotal part of health public relations.

In this decade alone, HIV/AIDS is no longer a jargon or euphemism for public. The emergence of the epidemic has somewhat shed some light on its modes of transmission and prevention via various types of media throughout the community. Naga Malika and Rakesh S. Katare (2004) claimed that in order to halting the rates of HIV/AIDS transmission, education and information are an essential prerequisite, followed by prevention and control. However, it is plausible that information in terms of precautions of HIV transmission, prevention and fostering positive behaviour change is not disseminating to the grassroots effectively. In Africa, misconception of HIV/AIDS is notably showing that when people in general perceived that having sex with 100 virgins could cure a man of HIV (Zoë Slote Morris, & Peter John Clarkson, 2009); in the United States, college students with a degree still have the mindset that a person can contract HIV from mosquito bites (Joseph Inungu, Vincent Mumford, Mustafa Younis, Sara Langford, 2009); and in Malaysia, misinterpretation about the disease transmission also can be found among the semi-urban community of Mantin, a northern town in Seremban District, Kuala Lumpur, in which participants believed HIV/AIDS can be transmitted from saliva, mosquito bites or casual touch (Cho M Naing, et al., 2010).

Opposed to the background, if the media has been critical and played a key role in health communication as suggested by various researches (Naga Mallika and Rakesh S. Katare, 2004; Mwansa Chanda, Kingo Mchombu and Catherine Nengomasha, 2008; UNAIDS, 2004; Robin Stanback Stevens, 2009), why are there still people out there having such misconceptions and misrepresentation of HIV/AIDS or practice stigmatization and discrimination towards People Living with HIV/AIDS? Based on the premise, it is well agreed that to effectively reach out to the public, there is a dire need for media to report the HIV/AIDS-related news beyond conveying scientific information. Naga Mallika & Rakesh S. Katare (2004) highlighted that it is significant for media to diffuse the awareness messages explicitly to the dwellers rather than implicitly. Veiled messages in news reporting of the disease only may cause uncertain, opaque and ambiguous information transfer among the readers. In accordance to that, sensitivity in reporting and diffusing the preventive messages of HIV/AIDS to the dwellers especially those who are living in rural areas should be confronted by our media practitioners.

This study, therefore, proposes to examine the nature and pattern of the news coverage on HIV/AIDS for creating keen awareness among the people with more care and responsibility. This study takes into consideration if newspaper plays its role in creating awareness among the people, did the coverage create panic or uncertainty about the HIV/AIDS among the readers? Did the coverage prompt

people to take action? Given the lack of vaccination or cure, it is inevitable to scrutinize these aspects with the objectivity of a media researcher for the benefit of media practitioners, health practitioners, policy makers and readers.

## **HIV/AIDS in Malaysia**

In 1986, the first case of HIV in Malaysia was unleashed when a 45 year-old Chinese male of an American origin fell ill while visiting the country (UNGASS, 2010; Abu Bakar, 1991). Since then, the alarm bells rang, and the highly contagious disease continues to advance at a relentless pace. According to World Health Organization, Malaysia has been classified as “a concentrated epidemic” based on the relentless growth of HIV infection among the Injecting Drug Users (UNGASS, 2010). Notwithstanding, the trend has presently changed. More vulnerable groups like women, children and younger generation are all at high-risk in contracting the disease. According to the statistics, in 2010, there were 668 women reported of being affected by HIV infection compared to 553 cases in 2009. Besides, 167 AIDS cases among women had been reported in 2010 as opposed to 119 in 2009. This portrays that a growing number of women in our country are now becoming insidiously infected with HIV. Literatures indicate that if there are no prudent strategies been taken effectively against the exponential growth of HIV infection in Malaysia, there would be 300, 000 HIV cases reported in 2015 (The Star, February 13, 2006; Utusan Malaysia, May 10, 2011).

## **Methodology**

This research attempts to provide a comprehensive review of HIV/AIDS-related news stories in *The Star*. *The Star* was chosen as the case study for examining its media coverage on HIV/AIDS because it is a leading English-language newspaper in Malaysia which is owned by Star Publication (M) Berhad. According to Audit Bureau of Circulations, as of June 30, 2011, *The Star* had an average daily circulation of 288, 529 and is the most widely read English newspaper in Malaysia with readership of 1006, 000 people. Due to the fact that Malaysia is a multi-language and multi-cultural country, there are different types of newspapers serving different sectors or readers. In this study per se, *The Star* mostly serves the English sector.

### ***Time frame***

The HIV/AIDS-related news articles were examined from the January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006 to June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2006 and from the January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011 to June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2011. The reason of selecting those periods is due to the *National Strategic Plan on HIV/AIDS 2006-2010* that was announced by the Malaysian government in early 2006. In this aspect, this study attempts to scrutinize how the newspaper reports HIV/AIDS-related news articles in the selected time frame.

**Sample**

As aforementioned, *The Star* was selected for the study as it is the largest circulated English-language newspaper in Malaysia. The units of analysis were news articles. All the news articles that appeared in the daily with the keywords—“HIV”, “AIDS”, “red ribbon icon”, or “gay” were scrutinized. There were 72 articles identified during the periods.

**Meta-messages analysis on the themes of the coverage**

To profoundly grasp the nature and pattern of the news coverage on HIV/AIDS, meta-messages analysis of the themes appeared in the coverage was conducted. Themes reviewed here include government responses to HIV/AIDS, community involvement in the effort to prevent HIV/AIDS, scientific information for generating keen awareness, fear and panic among people with regard to the sources of information portrayed in the news coverage, precaution of the HIV infection by adopting suggested strategies, voices from infected people in response to the epidemic, the types of infection of the disease, and celebrities’ endorsement in curbing the HIV infection. These themes were generated based on the previous research done by Rahul Gadekar & Aparna Khadikar (2010) and modified to the need of this study. Each theme consists of different characteristics, thereon Table 1 shows the difference.

**Table 1. Characteristics of the themes in the news articles for HIV/AIDS**

No	Themes	Characteristics
1	Government response	Government’s policies Involvement of religious agency Law and regulation Government funding for AIDS preventive programme(s)
2	Community involvement	Indigenous (orang asli) Community-based organization Activists Parents University Corporate companies Non-governmental organizations
3	Scientific information	Vaccine development New drugs development Treatment availability
4	Fear and panic among people	Human interest Statistics

5	Precaution of the disease	Use of condom Overcoming gay issue Behaviour change Quite smoking—drug abuse
6	Voices from infected people	Convicts Women Widow
7	Infection of the disease	Orphans Children Drug addicts
8	Celebrities' endorsement	Hollywood Celebrities Dayang

Throughout the analysis, of the 72 articles, only 61 articles fitted the themes and would be further examined. The themes are as shown in Table 2 below.

**Table 2. Themes of the news stories on HIV/AIDS**

Themes	Number of news stories
Government response	14
Community involvement	14
Scientific information	8
Fear and panic among people	8
Precaution of the disease	6
Voices from infected people	4
Infection of the disease	4
Celebrities' endorsement	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>

### **Distribution of the coverage**

The distribution of the news coverage of HIV/AIDS in *The Star* was uneven during the study periods. As Table 3 shows, year 2006 contributed a total of 50 news articles, while year 2011 accounted 22 news articles in total. This explains that the volumes of news coverage on HIV/AIDS-related issues in 2006 were linked to the announcement of the *National Strategic Plan on HIV/AIDS 2006-2010*. In contrast, the degrees of HIV/AIDS-related news coverage were respectively low in 2011 where a year after the programme was terminated. As illustrated in the table below, May 2006 showed a peak with the most number

of HIV/AIDS news articles (13 articles), whereas in 2011, the number of news articles showed no explicit variation.

**Table 3. Monthly distribution of HIV/AIDS-related news in *The Star***

Month	2006	2011
January	5	3
February	9	3
March	5	3
April	7	2
May	13	6
June	11	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>22</b>

Table 4 shows that the units of analysis were unevenly distributed in respect of themes. As a result, it is remarkably clear that most of the respective themes were reported in the year in which the national plan was announced—2006. In contrast, the respective themes in *The Star* were least covered in the year 2011 as opposed to 2006. In terms of themes, both government response and community involvement on the issue of HIV/AIDS in Malaysia were given eminence in the newspaper in year 2006 compared to year 2011. In order to have a greater picture of the news reported on HIV/AIDS stories, Table 5 shows the examples of the headlines reported in *The Star* during the study period.

**Table 4. Themes of the news stories on HIV/AIDS according to year**

Themes	Number of news stories		Whole samples
	2006	2011	
Government response	12	2	14
Community involvement	12	2	14
Scientific information	7	1	8
Fear and panic among people	4	4	8
Precaution of the disease	6	0	6
Voices from infected people	1	3	4
Infection of the disease	2	2	4
Endorsement from celebrities	1	2	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>61</b>

**Table 5. Examples of headlines under the examined themes**

Themes	Headlines
Government response	<p>Pre-nuptial HIV screening compulsory in Perak, too. (2006, June 20)                      Free condom, needle plan to start soon. (2006, Feb 12)                      AIDS control policy out. (2006, Feb 13)                      Australia, Clinton in AIDS fight. (2006, Feb 23)                      Mandatory medical checks. Three screenings for alien workers in first two years. (2006, April 19)                      Adnan: Check HIV and drug abuse. (2006, April 27)                      HIV patients may get free drugs. (2006, May 22)                      Chia wants media to help. (2006, May 23)                      UN lauds HIV/AIDS reduction methods. (2006, June 5)                      AIDS to cost China RM150 billion. (2006, June 8)                      UNDP wants Malaysia to do more on AIDS. (2006, June 20)                      Blood crime. HIV-positive donors to face jail term, says Najib. (2006, June 30)                      S. African school kids to be tested HIV. (2011, Feb 9)                      Jakim to distribute 10,000 copies of HIV/AIDS manual. (2011, May 23)</p>
Community involvement	<p>Help sought to kick start HIV + farm. (2006, January 22)                      AIDS awareness crucial. (2006, Feb 23)                      Hotels raise RM42, 000 for AIDS. (2006, Feb 28)                      100 girls in fight against drugs. (2006, March 7)                      Sex education is for parents, too. (2006, March 12)                      Reaching out. (2006, April 5)                      Stop the stigma. (2006, April 27)                      Fighting HIV/AIDS via education. (2006, May 5)                      Reaching out. (2006, May 10)                      Messages to the AIDS afflicted. (2006, May 15)                      Dinner to help HIV/AIDS kids. (2006, May 18)                      Raising AIDS awareness. (2006, June 10)                      Orang asli women get education on HIV. Most of the attendees at the two-day workshop were illiterate. (2011, March 9)                      Solidarity with HIV/AIDS suffers. 800 attend candlelight memorial. (2011, May 16)</p>
Scientific information	<p>Better HIV treatment. (2006, January 20)                      Getting closer to a pill to stop AIDS. (2006, Feb 8)                      Human test for HIV drug. (2006, Feb 24)                      Test being done on anti-AIDS gel. (2006, April 25)                      Chimps linked to origin of AIDS. (2006, May 28)                      Anti-AIDS drive falling short. (2006, June 1)                      Shadow of fear over new class of HIV drugs. (2006, June 20)                      Early drug therapy cuts HIV risk. Transmission to partner fall by 96%, says study. (2011, May 13)</p>
Fear and panic among people	<p>AIDS kills more than Hepatitis B. (2006, Feb 15)                      18, 942 convicts had HIV/AIDS. (2006, March 31)                      HIV on rise. (2006, May 17)                      2.3 million HIV children. (2006, May 28)                      HIV woman has sex with 100 in revenge. (2011, Feb 22)                      Gay Casanova with HIV plays out 200. (2011, March 10)                      Gay Casanova's lovers advised to go for AIDS test. (2011, March 12)                      48% of HIV cases last year were through sex. (2011, May 15)</p>



Precaution of the disease	<p>Cardinal: It's okay to use condoms. (2006, April 23)          Smoking "gateway" to drug abuse. (2006, May 22)          MAC: Tackle issue of gays. Number of HIV/AIDS patients can be reduced with govt's help. (2006, May 28)          Rise due to risky behaviour. (2006, May 29)          Need for holistic action on AIDS. (2006, May 31)          UN: Women need more control over their lives to fight the spread of AIDS. (2006, June 6)</p>
Voices from infected people	<p>AIDS victims bring home message to men who stray. (2006, Feb 17)          Human rights in HIV. (2011, January 9)          Hope alive for AIDS cure. Possible treatment fans hope for a stop pandemic. (2011, June 4)          Widow finds new meaning in life after HIV. (2011, June 6)</p>
Infection of the disease	<p>Orphaned by AIDS. (2006, March 27)          Treating drug addiction—A GP's perspective. (2006, June 18)          A positive childhood. (2011, April 3)          Rosmah: HIV kids have right to lead normal life. (2011, May 13)</p>
Celebrities' endorsement	<p>Starring too many causes? Why did AIDS stop being Hollywood stars' big cause? (2006, June 25)          Message on AIDS. Celebs in unique photo exhibition to raise awareness. (2011, Feb 17)          Help for HIV/AIDS patients. Dayang's special showcase to create awareness on group's plight. (2011, June 18)</p>

## Discussion

### Government response

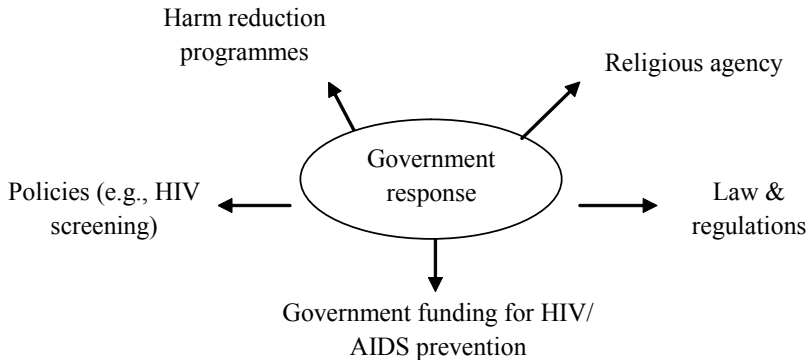


Figure 1. Meta-messages analysis map of government response

Through the analysis, *The Star* gave most attention to the issue of government response in tackling the issue of HIV/AIDS. News report portrayed the types of policies that were undertaken on preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS in Malaysia. For example, the headline of a news story read: “Pre-nuptial HIV screening compulsory in Perak, too”. The coverage reported the mandatory HIV screening

among Muslims who intend to get married. Through this policy, if a partner is tested positive for HIV, marriage is discouraged. However, if the partner decides to get married, the spouse will have to undergo counseling.

According to WHO, Malaysia's rates of HIV infection cases are mostly attributed by injecting drug users and heterosexual (UNGASS, 2010). Hence, to effectively tackle the issue, an article reported distributing free condom and needle exchange programme implemented by Malaysian AIDS Council with the collaboration of Ministry of Health in *The Star*. This harm-reduction programme is significant as not everyone is aware of the importance and availability of the programme. Therefore, news coverage of the programme is vital.

Under this theme, there are also some news stories about the government policies on preventing HIV/AIDS in an international perspective, such as the headline of a news article: "S. African school kids to be tested for HIV". There is a growing acknowledgement that HIV/AIDS cases in South African are leading at the top of the list. Therefore, the government of South African takes action to prevent HIV/AIDS infection among children by implementing the HIV testing on children as young as 12.

### Community involvement

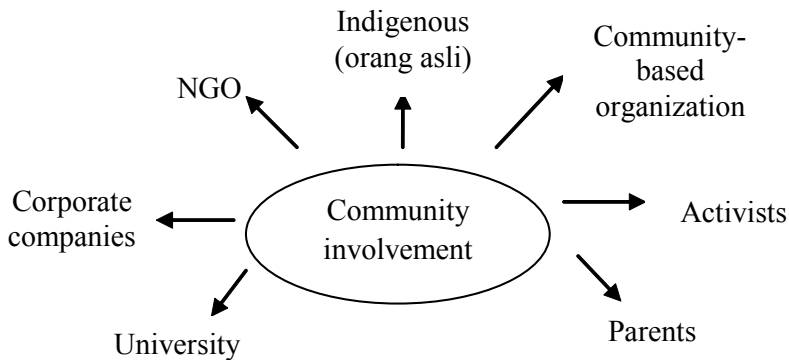


Figure 2. Meta-messages analysis map of community involvement

Circulation of awareness messages and preventives towards the community at large was another important theme under community involvement that *The Star* had widely covered. In our sample, 14 news stories spoke about how the HIV/AIDS awareness messages and prevention had reached out. One of the most interesting headlines that had been covered in the newspaper was "Orang asli women get education on HIV. Most of the attendees at the two-day workshop were illiterate". The *Women Institute of Management* (WIM) conducted the workshop in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund at Kampung Kachau, Semenyih, Selangor so as to convey the accurate messages of HIV/

AIDS, how to prevent HIV/AIDS and rectify their misconception about the disease within these two-day's workshop. This article also covered the fact that most of the women in the village did not know how the virus can be contracted. After the workshop, one of the participant said she will impart whatever she had learnt from the workshop with her husband and another said she has now more accurate perception about HIV/AIDS.

Not just that, some stories were of corporate involvement. For example, a news article reported the Renaissance Hotel and Resorts in Malaysia raised RM42,000 for the Malaysian AIDS Foundation as the fund for operation. Another one was on Standard Chartered Bank and International Economic and Commercial Sciences Students Association, Malaysia (AIESEC) working together in spreading awareness about HIV/AIDS among the youth. The involvements of corporate companies provide substantial support to the aim of preventing the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the wider community.

### Scientific information

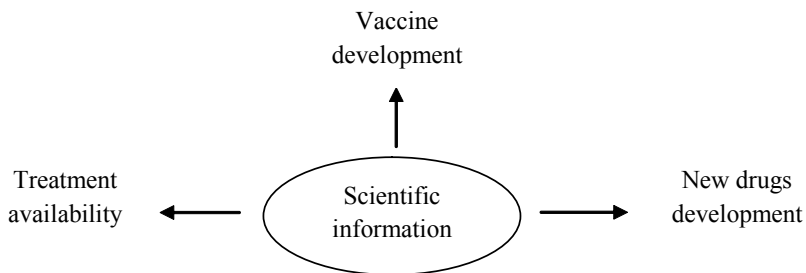


Figure 3. Meta-messages analysis map of scientific information

Scientific information of any diseases is imperative to reduce uncertainty, ambiguous, and opaque among the grassroots. In this study, *The Star* mostly attempted to provide news about new drugs development for HIV/AIDS treatment. For example, some headlines read: “Better HIV treatment”; “Early drug therapy cuts HIV risk”; and “Getting closer to a pill to stop AIDS”. In fact, with the emergence of scientific information on HIV/AIDS, related stigmatization and discrimination can be reduced by telling the public how the virus can be and cannot be contracted to a person. However, even with the scientific information, general public still have the misconceptions about the disease and people living with the disease. In this respect, advocating behaviour change and cues to action are indispensable.

### ***Fear and panic among people***

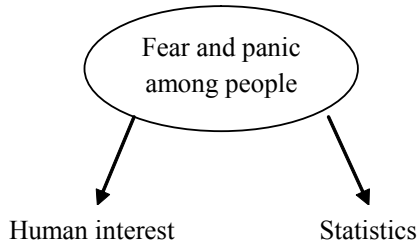


Figure 4. Meta-messages analysis map of fear and panic among people

Initially, AIDS reporting in the international level was contributed by fear-generation. (Tong JingJing, 2006). Fear for the disease intentionally spurs an individual to be responsible to the society. Their risky behaviour such as sharing contaminated needle syringes and sexual promiscuous behaviour can cause massive catastrophe to the society. *The Star* reported such fear. There were some headlines contributed by fear-generation read as follows: “Gay Casanova with HIV plays out 200”, “Gay Casanova’s lovers advised to go for AIDS test”, “HIV woman has sex with 100 in revenge”, and “AIDS kills more than Hepatitis B”. Juana N. Clarke & Michelle M. Everest (2006) revealed that fear is exacerbated in a number of ways. This emphasizes the increase in a disease rates and the use of scary statistics. According to Rahul Gadekar & Aparna Khadikar (2010), emergence of fear and panic among people about the disease also can be highlighted from the figures and statistics covered in news stories. In fact, highlighting figures and statistics, surely, can demonstrate threat of infection because it leads to high credibility among the readers. In this respect, a headline highlighted “48% of HIV cases last year were through sex”. Another story reported that holistic action should be implemented against the rise of HIV in this setting.

### ***Precaution of the disease***

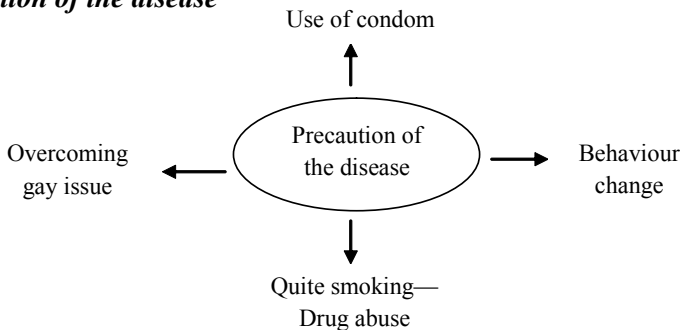


Figure 5. Meta-messages analysis map of precaution of the disease

In the effort of preventing the spread of diseases, precaution of a disease is an important key element that needs to be instilled to the people. It helps prompt people to take precautions like complying with ABCs approach: abstinence, being faithful, and condom use, abandoning unhealthy behaviour such as smoking and drug abuse, and psychological and physical control. This theme of news stories in *The Star* provided cues to action in order for people to turn their knowledge into action. However, the number of stories under this category was explicitly small (five).

### *Voices from the infected people*

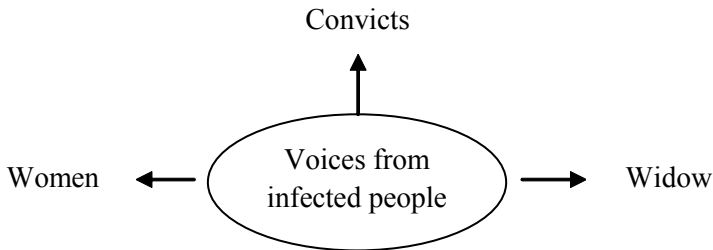


Figure 6. Meta-messages analysis map of voices from the infected people

Literatures suggested that reporting HIV/AIDS-related news beyond scientific information may confer striking benefits (Kingo J. Mchombu, 2000; Naga Mallika & Rakesh S. Katare; 2004; Lean Mei Li, 2005; Nelson Traquina; 2007). In accordance with that, *The Star* allocated some space to the people infected with and affected by HIV/AIDS. For example, the headlines like “Human rights in HIV”. This coverage draws out how the People Living with HIV/AIDS (PHLHA) being shunned by their friends, family and the wider community after declaring their HIV status. These negative perceptions are also directed to prisoners who are HIV positive. When they are released from the prison, they have a hard time getting a job due to their criminal record and health status. Hence, the social aversion can trigger these people (PHLHA) to refuse on getting further treatment.

There was another news article in which three women, all AIDS victims, advised men to think twice before seeking the services of prostitutes. The headline sounded “AIDS victims bring home message to men who stray”. This coverage portrayed how the three interviewed women were infected through their husbands. These women have to bear the burden of supporting their family while coping with their own illness and looking after their children.

*The Star* also covered another news story with the title of “Widow finds news meaning in life after HIV”. This headline was influential and distributed the message forthright to the ground. A 41 year-old woman contracted HIV after she realised her husband’s death was due to the deadly disease and that it had passed on to her. Since then, her life is in a pickle. Her lifesavings were drained

to repay her late husband's debts from his failed business, hospital bills and mortgages. Nevertheless, she never gave up on receiving treatment at hospital and she is now assisting HIV/AIDS patients by counselling, organizing fund-raising programme and seminars to increase public's awareness on the disease.

### ***Infection of the disease***

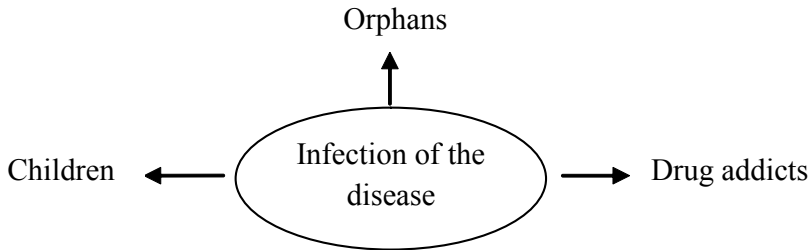


Figure 7. Meta-messages analysis map of infection of the disease

This theme explicates the trends of HIV/AIDS infection in Malaysia. *The Star* reported some stories stressed on community at large leaving children behind although making impressive efforts at achieving results to tackle the epidemic. The headline of such news stories read as follows: “A positive childhood”, Rosmah: HIV kids have right to lead normal life”, and “Orphaned by AIDS”. These news stories urge public to deal with these children as they are all innocent. Compliance to treatment, giving community support and care to these children can help them bear all hardships bravely. In short, children who are infected with and affected by HIV need our utmost support and understanding so as to bring them back to the society and reduce HIV/AIDS-related stigma among the community.

### ***Celebrities' endorsement***

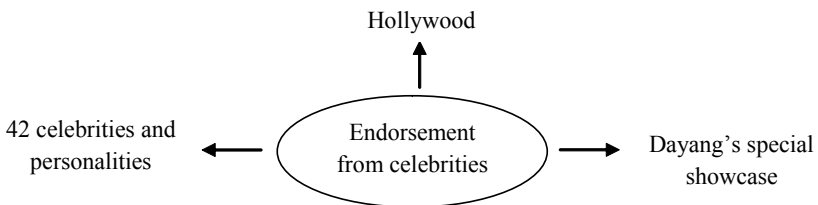


Figure 8. Meta-messages analysis map of endorsement from celebrities

There are limited stories that show endorsement on preventing HIV/AIDS by celebrities. These stories report few celebrities involving in exhibitions or fund-raising events in order to play their part in raising awareness through their exclusive identity. For example, “Message on AIDS. Celebs in unique

photo exhibition to raise awareness”, “Help for HIV/AIDS patients. Dayang’s special showcase to create awareness on group’s plight”. Combination between education and entertaining has to fit the bill in order to effectively convey the message about HIV/AIDS. UNAIDS (2004) depicted that education through entertainment can increase public’s interest and curiosity in exploring more HIV/AIDS-related information. However, the volume of articles in this theme was relatively small (three).

## Conclusion

Keeping HIV/AIDS-related news at the top of the news agenda is another key area of media involvement in AIDS education. Throughout this investigation, *The Star* covered issues of HIV/AIDS based on “event-orientation”. Government response and community involvement in addressing the issues of HIV/AIDS remarkably received more coverage than any other themes of the story in *The Star*. *The Star* reported that the HIV/AIDS-related news stories were based on an event, community programme or policy decision making implemented by authorities. *The Star* was trying to be a story-teller telling the public what the government has done in terms of the HIV/AIDS-related issues. By revealing government response and community involvement on the issue, in fact, it leads to high credibility and confidence of the governance among the readers as it projects that our authorities do view the issue seriously.

However, in terms of the news volumes, it notably portrays that putting media obligation in exposing for a short period of time and in relation to specific issues may not be hard, but gaining and sustaining regular coverage in the continuous process of policy making can be extremely difficult. In this respect, we should bear in mind that keeping focus of the highly contagious disease in the news coverage will still remain a challenge for journalists due to the limited space and editorial decision.

Although Malaysia has been experiencing the outbreak of HIV/AIDS for more than 25 years, the effort of preventing the HIV/AIDS prevalence is still remaining at the phase of creating awareness, scientific report and fear-generation. *The Star* tends to inform people the nature of HIV/AIDS transmission in this setting by projecting scary statistics and figures as well as generating fear. Very few stories spurred or cued people to take the necessary precaution of the disease such as prompting ABCs approach: abstinence, being faithful, and condom use or prompting people to join community work for being peer educators. Besides, with the tardy growth of HIV/AIDS-related stigmatization and discrimination among the public, instilling a sense of receptivity of the People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLHIVA) is needed. There is a growing acknowledgement that issues pertaining to stigmatization and discrimination in tackling the issue of HIV/AIDS are an obstacle and remains a challenge for health practitioners, media practitioners and authorities. Against the background, however, limited coverage of receptivity of the PLHIVA to go back to the society and acknowledging their

ability to contribute to the country's economic development has been omitted by *The Star*.

In sum, the coverage of the HIV/AIDS-related issues in *The Star* showed that there is a need for the media to propel the public to turn the knowledge that media has been instilling in them into action concerning receptivity towards the infected people and preventive health behaviours and not just being event-oriented.

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