

T18P04 / Media and Health Policy

Topic : T18 / Others

Chair : Shona Hilton (University of Glasgow)

Second Chair : Daniel Weinstock (Institute for Health & Social Policy)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Mass media can influence health policy in myriad ways, through influencing the political agenda (e.g. McCombs and Shaw 1972; Sato 2003), framing particular health issues for public and policy consumption (e.g. Entman, 1993; Feeley & Vincent 2009; Hawkins & Linvill 2010) and shaping public preferences for particular policy options (e.g. Dixon et al. 2014; Son and Weaver 2000). Therefore, we cannot fully understand the policy-making process, or the policy implementation environment, without understanding the role of mass media in it.

The purpose of this panel is to contribute to our understanding of how mass media (including social media) can impact public health policy communication, creation and successful implementation.

CALL FOR PAPERS

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The purpose of this panel is to contribute to our understanding of how mass media (including social media) can impact public health policy communication, creation and successful implementation.

Possible topics might include media representations of health policies, media representations and framing of health issues, theoretical and methodological contributions to understanding the relationship between media and health policies, and case studies of agenda setting in health policy.

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Session 1

Wednesday, June 28th 14:00 to 16:00 (Block B 2 - 2)

Discussants

Shona Hilton (University of Glasgow)

The importance of media in framing public and political debates about NCDs

Shona Hilton (University of Glasgow)

For the first time in history non-communicable diseases (NCDs) now pose a greater health burden than communicable infectious diseases and the media play a crucial role in framing public and policy debates about the causes of, and solutions to, NCDs. While the literature suggests that media debates should be a key concern for those interested in understanding public health policy processes, as yet there has been only limited research in this area. This paper presents the findings from a scoping review which asked: what are the gaps in current research on media representations of industries that contribute to NCD risk and how might media representations shape public and political opinion? We searched Web of Science, Medline, Embase, and Google Scholar for three NCD debates, considering how alcohol, processed food and tobacco industries have been represented in the media. Our findings indicate that: (i) limited research that has been undertaken, 61 studies over the last 30 years, mainly dominated by tobacco studies; (ii) comparative research across industries/risk-factors is particularly lacking; and (iii) coverage tends to be dominated by two contrasting frames (market justice and social justice). We conclude that future research is needed that investigates how media debates on NCD risk and policy are related to have a more nuanced understanding of the complex ways in which media representations of unhealthy commodity industries are shaped by, and contribute to shaping, public, corporate and political discourses.

Using media content analysis to understand and influence health policy

Christina Buckton (University of Glasgow)

Shona Hilton (University of Glasgow)

Mass media play an important role in policy processes by setting the public agenda and framing narratives. Evidence-based theory illustrates how media content influences which topics audiences are attentive to, and how they understand the problems, societal groups and potential solutions associated with those topics. Understanding media content is useful to policy advocates as they seek to both understand public and elite perceptions of issues and to influence debates by engaging with media narratives.

Content analysis is an established set of methods that allow us to understand media content empirically. This paper comprises reflections on a series of media content analysis research projects covering a variety of health issues including obesity, tobacco control, alcohol, cancer, gender inequalities, HIV prophylaxis and health service delivery. These studies are used to illustrate the variety of ways in which media analysis can aid our understandings of policy processes, from large-scale quantitative studies of changing trends over time, to more focused, qualitative studies of the nuances of policy debates. In exploring these different application of content analysis, we consider how their findings can be applied practically by policy stakeholders.

Employee Leave Policies in the United States: Thirty years of discourse

Mark Daku (Montreal Health Equity Research Consortium)

Ensuring that employees have the ability to take time off work when they are sick is a straightforward public health intervention that could have a dramatic impact on public health in the United States. As it stands, there is no Federal law protecting the jobs of workers who have short-term illnesses. The result is that many Americans – typically those workers in lower-waged jobs – do not have the ability to take time off work when they are sick. Importantly, these jobs include restaurant workers and care-givers – precisely the people that you would want to stay home when they are sick. There is substantial evidence about the benefits of guaranteed sick-leave, from improving public health, to increasing firm productivity. The issue is not one of evidence, yet there is still much work to be done in order to protect workers in the United States. In order to shed light on the difficulties – and progress made – in the attempts to place this issue on the national agenda, this article investigates the historical development of the discourse around sick leave in American print media. Using a combination of automated and manual content analysis, we analyze national newspaper articles from Jan. 1980 – Dec. 2014 that discuss sick leave, family leave, and parental (maternity and paternity) leave.