

Developed world at risk of forgetting about AIDS pandemic

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Media coverage on HIV/AIDS has fallen by more than 70% in developed countries over the last 20 years, according to an international team of researchers.

While in the early 1990s, an average of 1.5 articles linked to HIV/AIDS could be found in every issue of the main broadsheet newspapers, levels of coverage have dropped to below 0.5 articles per newspaper issue since 2008. Coverage in French and US-based newspapers has decreased particularly dramatically during this period.

The findings are part of an ongoing study into sustainability-related [media coverage](#) worldwide by the University of Leeds, Queen's University Belfast, the Berlin-based Institute for Futures Studies and Technology Assessment (IZT) and Euromed Management School in Marseille.

The Trends in Sustainability project tracks coverage of issues such as [climate change](#), poverty and human rights in 115 leading broadsheet newspapers from 41 countries over a 20-year period from 1990 until May 2010. To date the research has looked at approximately 69,000,000 articles in 410,000 newspaper issues, and the results have been used to generate a new website, trendsinsustainability.com, which launches on World AIDS Day (1 December).

The research shows that while attention to sustainability-related issues has increased overall during the last 20 years, the media agenda in this

area has changed considerably. In general, coverage of environmental problems like acid rain and the ozone hole, which have been successfully addressed, has diminished since the early 1990s.

On the other hand, articles on climate change have increased more than 10-fold since this time, amounting to an average of more than two articles per newspaper issue across the overall sample of 115 newspapers.

Dr Ralf Barkemeyer from the University of Leeds said: "The analysis of levels of broadsheet newspaper coverage on sustainability-related issues can help to shed light on levels of public attention to specific issues.

"In recent years, climate change has emerged as a defining issue in the context of sustainability. This globally-important issue has been very successful in terms of gaining general public acceptance of and attention to sustainability, but at the same time it may have significantly changed the sustainability agenda itself – possibly at the expense of attention to socioeconomic problems such as malaria and HIV/AIDS or even corruption, human rights or poverty. All of these issues have seen a stark decline in media coverage in recent years, in particular since early 2006 when media attention devoted to climate change started to pick up markedly."

However, this changing agenda has been largely identified in newspapers based in the developed world. Attention levels in areas that are hit hardest by the AIDS pandemic – such as South Africa – have remained at a high level or even increased throughout the last 20 years.

"If we look at generic differences between the agendas that are reflected by newspaper coverage in developing and [developed countries](#), we can arguably identify typical 'Northern' and 'Southern' sustainability agendas, with the latter tending to revolve around issues commonly associated

with socioeconomic development rather than climate change," said Professor Frank Figge from Queen's University Management School Belfast.

"HIV/AIDS has emerged as a key issue that increasingly tends to be treated with neglect by newspapers based in the developed North. This does not necessarily come as a surprise, as the remarkable progress that has been made in tackling HIV/AIDS has also largely been restricted to the wealthy North. Hence, the problem itself has shifted towards the global South."

As the vast majority of research into HIV/AIDS takes place in the developed world, the researchers argue that a lack of interest in these countries might hamper the advance of solutions for the spreading pandemic in developing countries, particularly Sub-Saharan Africa.

Dr Tobias Hahn of Euromed Management School Marseille added: "It's not just the geographic shift of the problem and the emergence of climate change as a global concern that might crowd out levels of public attention to the pandemic. Over the last ten years, the threat posed by international terrorism also appears to have crowded out most of the set of 20 sustainability-related issues we have analysed in US-based newspapers. The global recession certainly hasn't helped in terms of public attention to HIV/[AIDS](#), either."

Provided by University of Leeds

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