



# Views and opinions of mass media key informants on coverage of issues related to maternal, newborn and child health in Lake Zone, Tanzania

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## Abstract

In Tanzania, the mass media is a primary means of communicating health information to urban and rural populations. While unsafe abortion is the leading cause of maternal deaths and complications in Tanzania, this has increased the high unintended pregnancy rate. Journalists, editors, program managers and producers play a significant role in determining the health-related issues reported. In the present study, the views, and opinions of mass media key informants on coverage of issues related to maternal, newborn and child health in Lake Zone were investigated. This qualitative study was conducted with key informants from 24 mass media outlets that covered the Lake Zone in Tanzania. Twenty-seven key informants from media outlets (radio, television, and newspapers) were recruited to participate in the study. Results revealed that most key informants identified breastfeeding, antenatal care (ANC) visits, facility deliveries and malaria as essential and the MNCH issues covered mainly by mass media. In MNCH issues identified, breastfeeding and ANC visits were more likely to be endorsed as issues covered in the media compared to facility deliveries and malaria. Mass media campaigns were the most effective and popular way of disseminating MNCH-related information.

**Keywords:** Key Informants; Mass Media; Maternal; Newborn and Child Health

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## 1. Introduction

Evidence shows that health communication is a core strategy in promoting public health and informing individual and community decisions regarding health (URT 2010; Bernhardt 2004; Mboera et al., 2007; Rimal et al., 2009). Various means of communication have been used, including publication in scientific journals, communication through mass media outlets like newspapers, radio and television, and non-tradition means such as health education sessions at health facilities, meetings, and seminars. Compared to other means of health communication, mass media coverage and comprehensive utilization in rural and urban areas seem to outweigh other means of communication.

Maternal, newborn and child health (MNCH) generally performs less effectively than hoped in developing countries, including Tanzania. Despite investments in this area, services utilisation is not reaching the required level (Nyumayo, 2022). Most child health programs, particularly newborn care, are performing poorly (URT, 2015; Wango, 2022). Moreover, post-natal care (PNC) is low in Lake Zone, where most mothers and newborns do not receive recommended postnatal care within 2 days after birth (URT, 2010). Antenatal care (ANC) is often late and incomplete among pregnant women (URT, 2015). Although there has been a slight increase in the number of Tanzanian women attending the recommended four visits from 43% in 2010 to 51% in 2016, the vast majority of rural women in Lake Zone didn't complete the guided four visits (URT, 2010). Similarly, in some areas of the Lake Zone, many children are not vaccinated or under-vaccinated (URT, 2015).

In addition to perinatal care programs, Stunting remains a problem because of repeated episodes of ill health of children and inadequate infant and young child feeding practices, and exclusive breastfeeding is not yet a common practice, especially in rural areas (URT 2015; Wango, 2022). Evidence shows that Lake Zone performs poorly in breastfeeding initiation, where the practice ranges between 26% to 30% (URT 2015). Malaria prevalence is high as 24% in the Lake Zone compared to other zones like Northern Zone (1%) (URT 2010). Poor utilisation of health care services for the treatment of acute respiratory symptoms and fever is common (Wango, 2022).

However, many of these issues could have been improved through adequate and enhanced health information for decision-making by mothers/caregivers or health workers within the population (Nyumayo, 2022). It is widely accepted that health information is an essential element of efforts to improve personal and public health, and the best way to transmit health information is through health communication campaigns (Wango, 2022).

The current study was open to any health-related issues given attention by the key informants in the mass media. For instance, even though problems in accessing health care have been reported to be high among women in Lake Zone, evidenced by low facility deliveries (around 40% to 61%) (URT 2015). The current scope of the study was open to any other health issues reported and given attention by the mass media in the lake zone. In countries with limited resources, including Low and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs), where inadequate access to health information is shared, mass media is an effective tool to reach mothers on a large scale (Zamawe et al., 2016). This might be because of the limited provision of health services to the population because of the minimal number of trained healthcare workers, especially in rural and pre-urban areas (Mboera et al., 2007). Further, some of the documented reasons for its wide acceptance include the persuasive nature of the mass media and its frequent use among the population (Zamawe et al., 2016).

However, awareness of malaria information among the Tanzanian population from mass media is reported to be 84% among women and 87% among men (URT, 2010). The Malaria Elimination Agenda with key phrases “*malaria haikubaliki*” and “*maliza malaria*” was reported to be seen or heard via mass media in urban areas by 93% of the population and in rural areas by 79% of women and men aged 15-49 years (URT, 2010). The percentage indicates that mass media information is highly accepted in rural and urban areas.

There are various ways which are used by media to deliver intended messages to their targeted audiences. In print media, messages are most published using hard news, feature, and editorial stories. Likewise, in electronic media, radio and television, sports, talk shows, and news bulletins, among others, are common ways of disseminating messages, including but not limited to health-related messages. Moreover, in print and electronic mass media, key informants have the power and legitimacy to decide on media content. Their decisions for covering an issue of public interest are based on how timely, accurately, proximity, and prominent the issue is to be covered. The question remains, do the mass media in Lake Zone and their respective vital informants cover the current and immediate MNCH challenges facing women and children? This, among other reasons, supports the vital need for this study.

## 2. Methods

This qualitative study used a phenomenological approach carried out in media houses within the Lake Zone, comprising administrative regions (Geita, Simiyu, Kagera, Mwanza, Shinyanga and Mara). There was a total of 47 mass media outlets in the area (including 20 newspapers, 7 television stations and 20 radio stations with a total reach in Lake Zone (URT, 2015). Mass media with national reaches, such as the state-owned media Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation (TBC) and private stations such as Sahara Media, Industrial Products Promotions (IPP) media, Global Publisher Ltd, and Clouds Media Group, attain total reach in most of Lake Zone regions. In addition to media houses with national coverage, local radio stations with regional and district wavelengths, such as Radio SAUT FM – owned by St. Augustine University of Tanzania, Sibukafm – in Maswa-Simiyu, Victoria FM- in Mara, Radio Kwizera - in Kagera, among others (URT, 2015), also service the lake zone. In comparison to other zones in Tanzania, Lake Zone contributes higher regarding maternal and child mortalities.

### 2.1. Sampling

A sampling frame with a list of all media workers from selected mass media was obtained at each media outlet from which key informants (programming managers, editors, journalists and/or producers) were selected. Key informants who had reported on any MNCH-related issue or had mentioned any domain of MNCH-related issues in the past year were invited for 16 in-depth interviews to explore further what, why and how MNCH issues are reported in mass media. The sampling of research participants continued until the point of thematic saturation - where no new information was obtained from further data collection and/or interviews.

### 2.2. Data collection

Eight to ten key informants' interviews were considered adequate to obtain information on what issues related to MNCH are covered in media, why they are covered, and how key informants perceive health-related issues.

A recording device was used; notes were also taken to enhance transcriptions. The interviewer contacted key informants to determine a suitable place and time for an interview. All the interviews were conducted in the Swahili language, which is the common language of most people in Tanzania. The responses of the key informants were translated into English for data analysis. When necessary, English words were used during key informants' interviews.

### 2.3. Data analysis

NVivo 7 computer software was used to enhance data analysis. The researcher identified emerging themes. This step ensured investigator triangulation to systematically compare identified themes and avoid investigator bias. The Swahili language was used during the interviews. All interviews were transcribed and translated into English for thematic content analysis.

### 2.4. Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for this research was obtained from the CUHAS and BMC joint Ethics and Review Committee with the Research clearance. The permission letters to conduct the research were obtained from the respective authorities at the 18 Regional Administrative Secretary and media houses in Mwanza and Dar es Salaam where mass media with the wavelength in Lake Zone are located. Written informed consent was sought from participants prior to interviews. It is to be understood that all participants in this research were voluntary.

### 2.5. Study limitation

The study sought to explore views and opinions of mass media key informants on coverage to MNCH and was based on reports of key informants. The types of articles published in the media were not investigated/analyzed; therefore, discussion with program managers as key informants was done to explore more on what has been reported by journalists and editors. The Findings cannot be said to be representative of all health publication/articles and broadcasts in Tanzanian mass media.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Socio-demographic characteristics of study participants

This study sought to ascertain the background information of the respondents involved in the study, including marital status, education level, age, working position/title, sex, and working experience—the background information points to the respondent's suitability in answering the questions. A total of 27 individuals participated in the in-depth vital informants' interviews at 24 mass media (radio, television, and newspapers). Most of them were male (n=20, 74.1%) and the majority were 26 - 52 years old. Over 81% (n=22) were married; among them, journalists/producers formed the largest proportion (n=19, 70.3%) of the respondents. Most of the respondents (n=16, 59.2%) had at least a university degree education with working experience of more than 3 years. The distribution of social-demographic information of mass media key informants in 24 mass media with full reach in Lake Zone.

**Table 1.** The distribution of demographic characteristics of mass media key informants.

Respondents' characteristics	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
<b>Sex of respondents</b>		
Male	20	74.1
Female	7	25.9
<b>Age of respondent</b>		
≤27	2	7.4
27-37	5	18.5
37-47	17	62.9
≥ 48	3	11.1
<b>Marital status</b>		
Single	4	14.8
Married	22	81.4
Divorce		
Widow/widower	1	3.7
<b>Education</b>		
Certificate	3	11.1
Diploma	7	25.9
1 <sup>st</sup> degree	16	59.2
Other	1	3.7
<b>Work experience (years)</b>		
≤ 1	3	11.1
2-3	5	18.5
4-5	7	25.9
≥ 5	12	44.5
<b>Staff category</b>		
Program Manager	2	7.4
Editor	6	22.2
Journalist/ producer	19	70.3

**Table 2.** Child health topics identified to be covered by mass media KI

Topic Covered	No. (%) of respondents
Nutrition/breastfeeding	23 (81.4)
Malaria	19(70.4)
Immunisation &vaccination	18 (66.7)
Respiratory disease	13 (48.1)
Diarrheal disease	13 (48.1)
UTI	4 (14.8)
Eye infection	1 (3.7)

### 3.2. Important maternal newborn and child health topics identified by mass media key informants

From the findings, participants were requested to express their experience concerning which issues related to MNCH are most reported in mass media and which are considered essential.

### 3.2.1. Child health topics

Most KIs identified nutrition (undernutrition, breastfeeding and complementary feeding) (n=23/27, 85.2%) as the most important public health issue covered regularly by KI. Others included malaria (n=19/27, 70.4%), Immunization and vaccination (n=18/27, 66.6%). Topics on care seeking for respiratory diseases, diarrheal diseases (n=13/27, 48.1%) while eye infection (n=1/25, 3.7%) and urinary tract infection were the least covered issues (n=4/27, 14.8%).

*“...we have reported many issues on child health, but I can mention a few...about the shortage of vaccines for children 12-23 months in most of the health facilities, which is against health policy...example one dose of BCG, measles, tetanus toxoid and polio... on top of that, I covered a story on the mind-set of rural women on using insecticides treated mosquito nets that preventing them from malaria disease which has been affecting our children ...benefits of breastfeeding up to 2 years since breast milk is packed with disease-fighting substances that protect our newborn babies from illness..”*

Regarding nutrition topics, mass media is reported to cover a wide variety of nutrition topics, including breastfeeding, complementary feeding, and adequate nutrition. Breastfeeding coverage often focuses on the importance of early initiation, giving colostrum, breastfeeding exclusively for the first 6 months, and continued breastfeeding for 2 years. According to a discussant:

*“On nutrition topic, my coverage was emphasising not giving food and water until 6 months of age.”*

Moreover, on malaria topic, mass media focuses on behaviour change communication to change people's mindset on using insecticide-treated bed nets.

*“Regarding the provision of bed nets all over the country, in Lake Zone, people are not sleeping under mosquito nets... rather they are using nets for fishing and animal keeping. Therefore, our messages are directed to the general public, encouraging consistent use of bed net... especial pregnant women and young children to sleep under-maintained net is our focus.”*

This study also found that, media key informants perceive media outlets as effective tools to influence target audiences to adopt new healthy behaviors. It enables people to make healthy choices through providing education on disease prevention. In addition, mass medias promotion of MNCH was also mentioned as playing an important role in increasing the use of maternal and child health services.

*“Mass media is an effective measure to reach women, men and young people on a large scale and may increase people's knowledge on health issues; hence, increase use of health care services, such as maternal and child health care services”. “Media's primary role is to educate the lay public on health issues as it is the human right that means everyone has the right to the highest access to healthcare services and information”.*

Mass media KIs identified immunisation as one of the critical topics covered. Their coverage generally focused on more than one of the routine childhood vaccinations, including polio, diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, measles, and tuberculosis.

*"I reported a mass immunisation campaign sponsored by the ministry of health, where the coverage aimed to increase utilisation of vaccination services by informing parents the role vaccinations play in preventing common childhood illness".*

Mass media KIs from radio and television reported having been reported issues related to respiratory disease through news bulleting and mass media campaigns. Their communications informed the general public about the symptoms of pneumonia in newborns and promoted care-seeking behaviour among parents. Similarly, to UTI and eye infection disease, they announced care-seeking behaviour. However, for diarrheal disease, most KIs identified to produce programs/ articles aimed at increasing knowledge of the causes and consequences of diarrhea in young children.

*"I wrote a feature story on using the homemade water-sugar-salt solution as first aid for watery diarrhoea... proper stool disposal and handwashing as measures to control the spread of disease and treatment at home".*

The important child health topics identified by mass media KI are summarised in Table 2.

### 3.2.2. Maternal health topics

The majority of Participants (n=15/27, 55.5%) identified the importance of expectant mothers receiving at least four antenatal visits to check and monitor the health of the mother and foetus. On ANC, mass media is focused on raising awareness of the general public on the need for pregnant mothers to attend ANC services. According to the discussant:

*"In our program Baragumu we had a talk show with the minister for health; she explained in detail statistics for pregnant women who didn't attend the recommended four visits for the year 2015/16".*

Other participants (n=7/27, 25.9%) interviewed at television stations testified to cover documentaries and news bulletin about ANC visits. They report various topics on the importance of ANC services to pregnant mothers where mothers receive check-ups, immunisation against tetanus toxoid, screening of HIV/AIDS/PMTCT of HIV, and STIs, the impact of anemia in pregnancy due to iron and folic deficiency, Nutrition intake to pre-and postnatal mothers. And adverts promote male involvement in SRH. PMTCT, their information focuses on showing the negative consequences of not getting tested for HIV during pregnancy and the benefit of PMCTC services for child survival.

Other topics identified included the effects of malaria (n=19, 70.3%) in pregnancy, where pregnant women are encouraged to sleep under well-maintained treated mosquito nets. On top of that, KIs identified themselves to cover topics related to malaria prevention during pregnancy, where they promote intermittent preventive treatment in pregnancy with sulfadoxine-pyrimethamine (SP).



*“It has to be recommended by medical experts invited to our talk show that pregnant women should take at least three doses of SP during each pregnancy as malaria preventive treatment.”*

Topics of nutrition, family planning, hospital deliveries with skilled attendance, pregnancy danger signs (n=9, 33.3%), and dialogues with policymakers/stakeholders on challenges in accessing quality care among pregnant women (n=3, 11.1%) have been identified to be among maternal health issues mass media KIs reports.

*“We are writing about pregnancy danger signs. I remember we had a feature story on pre-eclampsia, titled “kifafa chatesa wajawazito” we informed our audience about its symptoms (high blood pressure during pregnancy) and how the magnitude of this problem (contributes to 17-20% of all maternal deaths).*

Similar results were obtained at radio stations.

*“.....there are many topics that have been reported to inform people .....one of them being the prevention of malaria in pregnancy,...we educate adolescent and young women and male to have a decision on uses of family planning services.... Also, another thing we are reporting the importance of ANC visit to pregnant women and male involvement, and nutrition topics where some recommendations are made to the type of food pregnant women are supposed to take.”*

A series of questions explored Key informants' views on what are the most emphasised MNCH topics that appear regularly in their mass media; the majority (n=13, 48.14%) mentioned Breastfeeding, followed by ANC services, hospital deliveries (n =9, 33.3%), and (n=5, 18,5%) Malaria/ ITN use.

*“Almost all health-related issues are significant for us as long as it has an impact and it's in the public interest, but there are topics we are giving priority, like topics about nutrition and breastfeeding, and uses of ITN among pregnant women and children. In our health program called ‘SITONYAMAZA’, we have a segment for mother and child health named ‘ILINDE AFYA YAKO’ where some recommendations were made for lifestyle changes. This is specifically for question and answers on issues related to mother and child health whereby the audience used to call and ask medical experts invited.”*

Another participant who worked in the newspaper said:

*“in every edition, I have been given a space for health issues in our newspaper; we are discussing various issues but among them being issues related to exclusive breastfeeding. As you know, a mother's milk is healthy for her child .... Again, we are writing about the importance of attending the clinic early in the 4weeks after conceiving and within seven days after childbirth for follow-up”.*

Moreover, most respondents reported that topics covered in radio, television and newspapers were categorised into health promotion, disease prevention and control (including immunisation), and environmental, sanitation and hygiene.



### 3.3. Factors for coverage of Maternal Newborn and Child Health issues

Several possible reasons determined the coverage of issues related to MNCH, few informants said (n=9, 33.3%) are personal interest of senior editors and health journalists was a key element.

*"I have a passion with medical issues, and luck enough, even my editor he is interested in health issues; he actual insists at least every week that our news must have a health issue no matter from which source of information as long as it is from credible source, we normally give it space and time..."*

Another important factor that some (n=15, 55.5%) of key informants mentioned was having a specialised reporter who covers health and the availability of a common designated space for presenting these issues.

*"I'm specifically responsible for producing health programs even though sometimes I do news anchor."*

Another factor determining coverage that most KIs (n=21,77.7) mentioned was external support from sponsors like ministry of health and other health partners who use mass media campaigns as a medium of health communication. They provide support both in terms of expertise and financial support.

*"There was a documentary called 'MWANAMKE NA UJAUZITO... White Ribbon Alliance sponsored us; it was a media campaign for safe motherhood. ...apart from that, we had dialogue sessions with champions (parliamentarians and ministers) to involve policymakers in discussing developing various national women-friendly health policies."*

Only a few respondents (n=3, 11.1%) reported MNCH issues due to Tanzania's high maternal and child mortality rate.

*"Statistics show clear that mothers up to 454 out of 100,000 are losing lives from pregnancy complications or delivery in our country...but also deaths of newborn which is 51 out of 1000 of the live births ...therefore due to the high mortality rate, we are covering issues related to mother and child health to raise public awareness and to advocate for better policies".*

However, for the majority of KI (n=18, 66.8%), significant factors that facilitated easiness of coverage of issues related to MNCH included good cooperation between journalists and health experts. However, few said (n=3, 11.1%) lack of healthy communication skills, lack of training and poor support from medical experts were their main constraints.

### 3.4. Ways used for Reporting MNCH Messages

The findings establish that key informants from almost all media houses have specific programs/ articles for health-related issues, and within, there are segments related to MNCH issues.

*“Previously, we had a campaign sponsored by one NGO whereby we organised community sensitization events; I remember we participated in a charity walk in Simiyu to advocate women’s rights and safe motherhood. Apart from that, we have a special program for health-related issues”.*

However, the study found that media campaigns, documentaries, and news bulleting were the most common ways to disseminate MNCH information.

*“We have this session for health that is scheduled once a week lasting half an hour... but now to make it more beneficial, we tried to divide it into five minutes radio spot, and it plays throughout the week, then once a week it’s seen for half an hour. But sometimes, we cover health-related stories in our news bulletin.”*

While in newspapers, MNCH stories are given space on front pages, letters to the editor and feature stories, opinions and letters, news articles, feature stories, columns, and picture stories/cartoons.

*“It depends on the story genre; for the information, we put them in front pages, letters to editor and news and educative the forms of feature stories are used. Since feature provides the space to discuss issues in a greater length and more comprehensively than news”.*

When asked about appropriate ways to deliver MNCH-related messages, most of the accounts key informants gave suggested that MNCH issues need a unique program in the media, like media campaigns and documentaries.

*“If we compare all ways of delivering maternal and child health issues, I can suggest appropriate ways through campaigns and documentaries. Stories in documentary formats usually take investigation before airing them out. They involve testimonies from the community experienced health challenges and are well-balanced stories with many facts from different credible sources of information”.*

Some participants from print media also suggested a mass media campaign where regular short stories at front pages and news columns are appropriate in delivering issues related to maternal and child health.

*“Our people did not tend ready long stories, but when it is placed on front page, even for those who are not buyers but just passing by newspaper vendors, they get a message hence being attracted to know more about the story.”*

One respondent from the radio said:

*“To raise awareness of the risk associated with home delivery, men’s engagement etc.... I think the appropriate approach will be a mass media campaign where different format will be applied to deliver messages like drama, a panel discussion with experts and the community, also through songs.”*

According to KIs, the ministry of health and regional or district medical offices are a source of statistical data. Some were from eyewitnesses from the community and service providers.

### 3.5. Perceived health issues reported by critical informants

Regarding potential MNCH issues identified by the study participants, we intended to gather information about perceived health issues reported by key informants in the mass media on maternal, newborn and child health topics.

#### 3.5.1. Children's health issues

Most participants mentioned various matters that they considered health issues related to MNCH. One particular children's health concern was voiced by half of the participants. Several informants believe that the use of infant formula has an impact on child development due to reason that fake milk powder for infants which have been found to contain substances harmful to human health; the Use of nappy pants (pampers) among infants for urinary tract infection, Use of plastic baby bottles for formula feeding about the diarrheal disease.

*"I remember two weeks ago, I conducted a panel discussion with a medical expert ..we discussed whether plastic baby bottles and nipples are harmful to expressed breastfeeding or infants formula to baby."*

In addition, malnutrition, often associated with poor nutrition intake, was perceived as a frequent and alarming health condition in the lake zone community media needs to report.

#### 3.5.2. Women's health issues

Prominent women's health issues perceived by several vital informants were patients' complaints that; health care services are expensive regardless of the free maternity service policy; pregnant women are treated rudely with service providers; long distance to the health facility associated with home deliveries.

*"I remember we wrote a feature story about challenges women are facing when they seek health care services (what are the challenges) was about how health providers are treating women at hospital...women were complaining about being forced to pay for the service while it's free."*

Another participant from the radio station said:

*"There are many health issues related to mother and child health we have been covered, such challenges women are facing at the hospital like shortage of medical staff, women normal reports to being charged some amount of money when they seek health care for their under-five children which is against the health policy."*

Some mentioned common challenges discouraging some journalists or editors from reporting issues related to MNCH were mentioned as lack of support from medical experts. Since media people are not trained to

communicate health, they depend much on medical experts as a credible source of health information. This is what has been reported during the interview:

*“When I want to meet medical people to interview them, most of them are not willing to give information. I don’t know why”.*

Another one said:

*“You may find a doctor; he tells you he is not a spokesperson of the hospital or he is not ready to be invited for further discussion about a particular health issue. This is a challenge for us ... because any issue we report as a journalist must be a well-balanced story full of evidence from credible sources”.*

Another from print media said:

*“In general, the content of articles published in our newspaper used additional information or quoted credible resources person, but when we invite medical expert they feel like wastage of time, otherwise we cater for their transport cost/ fuel.”*

As a result, they required more support from medical experts by saying,

*“I am asking for support from the health experts, when the journalist is going to ask them for information about something, especially for the aim of educating the community, they should be ready to give us information so that we may provide education with easiness.”*

Another common challenges journalist mentioned was lack of knowledge on MNCH issues which they found difficult to report and write health-related stories. Hence, they recommended formative training on reporting issues related to health.

*“Frankly speaking, I’m much interested in issues related to mothers and child health ... but sometimes it is not easy to understand medical terminology mentioned by medical expertise.... So when I failed to understand anything from my source of information led me to leave that issue, and focus on issues like politics of which I know something about it....”*

This was said by one of respondents from one of the radio stations.

### 3.6. Identified Difficulties in Covering MNCH Issues

Media informants were asked to list the challenges that they encountered while they are covering MNCH issues. The majority of mass media key informants mentioned some challenges facing them in MNCH coverage related to lack of support from health professionals, inadequate budget for information gathering, negative attitude and perception towards information provided in mass, and lack of skills related to health issues reporting. In some cases, key informants (journalists) observed that experts in the health professions tended to avoid giving them interviews, often citing time constraints. As one of them said:

*'Most of the doctors still don't see the importance of health communication through mass media, as they refuse to give support in terms of being sources of information. Can you imagine our frustration when someone gives you close to 10 appointments on one issue that you need to cover.'*

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. Most Covered MNCH topics identified by key informants

In the present study, issues on safe motherhood and early child development were topics based on raising awareness of the risk associated with home deliveries, the importance of breastfeeding, promoting ANC visit, and the use of mosquito bed-net/ uptake of malaria prophylaxis among pregnant women are among the most essential MNCH issues identified by mass media KI. Similar to a study conducted in Nigeria, safe motherhood was the most frequently covered issue in print media, followed by Family Planning and HIV/AIDS. Still, the most minor covered themes were breastfeeding and children's health.

Moreover, the present study found that most MNCH issues aimed at raising public awareness of causes, symptoms and treatments of diseases and conditions. It also gives recommendations for lifestyle changes or types of food to take. However, mass media often covers MNCH topics because of cooperation with various stakeholders and journalists' commitments. However, lack of funds, lack of healthy communication skills, lack of training and poor support from medical experts were their main constraints.

However, the present study found that, despite senior journalists being interested in health issues, the reasons determined coverage for MNCH issues was influenced by sponsors such as NGOs, the Ministry of Health, Medical Researchers, and other health stakeholders. Similarly, in Malawi, a "MaiMwana" project sponsored a media campaign to bring knowledge about maternal and child health issues to a large population (Odesanya, 2015). This suggests that mass media key informants' perceptions and external influences from sponsors might significantly influence the content and coverage of MNCH-related issues.

### 4.2. Ways used to deliver MNCH messages

Ways through which MNCH information was delivered in mass media were of mainly two categories: mass media campaigns and specific health programs/articles. Our findings have shown that the most common approaches belonging to mentioned categories were through documentaries and feature stories (investigative reports). The choice of ways depends on relative impact and cost, hence cost-effectiveness. In the newspapers, for instance, MNCH issues were given space on front pages, editorial pages and columns. In radio and television, MNCH-related issues are given time in news bulletins, adverts and spots. Most key informants had mentioned having a particular health program where many are for half an hour or one hour/ weekly. This is contrary to the study conducted in Nigeria, where mass media, particularly print media, did not give prominence to health issues; there is low coverage of MNCH issues in mass media (Onyeizu et al., 2014; Abukar et al., 2015).

Beyond creating awareness, which is crucial to influencing people's behaviour and health-seeking attitudes, key informants generally use a medical frame. This means they provide a theme for audiences to understand health problems, causes, symptoms and treatment. This is contrary to a study conducted in Ghana, where no particular articles provided the audience with medical frame information (Diedong, 2013).

### 4.3. Perceived health issues reported by key informants

Our results show that the KI of both mass media perceives the associated risk factors for UTI among children as the use of nappy pants (pampers) and diarrheal diseases caused by plastic bottles and nipples for baby feeds. Further, the study found that key informants give time and space to issues related to patients' complaints. Lack of healthcare utilisation was believed to be due to healthcare services being costly for pregnant women to afford; healthcare workers are not friendly to women attending health facilities for childbirth.

According to recent research, journalists' knowledge on the current MNCH indicators identified by the ministry of health Tanzania needs to improve. Therefore, KI lacks training on MNCH issues to be covered for health promotion. Like in Indonesia, journalists were trained to raise knowledge and interest in reproductive health issues, which led to the coverage of the problems related to safe motherhood (Firmansyah et al., 2001).

From these findings, we can see that mass media can contribute to health discourse by facilitating and sustaining debate, especially among policymakers, to make policies that could aid women and children in achieving good health. They can do this through their program and write-up emphasising the magnitude of women's and children's situations regarding health.

Since further training emerged as an immediate need among KIs, we recommend that mass media KIs be trained to build their knowledge on MNCH issues. This will help to improve mass media key informants to give more coverage to other MNCH problems, as indicated by the Tanzania Ministry of Health. There is also a need to establish mass media and medical experts' alliance; this shall help KIs in health reporters to liaise with medical experts and medical researchers to understand some of the reports they get and be able to internalise it and simplify it for public consumption. By understanding the information, they get, they can package it in simple language by breaking down the scientific jargon without distorting the basic information. The government, medical professionals, medical researchers and other health stakeholders should provide an enabling environment for the media to perform by providing them with communication when required.

Based on the study findings, there is a need for future studies on the impacts of mass media key informants' coverage on the utilisation of MNCH care services. This can be done at the community level by measuring their messages' impact. We also call for further studies on the content analysis to compare health issues, specifically maternal and child health issues covered in different mass media in relation to other matters of public interest.

The study had two main limitations. First, data on perceived health issues in this study is limited in its generalizability beyond the study population due to the small sample size of both media houses and key informants. Secondly, it was difficult to determine the proportion of MNCH issues covered in media about other issues due to the nature of the like politics, among others as the study design was qualitative.

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the findings, the present study has demonstrated that, mass media key informants cover issues related to MNCH in Tanzania. The most emphasised MNCH issues were Breastfeeding, ANC, Facility deliveries, and Malaria. Although almost all key informants cover MNCH issues to some extent, there is a need for formative training to build capacity in terms of knowledge on health issues related to MNCH to be covered to promote health. The knowledge and skills will enable them to write articles on health problems based on their expertise on such issues. Furthermore, frequent coverage (weekly) of health issues in mass media was found.



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