

ARTICLES ON AIDS IN MAJOR JAPANESE NEWSPAPERS*²

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ABSTRACT

People in general obtain knowledge about AIDS through the mass media. It is interesting to know how newspapers have dealt with AIDS in recent years, since newspapers are the most important mass media. The number of articles on AIDS from 1981 to 1994 was investigated in three major Japanese newspapers (Asahi, Yomiuri, and Mainichi), which are distributed nationwide. The first article appeared in 1982, and the number of articles gradually increased to a peak (total 785 articles) in 1987 when the first Japanese female patient was reported. Then, the number of articles decreased to 116 in 1989. The number of articles on AIDS in newspapers was not correlated with the reported number of patients.

Key words: AIDS, Mass media, Newspaper,

INTRODUCTION

AIDS is one of the most important medical and social problems in the world, and its prevention is a matter of urgency in most of the countries. In August, 1994, the International Conference on AIDS was held in Yokohama, Japan, and a large number of reports in the mass media drew public attention to AIDS. People obtain knowledge on AIDS through the mass media. Therefore, media reports shape the social context of the epidemic, affecting public perspectives, personal behavior, and policy agendas (Nelkin [1]).

It is interesting to know how newspapers have dealt with AIDS in recent years, since newspapers are the most important mass media through which people obtain knowledge on AIDS. There are a few studies that have investigated the number

of articles on AIDS in newspapers in selected areas such as the USA (Lupton [2]), France (Herzlich and Pierret [3]), Zimbabwe (Pitts and Jackson [4]), and Puerto Rico (Cumingbar [5]), or among selected populations such as prostitutes (King [6]).

Recently, an analysis of one newspaper was reported by Hirata et al. [7]. In their study, however, only articles that contained the key words "AIDS" or "HIV" were counted, and those without the key words were excluded, even if the articles were related to AIDS. We investigated the number of articles on AIDS in major Japanese newspapers that are distributed nationwide.

METHODS

Articles on AIDS were counted using reduced-size editions of three Japanese newspapers (Asahi, Yomiuri, Mainichi)

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published from 1981 to 1994. We selected these papers because they are daily papers distributed nationwide, and cover more than 90% of Japanese population. In the present study, only the number of articles was studied and the size of each article was neglected. Because there was a peak in the number of articles in 1987, the contents of the articles were analyzed for the years 1986 and 1987 and classified into six categories: 1) prevalence reports, 2) scientific matters, 3) general knowledge, 4) countermeasures and political matters, 5) social and ethical problems, and 6) foreign news. When an article contained topics that fell into more than two categories, it was counted as many times as the number of the topics. Statistical analyses were carried out using either linear regression analysis, analysis of variance, or chi-square test.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In Japan, articles on AIDS appeared for the first time in newspapers in 1982. After that, no articles were presented until June, 1983. The number of articles is shown in Table 1. The number of articles increased to a peak (total 785 articles) in 1987. Then, the number of articles decreased to low of 116 in 1989. Analyses of the articles revealed that a Japanese female patient was reported for the first time in 1987. This appears to be the reason for the increase of article number. Since there was a marked peak, we then analyzed the contents of the articles. The numbers of articles on prevalence reports, scientific matters, general knowledge, countermeasures and political matters, social and ethical problems, and foreign news were 77, 57, 41, 39, 10, and 19 in 1986, and 291, 158, 335, 272, 92, and 184 in 1987. Although the numbers of articles in each category increased in 1987 compared with those in 1986, the percentage of preva-

Table 1. The number of articles on AIDS in three major Japanese newspapers between 1981 to 1994.

| Year | Asahi | Yomiuri* | Mainichi | Total |
|-------|-------|----------|----------|-------|
| 1981 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 1982 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 1983 | 43 | 15 | 19 | 77 |
| 1984 | 6 | 6 | 16 | 28 |
| 1985 | 55 | 36 | 63 | 154 |
| 1986 | 44 | 40 | 73 | 157 |
| 1987 | 304 | 215 | 266 | 785 |
| 1988 | 154 | 69 | 179 | 402 |
| 1989 | 49 | 26 | 41 | 116 |
| 1990 | 71 | 18 | 31 | 120 |
| 1991 | 67 | 36 | 29 | 132 |
| 1992 | 206 | 106 | 119 | 431 |
| 1993 | 135 | 117 | 136 | 388 |
| 1994 | 199 | 105 | 186 | 490 |
| Total | 1333 | 789 | 1159 | 3281 |

*indicates significant difference compared with Asahi (p=0.0017) or Mainichi (p=0.0105) by ANOVA.

lence reports and scientific matters was significantly decreased ($p < 0.005$ and $p < 0.00002$, respectively; chi-square test). Although the reasons for these changes in the ratio are not well known, they may have resulted from editors' intention to provide readers with information for judgement on action or thought rather than just simple facts. There were significant differences in the numbers of articles among the three newspapers ($p < 0.008$; ANOVA). The number of articles in Yomiuri was significantly lower than those in either Asahi ($p = 0.0017$) or Mainichi ($p = 0.0105$). There was no difference between Asahi and Mainichi ($p = 0.1530$). In the study by Hirata *et al.* (7), the number of articles was investigated only in Asahi, and the difference among newspapers was not shown. Since people usually obtain information from a single newspaper, the difference in the numbers of articles among newspapers may affect

Table 2. The reported number of reported patients with AIDS in Japan 1)

| Year | Patients | Infected |
|------|----------|----------|
| 1986 | 15 | — |
| 1987 | 43 | — |
| 1988 | 80 | 986 |
| 1989 | 97 | 1065 |
| 1990 | 189 | 1170 |
| 1991 | 374 | 1640 |
| 1992 | 458 | 2008 |
| 1993 | 566 | 2663 |
| 1994 | 713 | 3022 |

1) From Journal of Health and Welfare Statistics, Vol 33-41(9) (Kokumin Eisei no Doko) 1986-1994.

the knowledge about AIDS among the readers of the different newspapers. It remains to be studied, however, whether the newspapers provide correct information.

In Japan, the number of patients with AIDS is increasing (Table 2). These findings suggest that the number of articles on AIDS in newspapers does not correlate with the number of the patients. Newspapers seem to be influenced by topics rather than scientific matters. Since many people obtain knowledge on AIDS from newspapers, it is necessary that articles on AIDS are provided to remind people of AIDS and give them correct information. The mass media, however, do not present adequate information probably because many journalists lack basic scientific knowledge (Dean [8]). The

long-term argument on AIDS reports in England between The Sunday Times and Nature also reminds us of this possibility (Maddox [9], Anonymous [10]). Therefore, it is necessary to investigate in future studies whether articles on AIDS in newspapers give adequate and correct information.

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