



Role of Mass Media in Achieving Accessible Healthcare

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ABSTRACT

The mass media's dissemination of health-related information, guidance, discoveries, and innovations to the general public is crucial to improving people's overall health. The dissemination and improvement of health-related information is one method that can be used to contribute to the goal of achieving accessible healthcare. Continuing and recurrent problems plague the healthcare industry. There are several issues to be concerned about, including the cost as well as the accessibility to high-quality medical care. The vast majority of patients are unaware of the most suitable medical facility to seek treatment for the myriad of conditions they suffer from. Enhancement of outcomes can be accomplished through disseminating information by the mass media to patients and promoting open and fruitful dialogue between patients and medical professionals

INTRODUCTION

Communication is crucial in the advancement of public health objectives, as well as in fostering a deeper understanding of the underlying scientific principles and public policies. It is imperative to emphasize the significance of various health-promoting practices, such as advocating for the benefits of immunization, emphasizing the need for hand hygiene, and encouraging individuals to adopt preventive measures against non-communicable diseases. Mass media, such as television channels, newspapers, and radio, serves as a prominent platform for health communication (Sharma et. al., 2020).

Mass Media are vital in spreading health-related information, guidance, discoveries, and innovations to benefit the public. Media promotes and facilitates healthcare. The World Health Organisation emphasizes the need for collaboration between the media and health services in public health promotion. The media informs, educates, instructs, and entertains; therefore, it must be ethical in performing these functions. Mass media engages many people with current and diversified information. Thus, it is an essential source of health and lifestyle information. Health awareness significantly affects patient care. Media and healthcare institutions may collaborate to improve public health. Physician-media communication analysis has enhanced health information and healthcare system knowledge transmission (Zečević, 2021).

Mass media campaigns can change attitudes and behaviours to improve population health (Haynes, 2022). In the past few decades, we have witnessed the proliferation and progress of emerging media technologies in various domains, including healthcare.

These technologies employ web-based tools such as online social networking, blogs, wikis, and other social media platforms to facilitate communication with a broader audience (Yasin et al., 2022).

Since its inception in 2004, social media has been increasingly utilized by a rising proportion of persons for health-related purposes. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, WhatsApp, and YouTube have become significant channels for disseminating health information and public news. Health information dissemination can be both pertinent and accurate, yet it is essential to acknowledge that rumours can also circulate, potentially resulting in discrimination and misinformation.

There is evidence suggesting that the utilization of social media interventions can effectively contribute to the promotion of health equity. This is due to the ability of social media platforms to mitigate barriers related to geographical and physical accessibility (Rivera et al., 2022).

1. Accessibility

"Access" is recognizing the presence of a healthcare need, locating and using relevant resources, and having those needs met. First, it needs to be approachable; second, acceptable; third, available and able to accommodate; fourth, affordable; and fifth, appropriate. In this model, access is produced by the interaction between the five corresponding capacities of populations and the dimensions of accessibility. The five ancillary characteristics of capability are the ability to perceive, ability to seek, ability to reach, ability to pay, and ability to participate.

The concept of facilitating access pertains to providing assistance to individuals in obtaining suitable healthcare resources to maintain or enhance their overall well-being. The concept of access is multifaceted and necessitates the assessment of at least four distinct dimensions. Access to healthcare services is contingent upon the availability and sufficient supply of those services. When these conditions are met, individuals are afforded the opportunity to get healthcare, enabling a population to access such services. The level of access that a population attains is contingent upon several barriers, including financial, organizational, and social or cultural factors, which impede the usage of services. For the public to achieve optimal health outcomes, the offered services must be relevant and practical. To comprehensively address the issue of service availability and access restrictions, it is crucial to consider the varying views, health requirements, and material and cultural environments of distinct societal groups (Gulliford et al., 2002)

Despite being a constitutional guarantee, socioeconomic disparities make it difficult for all Indians to receive the healthcare they need. India has a three-tiered public healthcare system consisting of village health healthcare centres, district hospitals, and tertiary care hospitals. However, the government spends an inordinately small percentage of its GDP on healthcare. As a result, the wealthiest receive more than a third of the available subsidies, while the poorest receive less than a quarter, creating a gap between the well-off and the poor regarding access to health care in urban and rural areas. The ramifications of this paradigm shift extend beyond India and into global public health (Younger, 2016).

The Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India, has taken initiatives in making the healthcare accessible to the Indian population by taking the following initiatives mentioned as under-

1. Ayushman Bharat- Health and Wellness Centres

The Ayushman Bharat- the Indian Government implemented the Health and Wellness Centres (AB-HWCs) initiative to establish 150,000 units nationwide by December 2022. The AB-HWCs are established by converting pre-existing Sub-Health Centres (SHC), Primary Health Centres (PHC), and Urban Primary Health Centres (UPHC). The organization provides Comprehensive Primary Health Care (CPHC), which includes a wide range of preventive, curative, palliative, and rehabilitative care services. These services are accessible to all individuals, free of charge, and are centred around the community's needs. As of July 31, 2023, the total number of functioning AB-HWCs across the country exceeds 160,816 (Network, 2023).

2. Free Drugs & Diagnostics Service Initiative

The 'Free Diagnostics Service Initiative' (FDSI) scheme, part of the National Health Mission, is supported by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India. The plan was initiated to offer convenient and cost-effective pathology and radiological diagnostic services near the community, hence decreasing the Out-of-Pocket Expenditure (OOPE). States and Union Territories (UTs) receive financial assistance to facilitate the distribution

of free necessary medications in public healthcare facilities (*Update on Free Drugs & Diagnostics Service Initiative*, n.d.).

3. Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP)

The Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP) was initiated by the Department of Pharmaceuticals, Ministry of Chemicals & Fertilisers, Government of India, in November 2008. Its primary objective is to ensure equitable access to high-quality medications for all segments of the population, particularly those economically disadvantaged. Additionally, the programme aims to make affordable generic medicines readily available to the general public. The implementation involves the establishment of specialized storefronts referred to as Janaushadhi Kendras, which are designed to offer generic medications at prices that are within reach for the general population. As of March 31, 2023, there are 9303 operational Janaushadhi Kendras nationwide. The product basket of the Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP) consists of a total of 1800 pharmaceutical medications and 285 surgical items (*Bureau of Pharma PSUs of India (BPPI), Government of India, 2015*).

4. E-Governance and Telemedicine

The utilization of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can enhance the provision of healthcare services and the administration of the public health system. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) is actively advocating for the adoption of eHealth or Digital Health, which involves the utilization of ICT to enhance the accessibility of healthcare services to citizens. This approach also aims to empower citizens by disseminating relevant information, thereby leading to substantial enhancements in public healthcare delivery (main.mohfw.gov.in, n.d.).

5. National Health Portal

The establishment of the National Health Portal (NHP) by MoHFW was intended to offer healthcare-related information to residents nationwide. The primary goal of establishing the NHP is to function as a centralized platform that provides reliable and comprehensive health information, tools, and materials. This initiative aims to cater to diverse users, including academics, citizens, students, healthcare professionals, and researchers. The primary objective of NHP is to fulfil the vision mentioned above through the collection, verification, and dissemination of information pertaining to health literacy and healthcare delivery services for the entirety of India's population (*Healthy India Chronicle, 2017*).

6. Telemedicine

Health outcomes for large populations can be enhanced with the use of technology. Historically, it has been used to help streamline healthcare delivery and provide services to people who might otherwise have trouble getting to them. Healthcare administration and instruction have also benefited from this development. Primary care consultations and the monitoring of chronic diseases are only two examples of how telemedicine can be used. The World Health Organisation has advocated for the use of such technology in the healthcare industry, but so far, governments have been sluggish to adopt it. Nonetheless, its prevalence is likely to grow with the proliferation of digital technologies. There was also a rush to install telemedicine methods wherever they could be used

during the COVID-19 pandemic to keep patients from violating social distance norms (Parsons, 2021).

Telemedicine represents the progressive advancement of healthcare within the realm of digital technology. Telemedicine offers novel healthcare approaches across many geographic regions. One of the advantages of telemedicine is its ability to enhance accessibility in the healthcare field, hence improving the overall quality of healthcare services (1) Telemedicine refers to the provision of healthcare services through the utilization of communication technologies. The word is utilized to encompass healthcare delivery. Telemedicine refers to the utilization of communication technologies in providing healthcare services, particularly when geographical separation poses a challenge. In contemporary society, there is a prevalent practise of conducting telephone consultations for experimental remote surgery daily (R et al., 2021).

The implementation of eSanjeevani, the National Telemedicine Service of India, is a significant stride in pursuing digital health equity to attain Universal Health Coverage (UHC). The eSanjeevani platform enables convenient and expeditious utilization of telemedicine services, allowing individuals to readily connect with physicians and medical experts via their mobile devices. Remote access to high-quality health treatments is facilitated by the utilization of eSanjeevani, which individuals may access by visiting the local Ayushman Bharat Health & Wellness Centre (esanjeevani.mohfw.gov.in, n.d.).

7. Integration of AI into Healthcare

The proliferation of healthcare data signifies the growing utilization of Artificial Intelligence (AI). AI is currently being utilized in various significant domains, including early disease diagnosis, drug discovery processes, drug trials, diabetic retinopathy, cancer treatments, cardiovascular disease, and eye care. AI-driven technologies are currently undergoing experimentation in the field of cancer research. AI-powered solutions have the capability to utilize de-identified photos of superior quality in order to identify and analyze biomarkers. The Comprehensive Archive of Imaging, India's inaugural de-identified cancer picture library, was recently established through a collaboration between Tata Medical Centre and the Indian Institute of Technology (Integrating AI into Healthcare: A Trillion Dollar Opportunity for India, 2022).

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the study, 'Refugee healthcare needs and barriers to accessing healthcare services in New Zealand: a qualitative phenomenological approach,' the emergent topics were subjected to thematic analysis, which revealed the need for a national framework of inclusion, the need to mandate cultural safety training for frontline employees, the need to improve access to translators and cultural mediators, and the need to establish the position of patient navigators. Barriers to accessing healthcare also included low health literacy, amongst many others. The researchers recommended that the delivery of healthcare should emphasize increasing the capacity of the services that are already in place. This should include co-design procedures with asylum seekers and refugees, as well

as an increase in financing for refugee-specific health services that are achieved through the execution of an overarching national policy (Sherif et al., 2022).

In the study, 'Evidence on access to healthcare information by women of reproductive age in low- and middle-income countries', it was discussed that due to various causes, the vast majority of women of reproductive age living in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) do not have access to information regarding healthcare. This scoping review aimed to map the existing research on access to healthcare information for women of reproductive age in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). The results of the study indicated that women of reproductive age have inadequate access to and utilization of information regarding healthcare. As a result, the researchers advise that primary research be conducted in additional low- and middle-income countries in order to assess the accessibility, financial accessibility, connectedness, and challenges that women of reproductive age face in LMICs (Shatitwe et al., 2021).

The research paper "Disparities in Health Information Access and Utilisation between Rural and Urban Areas" examined the potential disparities in access to and utilization of health information sources between rural and urban populations. This study also investigated inequalities in access to and utilization of health information among people residing in rural and urban areas of the United States. The study's results revealed that variations in the availability and use of health information sources can be attributed to sociodemographic disparities between rural and urban communities. Rural people may encounter structural impediments, such as a scarcity of specialized medical practitioners and restricted media coverage, which might impede their ability to receive health-related information. This is particularly true for individuals with inadequate health literacy (Chen et al., 2019).

The research titled, "Reported evidence on the effectiveness of mass media interventions in increasing knowledge and use of family planning in low and middle-income countries: a systematic mixed methods review," investigated the population of approximately 200 million women and girls residing in low and middle-income countries (LMICs) who express a desire to postpone, regulate, or prevent pregnancy but do not currently utilize contraceptive methods. The primary objective of this research is to examine the efficacy of mass media interventions in promoting contraceptive knowledge and utilization while also identifying potential obstacles to the successful implementation of such programmes. Employing a comprehensive mixed-methods systematic methodology, the researchers conducted a thorough investigation by searching five electronic databases. Our search was guided by predetermined search techniques and supplemented by a manual examination of publications encompassing various study designs. The search scope spanned from 1994 to 2017, focusing on mass media interventions for family planning education. The search results were subjected to a rigorous evaluation process by two separate reviewers, who adhered to clearly established eligibility criteria. This process included assessing the quality of the studies, extracting relevant data from published reports, and analysing data using meta-analysis and thematic analysis techniques. To ensure a comprehensive and standardised approach, the

reviewers followed the recommendations outlined in the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA). There is a necessity for comprehensive impact assessment, which encompasses utilising randomized controlled trials, to evaluate the effects of mass media interventions on acquiring knowledge and adopting family planning in low-and middle-income countries (LMICs). It is imperative to enhance the customization of interventions based on the cultural and sociodemographic attributes of the target populations. Simultaneously, prioritizing and enhancing resource access should be an ongoing endeavour (Safieh et al., 2019).

In the study, 'Mental healthcare-seeking behaviour of women in Bangladesh: content analysis of a social media Platform' discussed that mental health is stigmatized; thus, people often hide their issues. Founded in 2018, the Women Support Initiative Forum (WSIF) provides expert and peer-led psychosocial help to Bangladeshi women of all ages via social media. The anonymous forum allows mental health discussions without fear of identifying. Anonymous WSIF posts from March 8 2020 to July 7 2022 were analyzed for content. By deleting duplicates and non-mental health-related postings like doctor address queries, 1457 posts were reduced to 1006 for analysis. An inductive thematic analysis was done. The 1006 postings produced four themes and nine subthemes. All 1006 women reported mental health symptoms. Most also listed reasons for mental healthcare (n = 818; 81.31%), healthcare-seeking behaviour (n = 667; 66.30%), and impediments (n = 552; 54.87%). Most women reported stress, depression, and anxiety-like symptoms, which were grouped into mental health problems. Mental health symptoms were linked to marital relationships, intrafamilial abuse, and COVID-19 anxieties. Women seeking information about mental healthcare services and providers dominated posts. The investigation indicated that most women with externalized mental health symptoms did not receive mental health services. According to the posts, low mental health literacy, stigma, and lack of mental health resources prevented women from accessing them. The study found that improving mental healthcare coverage for Bangladeshi women requires mass awareness and culturally appropriate evidence-based interventions with multisectoral cooperation (Koly et. al., 2022)

METHODOLOGY

We searched Google Scholar and Pub-Med for research publications and papers as well as thoughts on the topic to acquire information on accessible healthcare and the role of the mass media in achieving it. In addition to this, we visited several websites dedicated to reporting on healthcare news. There are hardly any study publications that have been made available that are relevant to this area of investigation. We investigated the issue by researching it and paying particular attention to the contexts in which accessible healthcare is discussed and reviewed, in addition to the focal points that include mention of the media. We attempted to develop a scientific debate to draw more attention to this matter.

DISCUSSION

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has emphasized the objective of India to prioritize the well-being and welfare of all individuals, with a particular focus on enhancing the accessibility and affordability of healthcare services. According to his statement, addressing the issue of inequity is of utmost importance for the nation. Genuine progress is centred around individuals, and ensuring that every person, even those in remote areas, has access to healthcare is imperative. The Prime Minister made this statement during the virtual inauguration of the sixth edition of One Earth One Health - Advantage Healthcare India 2023, held at Pragati Maidan in New Delhi in April (*PM Modi Asserts That India's Goal Is Wellness and Welfare for Everyone and Making Healthcare Accessible and Affordable, 2023*).

According to projections made by the United Nations, India has surpassed China in terms of population and is currently recognized as the most populated nation in the world, with a total of 1.486 billion individuals. This transition occurred in April (Chatterjee, 2023).

The healthcare industry faces constant challenges. Concerns regarding both the affordability and accessibility of high-quality medical care exist. For the most part, patients are unaware of which medical facility they should visit to receive treatment for their numerous illnesses. Improved results can be attained by equipping patients with knowledge and promoting efficient contact with healthcare professionals.

The media serves as a potent platform for the promotion of wellness education. The entity assumes a pivotal function in shaping the collective reaction to a health concern, as it functions as a conduit for exchanging information among governmental bodies, healthcare organizations, and the general populace. Media channels serve as portals via which the general public seeks reliable information, scientifically grounded facts, governmental determinations, and the responses of the broader populace. The data individuals gather as "receivers" influences their behaviours and responses. The media has a significant role in promoting health awareness and facilitating health communication, hence serving as a crucial intermediary. The efficacy of media in health communication is contingent upon the implementation of robust written, verbal, and visual communication tactics, which have the potential to influence public perspectives and perceptions (Mheidly, 2020).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Access to health care means having "the timely use of personal health services to achieve the best health outcomes". The quality and accessibility of healthcare facilities play a crucial role in preventing and mitigating health problems. Accessibility to healthcare also depends on accessibility to health information (Le et al., 2022).

Research conducted for decades in the field of health communication indicates that the mass media may be even more significant than interpersonal communication in boosting awareness and knowledge of health issues. The power of the mass media can be felt. Hence, the media has the potential to play a significant role in facilitating the accessibility of healthcare (Fishman, 2006).

FURTHER STUDY

This is a review article as limited publications are available regarding mass media's role in informing the population about the accessible healthcare. Therefore, others researchers can carry systematic literature review or bibliometric analysis in getting more substantial results.

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