

The Media and Indigenous Policy Project: Research Methodology

Content analysis of newspaper reporting of Indigenous health

The research team, overseen by the research manager, Monica Andrew, collected all news reports dealing with Indigenous health in four two-year time periods from three newspapers and recorded them in the *Media and Indigenous Policy* database. Quantitative findings mapped the nature of Indigenous health news, including the volume of news reports, topics of health news and spokespeople. The database provided a synopsis of each article.

This quantitative information has provided a rich source of data to trace the changing and recurring themes in mainstream journalists' reporting Indigenous health. It graphically demonstrates the intermittent attention given to Indigenous affairs news, the uneven volume of reporting between news outlets, and the narrow range of topics and voices heard in news reporting of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

Data collection – Newspaper reporting of Indigenous health

The research manager, in conjunction with the Chief Investigator, developed an Access database to store coded information from newspaper articles. The database included fields for article title, reporter(s)¹, date, page number and length (where available)², newspaper and type of article (e.g. news, letter to the editor, editorial).

Additional fields included specific topics (e.g. Indigenous health standards, health funding, disease), spokespeople (e.g. Aboriginal leader, Aboriginal lay person, politician) and a synopsis of the article. These later fields were either free text (e.g. article synopsis) or allowed multiple selections (e.g. specific topics).

The research manager and a small team of research assistants retrieved and coded relevant articles from the *Australian*, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and the *Courier-Mail* newspapers for the periods 1988-89, 1995-96, 2002-03 and 2007-08. Where possible, articles were retrieved through the Factiva online database. However, Factiva only includes the *Australian* from 8 July 1996 and the *Courier-Mail* from 20 January 1998; articles from the *Australian* and *Courier-Mail* for the earlier periods were gathered from newspaper clipping files held at the AIATSIS Library. As a result, there is a need for caution when comparing data from the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the other two papers and between the earlier and later periods for the *Australian* and *Courier-Mail*.

Search terms

The Factiva searches used the term: health and (Aborig* or Indigenous). This retrieved some irrelevant articles, such as articles on indigenous plant species, which were easily identified and discarded. Articles were included in the database only if they dealt substantially with Aboriginal health issues or mentioned Aboriginal health in a broader health article.

Intercoder reliability

The research manager developed the protocols for collecting and coding articles and trained the three research assistants who worked on the project. The assistants referred any queries to the research manager. In addition, the research manager has randomly checked records to improve intercoder reliability.

¹ A maximum of three reporters could be listed for each article. This was more than adequate for the majority of articles, which listed either one or no reporter. However, a small number of articles listed more than three authors.

² Factiva records generally included this information but it was not readily available for articles retrieved from the AIATSIS Library.