

The Role of Media in Health Awareness of Chronic Diseases in Society: From Prevention to Treatment

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Abstract:

This scholarly article explores the pivotal role of media as a socialization institution dedicated to health awareness, particularly concerning chronic diseases, a significant threat to human life, potentially leading to premature mortality in the absence of comprehensive knowledge. This awareness encompasses crucial dimensions including the educational-informational facet that enlightens individuals about chronic diseases, the emotional-psychological wellbeing of patients, and the behavioral strategies for effective management of these conditions.

The investigation reveals that media, both traditional and digital, are instrumental in educating the populace, healthy and afflicted alike, across two principal dimensions: prevention and therapy. Prevention focuses on enhancing health literacy about chronic diseases by clarifying their nature, causes, detrimental effects, and preventive measures. Conversely, the therapeutic dimension emphasizes educating on the best practices for managing chronic diseases and adaptive strategies for coping with them.

Keywords: Media, Health Media, Health Awareness, Chronic Diseases.

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1. INTRODUCTION:

Media serves as a critical institution in socialization, pivotal in elevating public consciousness and sensitivity towards pressing societal and individual challenges. Governments and various state agencies leverage media to propel development, effect social transformation, and bolster the health standards of populations while advocating for their sustained wellbeing.

In an era marked by a burgeoning prevalence of complex diseases, particularly chronic ailments that impose substantial burdens on individuals, society, and the state from health, economic, and social perspectives, and with the global mortality rates from these diseases escalating, the discourse on health awareness becomes increasingly pertinent. Both preventive and therapeutic health awareness are integral to the strategies deployed by socialization institutions, governments, and media to mitigate the impact of these diseases and decrease the incidence and fatality rates.

The increasing reliance on media as the primary conduit of health information underscores its growing significance. With its persuasive power and rapid dissemination capabilities, media is uniquely positioned to instill accurate health concepts among citizens. This responsibility encompasses various functions of the media, such as educating, guiding, directing, teaching, and issuing warnings.

This article's significance derives from its examination of the media's role in enhancing public health awareness regarding chronic diseases and its recommendations to augment the efficacy of media support in national health policies, societal health initiatives, and organizational health strategies.

2. Health Media: An Overview of the Concept and the Need for It

In today's world, marked by an era of precise specialization across all life domains, including health and disease, the necessity for specialized health and medical media has been underscored not only by journalists but also by scientists and researchers. These experts

have highlighted the importance of developing a media sector focused exclusively on health topics, employing specific methodologies and adhering to rigorous standards.

Over the decades, media professionals have advocated for specialization within their field, emphasizing the essential need for media practitioners to possess both deep media skills and extensive knowledge in scientific domains, particularly medical sciences.

The imperative for a specialized health media becomes even more pronounced during health crises, whether global or local. Such periods are often characterized by the rampant spread of misinformation, public scaremongering, and a reliance on sensationalism and exaggeration in media coverage of health issues.⁽¹⁾ To unpack the concept of "health media," we discern that it amalgamates two distinct ideas:

A. Media:

This refers to all forms of communication designed to provide the public with news, information, and accurate facts about various issues in an objective and unbiased manner. This type of media plays a crucial role in enhancing public awareness and perception by delivering reliable information, thereby enlightening and educating public opinion⁽²⁾.

From this definition, we can derive several general characteristics of effective media:⁽³⁾

(1)Samir Mahmoud, Problems and Challenges in Media Coverage of Health Issues in the Arab World, arabmediasociety, [Online] Available at: <https://2u.pw/00coywc>, visited on 05/08/2024 at 12:00.

(2)Mouna Saeed Al-Hadidi, Charif Darwich El-Leban, Arts of Communication and Specialized Media, Egyptian Lebanese House, Cairo, 2009, p. 28.

(3)Suzanne Al-Kalini, Communication and Its Means and Theories, Dar Al-Nahda Al-Arabiya, Cairo, p. 34.

- _ Media encompasses all elements of the communication process, including the source, receiver, message, medium, audience, and feedback.
- _ It must uphold objectivity and truthfulness, presenting facts without distortion.
- _ Media operates by explaining, simplifying, and interpreting facts and realities.
- _ It is distinguished by its objective reflection of mass mentality.

B. Health:

Defined by the World Health Organization as a state of complete mental, physical, and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Every human being is entitled to the highest possible level of health, irrespective of religion, gender, political belief, economic or social condition.⁽¹⁾

Health also pertains to the body's relative balance in performing its functions normally, adapted to surrounding environmental factors. This broad concept of health suggests that enhancing health involves not only physical and mental soundness but also a cultural and social context, along with interpersonal relationships. Health can further be described as a state of integration and harmony among the physical, mental, and community health within a values-based framework.⁽²⁾

Health media has been defined through various lenses as it constitutes one of the specialized branches of media focused on

(1)World Health Organization, Regional Committee for the Middle East, Health Promotion and Media, Cairo, [Online] Available at: <https://www.emro.who.int/ar/entity/health-promotion-media/index.html>, visited on 26/08/2024 at 12:30.

(2)Ramadan Al-Kandili, The Right to Health in Algerian Law: An Analytical Comparative Study, Policy and Law Notebooks, KasdiMerbah University, Ouargla, Issue 02, January 2012, p. 219.

health-related topics.

At its core, health media is designed to enlighten the masses and shape public opinion, guiding individual behaviors towards maintaining good health and confronting diseases. This media niche provides essential guidance and advice, offering insights on how to manage various health conditions, with a particular emphasis on chronic, cancerous, and infectious diseases.⁽¹⁾

Researcher Mai Abdel Wahed El Khaja in her study highlighted that health media specifically addresses both widespread and chronic diseases. It presents opinions from doctors and academics concerning health issues featured in the media, evaluating their appropriateness in form and content relative to societal health challenges and the target audience's needs for awareness.⁽²⁾

The paramount importance of human health and its protection from diseases are considered the most valuable assets an individual can possess. Thus, fostering and preserving health is not only a division and value but also a necessity of extreme importance. Within this framework, the critical role of media in society in enhancing individual health awareness becomes evident.

Media contributes to forming a robust informational background that addresses the preventive aspects of various diseases, thereby making individuals recognize that the healthy behaviors they adopt are beneficial and meet their personal health needs.⁽³⁾

(1) Bassam Abdel Rahman Al-Machakba, *Health Media*, Osama Publishing and Distribution House, Amman, 2012, p. 92.

(2) Mai Abdel Wahed Al-Khaja, *Health Media in the United Arab Emirates from an Academic and Medical Perspective*, Sharjah University Journal, Sharjah, Volume 15, Issue 02, 2019, p. 108.

(3) Maher Al-Rifai Mehitab, *Egyptian Press Coverage of Health Issues: An Applied Study on Al-Ahram, Al-Wafd, and Al-Usbu' Newspapers*, unpublished Master's thesis, Media Department, Zagazig University, Egypt, 2008, p. 59.

3. Chronic Diseases as an Important Health Field for Media Attention:

Chronic diseases are defined as health conditions that are persistent, extending over a long period, and whose impact on the patient's life and health intensifies over time. These conditions, which include major diseases such as stroke, heart disease, diabetes, and chronic mental illnesses, were identified as some of the primary causes of death globally as of 2008.

Chronic diseases accounted for 63% of global deaths, totaling 36 million cases. Notably, 29% of these deaths occurred in individuals under the age of 70, and about half of the victims were women.⁽¹⁾

The pervasive nature of chronic diseases underscores their significance as a focal point for health media. These diseases pose new challenges to healthcare systems, pressing the need for the development of innovative solutions and care strategies that are as comprehensive and personalized as possible, thereby ensuring effective management and care for those affected.⁽²⁾

The management of chronic diseases is inherently complex and enduring, necessitating novel approaches to lifestyle modifications. This management requires mental readiness for adapting to various aspects of the disease, including dealing with symptoms and facing changes in lifestyle, social interactions, and family relationships.⁽³⁾

The role of media in this context becomes increasingly vital, not

(1)Lamia Mohammed Hassan, Social Problems of Individuals with Chronic Diseases: A Field Study in Baghdad, Journal of Human and Social Sciences, Mohammed BouceifM'sila University, Issue 09, 2021, p. 21.

(2)The French Minister of Labor, Health and Solidarities, Living with a Chronic Disease, [Online] Available at: <https://sante.gouv.fr/soins-et-maladies/maladies/vivre-avec-une-maladie-chronique/>, visited on 25/08/2024 at 12:47.

(3)Maria Celia, Maria Manuela, CHRONIC HEALTH CONDITIONS IN ADULTS: CONCEPT ANALYSIS, Jornal Latino am Enfermagem, 2017, p. 591.

only as a disseminator of information but as a key player in promoting social awareness and encouraging substantial behavioral changes.⁽¹⁾

Media, distinguished from other knowledge institutions such as educational or scientific bodies, plays a critical role in generating and disseminating knowledge broadly. It generalizes elements of knowledge to enhance our understanding of human experiences and shapes our perceptions and awareness of these experiences. Furthermore, media contributes significantly to forming a knowledge base about the past, which influences our understanding of the present and shapes our expectations for the future.

While media shares the task of disseminating knowledge with educational, cultural, and religious institutions, it possesses unique characteristics that ensure its widespread dissemination and potentially stronger impact. These characteristics include:

- A. Media undertakes the dissemination of all types of knowledge, not restricting itself to any single domain.
- B. It possesses greater capabilities for reaching a diverse and extensive audience.
- C. Media employs various methods that dazzle and intrigue, making its content more attractive to audiences.
- D. Media performs many roles similar to those of socialization institutions, contributing to its integral role in society.⁽²⁾

The evolution of media through diverse means and modern technologies has significantly enhanced its impact on the masses. Amidst this diversity, each communication medium has its unique

(1) Maher Al-Rifai Mehitab, Egyptian Press Coverage of Health Issues: An Applied Study on Al-Ahram, Al-Wafd, and Al-Usbu' Newspapers, unpublished Master's thesis, Media Department, Zagazig University, Egypt, 2008, p. 20.

(2) Sami Charif, Specialized Radios and Channels, Dar Al-Nahda Al-Arabiya, Cairo, 2009, pp. 11-12.

convincing capabilities, which vary depending on the nature of the persuasive task, the characteristics of the media used, and the targeted audience.⁽¹⁾

In recent years, individuals have increasingly turned to various media sources for health-related information. The rise in the number and variety of information sources, coupled with the proliferation of media channels broadcasting health content, has been notable.

The significant transformation in the communication landscape, primarily driven by the widespread adoption of the internet, has made a vast array of health information accessible to individuals, encompassing both digital and traditional media sources. This accessibility underscores the pivotal role of media in educating the public and shaping health-related behaviors in contemporary society.⁽²⁾

Reviewing some media outlets that can be used for health awareness on chronic diseases and their persuasive characteristics:

- A. **Television and Radio:** These mediums stand as some of the quickest channels for conveying information to vast audience segments. Television and radio are highly effective for health education when they employ simple, clear language accessible to the general public. They avoid complex scientific jargon and strategically time the broadcasting of health information to maximize reach and impact.
- B. **Books, Print Media, Newspapers, and Magazines:** These traditional media outlets are instrumental in spreading awareness about health topics, particularly among educated populations.

(1)Mouna Saeed Al-Hadidi, Salwa Imam Imam, Media and Society, Egyptian Lebanese House, Cairo, 2006, p. 90.

(2)Chan L Thai, Anna Gaysynsky, Angela Falisi, Wen-Ying Sylvia Chou, Kelly Blake, Bradford W Hesse, Trust in Health Information Sources and Channels, then and now: Evidence from the Health Information National Trends Survey (2005–2013), Emerald Publishing Limited, 2018, p. 44.

Their structured and in-depth content allows for detailed discussions of health issues, making them valuable resources for informed readers.

- C. **Still Images:** Including photographs, hand-drawn illustrations, data visualizations, and maps, still images serve as powerful tools for conveying health messages.⁽¹⁾
- D. **Cinema:** Cinema possesses a unique persuasive power in health education due to its immersive experience. Films engage viewers deeply, focusing their attention on embedded health messages, thus effectively enhancing understanding and retention of these messages.⁽²⁾
- E. **Media Campaigns:** Employed as tools for community development, media campaigns, also known as awareness advertisements or social marketing of innovative ideas, are crucial in educating the public about various health issues⁽³⁾. These campaigns are designed to elevate living standards and disseminate vital information without the intent of financial gain.⁽⁴⁾

F. **Public Relations:** The integration of public relations strategies within health institutions is essential. An adequate budget should be allocated to support these activities and implement programs aimed at

(1) Bassam Abdel Rahman Al-Machakba, op.cit, pp. 101-102.

(2) Zahra Brik, Media and Its Role in Spreading Awareness and Health Education, Ma'alim Journal for Media and Communication Studies, Communication and Food Security Laboratory, College of Information and Communication, University of Algiers 3, Volume 02, Issue 01, December 2019, p. 20.

(3) Suzanne Al-Kalini, Planning for Advertising and Media Campaigns, Dar Al-Nahda Al-Arabiya, Cairo, 2008, p. 73.

(4) Jabbar Chierko, The Role of Television Media Campaigns in Spreading Political Awareness among Iraqi Youth, unpublished Master's thesis, Department of Media Studies, League of Arab States University, Cairo, 2011, p. 03.

providing health services to all residents of a country.⁽¹⁾

- G. **Internet:** The internet offers unique societal functions unmatched by other communication mediums, thanks to its interactive nature and the ease with which it enables feedback from users.⁽²⁾
- H. **Social Media Platforms:** Platforms like Facebook and Twitter are critical in conveying health information and raising awareness. These platforms provide spaces for the exchange of discussions, opinions, and information, meeting the audience's needs for health information and enhancing overall health awareness.⁽³⁾
- I. **Seminars and Lectures:** These are pivotal educational tools in health media.
- J. **Bulletins, Periodicals, Posters, and Printed Materials:** Issued and managed by health and academic institutions, organizations like the World Health Organization, and various civil, charitable, and health associations, these materials are essential for disseminating structured and reliable health information to the public.⁽⁴⁾

Commercial advertisements and entertainment, as well as social marketing, significantly influence behaviors associated with chronic diseases. For example, commercial television and internet advertising campaigns, along with point-of-sale advertisements, can sway consumer behaviors in ways that may elevate the risk of chronic

(1)Mahmoud Youssef, Public Relations in the Health Field, Arab House for Publishing and Distribution, Cairo, 2009, pp. 162-163.

(2)Mohammed ben Abdelmohsen Al-Zankri, The Efforts of Daily Press in Spreading Health Knowledge, unpublished Master's thesis, College of Da'wa and Media, Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, Saudi Arabia, 2016, p. 36.

(3)Kenza Hamdi, Media Awareness Campaigns for Breast Cancer: A Field Study at the Directorate of Health and Population in Sétif Province, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Department of Media and Communication, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Sétif 2 University, Sétif, 2021, p. 101.

(4)Bassam Abdel Rahman Al-Machakba, op.cit, p. 102.

diseases. These advertisements often promote the consumption of unhealthy foods or alcohol.

Conversely, they can also play a positive role by encouraging the public to engage with products or services that promote health, such as commercial weight loss programs or healthy meal plans. Additionally, social marketing campaigns can effectively utilize mass media channels to encourage healthy behaviors, such as quitting smoking and undergoing regular cancer screenings.⁽¹⁾

4. The Importance of Media in Health Awareness of Chronic Diseases and Reducing Their Spread

Health education is an essential tool to improve the well-being of citizens and enhance their quality of life. It aims to inspire individuals to adopt positive behavioral changes within the community. In this context, media serves as a primary conduit for health education, with a focus on raising awareness among individuals and the community at large.

The media's role includes providing accurate health information and employing persuasive techniques to shift behaviors and attitudes towards adopting new, healthy behavioral patterns aligned with reliable health information.⁽²⁾

During its health awareness mandate, media targets several fundamental aspects:⁽³⁾

(1)Samantha Rowbotham, Thomas Astell-Burt, Tala Barakat, & Penelope Hawe, 30+ years of media analysis of relevance to chronic disease: a scoping review, BMC Public Health, 20 March 2020, p. 2.

(2)Walid Khalaf Allah, Mohammed Diab, Encouraging Media Research on Epidemics and Diseases and Preparing Crisis Medicine Campaigns, [Online] Available at: https://araa.sa/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4970&catid=4314&Itemid=172, visited on 26/08/2024 at 18:00.

(3)Lamia Talah, Media in the Prevention of Chronic Diseases, Cancer as a Model, Journal of Studies in Health Psychology, Laboratory of Health Psychology, Prevention and Quality of Life, University of Algiers, Volume 05, Issue 01, 2020, p.14.

- A. **Disseminating General Health Information:** It is crucial to provide accurate health information, as this forms the foundation of health education initiatives. Establishing a broad base of sound health knowledge is key to the success of these programs, particularly for specific sectors of the community.
- B. **Instilling Healthy Behaviors:** Educating individuals about healthy behaviors that enhance their quality of life is essential. This includes guiding people on choosing clean and healthy foods and beverages, and teaching behavioral patterns that improve overall health.
- C. **Changing Unhealthy Behaviors:** In some communities, prevalent unhealthy behaviors such as drug and substance abuse can lead to serious health issues. These behaviors not only harm the individuals involved but also impact the broader community by depriving it of the contributions of these individuals and incurring significant financial costs for the state. Addressing these issues requires the implementation of specialized programs with targeted strategies to change harmful behaviors effectively.
- D. **Creating Leadership for Health Education:** The human element is critical to the success of health education initiatives, playing a vital role in achieving the desired outcomes. However, there is a notable shortage of specialists in this field, underscoring the need for concerted efforts from educational centers to develop and qualify leaders in health education as required.

Health awareness involves individuals acquiring, understanding, and integrating health knowledge across multiple dimensions. This multifaceted approach includes:⁽¹⁾

(1)Dahabiya Sidhom, Persuasive Methods in Print Journalism: An Analytical Study of Health Content in Al-Khabar Newspaper, unpublished Master's thesis, Department of Sociology, Mahmoud Mentouri University, Constantine, 2004, pp. 74-75.

- Educating people about health topics and diseases by informing and acquainting them with ways to maintain their health.
- Assisting individuals in learning the necessary skills to adopt and maintain a healthy lifestyle and changing harmful health behaviors based on an understanding of their dangers.
- Enhancing the role of health education through improving education and communication skills of those in charge.
- Health education considers the importance of environmental changes that contribute to improving public health and promoting healthy behaviors.

During the 46th session of the Regional Committee for the Middle East of the World Health Organization, focused on health promotion and media, member states were urged to undertake several initiatives:⁽¹⁾

- Enhance cooperation among health, educational, and media sectors to support health issues and practices.
- Conduct research to assess the impact of health messages conveyed by the media on public awareness of important health issues and determine how they affect their behaviors, avoiding any contradiction or conflict in media messages related to health.
- Organize workshops to train media personnel on health aspects and train health professionals on the requirements of the media sector and its priorities.

5. CONCLUSION:

The utilization of media in all its forms to promote awareness about chronic diseases is increasingly vital, given media's expanding

(1)World Health Organization, Regional Committee for the Middle East, Health Promotion and Media, [Online] Available at: <https://www.emro.who.int/h>, visited on 26/08/2024 at 16:40.

reach and its capability to engage vast audiences across extensive areas. The demand for health media, conducted by media and communication institutions, has escalated due to the rising prevalence of chronic diseases.

Health education via media aims to develop an individual's awareness of these issues and enhance their capability to manage health conditions if afflicted by chronic diseases. However, health media, as a specialized sector, requires further development to effectively achieve its objectives in addressing chronic diseases with accurate scientific principles. To this end, we recommend the following strategies:

- Broaden the scope of health awareness initiatives on chronic diseases across multiple media formats including print, audio-visual, and digital platforms.
- Clarify and distill the complexity of messages regarding chronic diseases to enhance comprehension across varied demographic segments.
- Develop and implement a rigorous training program for media personnel specializing in health communications concerning chronic diseases.
- Elevate the intensity and continuity of media campaigns focused on chronic disease awareness throughout the year.
- Promote the significance of nutritional well-being and the risks associated with unhealthy dietary choices linked to chronic diseases.
- Advocate for regular physical activity as both a preventive and therapeutic intervention for managing chronic diseases.

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- the Health Information National Trends Survey (2005–2013), Emerald Publishing Limited, 2018.
2. Dahabiya Sidhom, *Persuasive Methods in Print Journalism: An Analytical Study of Health Content in Al-Khabar Newspaper*, unpublished Master's thesis, Department of Sociology, Mahmoud Mentouri University, Constantine, 2004.
 3. Jabbar Chierko, *The Role of Television Media Campaigns in Spreading Political Awareness among Iraqi Youth*, unpublished Master's thesis, Department of Media Studies, League of Arab States University, Cairo, 2011.
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 7. Maher Al-Rifai Mehitab, *Egyptian Press Coverage of Health Issues: An Applied Study on Al-Ahram, Al-Wafd, and Al-Usbu' Newspapers*, unpublished Master's thesis, Media Department, Zagazig University, Egypt, 2008.
 8. Mahmoud Youssef, *Public Relations in the Health Field*, Arab House for Publishing and Distribution, Cairo, 2009.
 9. Mai Abdel Wahed Al-Khaja, *Health Media in the United Arab Emirates from an Academic and Medical Perspective*, *Sharjah University Journal*, Sharjah, Volume 15, Issue 02, 2019.
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 11. Mehitab Al-Rifai, Maher, *Egyptian Press Coverage of Health Issues: An Applied Study on Al-Ahram, Al-Wafd, and Al-Usbu'*

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12. Mohammed ben Abdelmohsen Al-Zankri, The Efforts of Daily Press in Spreading Health Knowledge, unpublished Master's thesis, College of Da'wa and Media, Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, Saudi Arabia, 2016.
 13. Samir Mahmoud, Problems and Challenges in Media Coverage of Health Issues in the Arab World, arabmediasociety, [Online] Available at: <https://2u.pw/00coywc>
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 23. World Health Organization, Regional Committee for the Middle East, Health Promotion and Media, [Online] Available at: <https://www.emro.who.int/ar/entity/health-promotion-media/index.html>.

24. World Health Organization, Regional Committee for the Middle East, Health Promotion and Media, [Online] Available at: <https://www.emro.who.int/h>.
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