

Engaging in a newspaper news thematic analysis to understand the socioeconomic, health, political impact of covid 19 in Sri Lanka
(From Sinhala newspapers published from May 24 to June 14, 2021)

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Abstract

The situation with the ongoing epidemic of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) that was probably first reported in Wuhan, China, has spread rapidly around the world. As of 12 October 2021, Sri Lanka had confirmed 528,064 cases of COVID-19, 480,499 of these cases were recovered and there had been 13,354 deaths. Some citizens do not comply with health regulations established to prevent COVID-19 due to the lack of knowledge about the disease. Newspaper news is an effective means of communicating important social concerns and has been used at length to do so during the pandemic. An exploratory content analysis of newspaper news was conducted between May 24th and June 14th of 2021 at the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak in Sri Lanka. A sample of first-page news from four daily and weekend free online newspapers was included and was selected using the following keywords: “corona”, “COVID-19” and “Covid”. Thematic analysis was used to identify the different perspectives of the News. Based on the keywords considered, 94 news out of 788 were selected. 694 news outlets were excluded because they did not contain keywords related to COVID-19. From the identification of COVID-19 as an epidemic, 21 common themes were identified, ranging from symptoms, distribution, and control, to highlighting changes in socio-cultural practices associated with epidemics and to discussing possible alternatives, and to economic and political impact of an epidemic. News has been used as an important medium to convey information on COVID-19, including prevention strategies guided by the WHO, and the social, health, economic, and political effects of the pandemic on Sri Lanka. But basically, exploratory reporting is not found in media reporting. The only way to find out is to quote the report from the webpage of the relevant institution or department. There is a lack of information reporting, chasing down major sources. Public health workers and authorities can collaborate with reporters and media to present the news that can provide effective health messages. It also discusses the spread of the disease, the number of patients, and the number of deaths, but does not discuss in detail the issues facing health staff, future challenges, and the socio-economic impact. And it was also concluded that in some cases fake news were given higher values in connection with politicians.

Keywords: *COVID-19, newspaper, news thematic analysis, health message, socio-cultural practices*

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