

**Do newspapers fulfil the demand for
adolescent reproductive health?**

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Abstract

Objective: To describe the expectations of adolescent school children, perceptions of editorial staff and coverage of topics of articles published by selected Sinhala newspapers regarding reproductive health.

Method: Data were extracted from three national and three tabloid newspapers published during the period May to October 2007. Thematic analysis was done to analyse in-depth interviews of eleven editorial staff. One hundred and thirty four 17-18 year old school children were sampled using stratified (based on stream, sex and urban/rural) purposive sampling from the Gampaha district. Content analysis of 14 Focus Group Discussions (FGD) was done.

Results: Ninety two and 58 articles on reproductive health were published in national and tabloid papers respectively during the study period. Pregnancy related issues were the commonest topic addressed followed by reproductive system, commercial sex and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Most of the published articles included photographs. The majority was written with the guidance of professionally qualified doctors.

Although journalists knew the spectrum of reproductive health issues, they were more prone to write on STIs and less on homosexuality, virginity and family planning. The opportunities given for selecting a topic by the press authorities were not satisfactory. Adolescent girls were interested to read about puberty, menstruation, contraception, commercial sex, virginity and STIs and boys were interested to read about homosexuality, heterosexuality, masturbation, STIs, contraception and abortion. Most of the students claimed that they were not provided with adequate RH related knowledge by the newspapers. The way of presenting the articles was not, satisfactory. Most of the adolescents preferred information in simple language (than scientific jargon) in question and answer form without seductive photographs.

Conclusions: Reproductive health coverage by newspapers are not satisfactory. Publishing articles to fulfil the expectations of adolescents would make newspapers a successful mode of RH education.

