
Alcohol Use During Pregnancy: Comparison Of Newspaper Article And Academic Research

The Sydney Morning Herald article “40 per cent of Australian mother’s drink while pregnant: study” by Bianca Hall was derived from the research article “Prevalence and predictors of alcohol use during pregnancy: findings from international multicentre cohort studies” in 2015 (Hall. B, 2015, L.M. O’Keeffe, 2015). The original article was cited by BMJ Open and is written by multiple authors including Linda M O’Keeffe (L. M. O’Keeffe, 2015). This report will critically analyse the accuracy, objectivity and balance of the newspaper article when compared to the academic research. The report will examine the use of particular narratives, news frames and ideologies in the news article representation of the academic research. There will also be a demonstration of whether the academic research article presents the results of quantitative and/or qualitative research methods and indicate if the academic research is peer-reviewed or not. Research Methods used for the newspaper article: News Framing Like agenda-setting theory, framing in general is used to select certain aspects of an issue or event (Entman. R. M, 1993).

Framing also influences the decisions, moral evaluation and casual interpretations in a communicating script of that information to the audience (Entman. R. M, 1993). According to Iyengar, the concept of framing in media coverage are categorised into two different genres: episodic and thematic news frames (Iyengar. L, 2005). Episodic framing portrays a current event or individual issue in a more random way, without placing that event/issue in a specific context (Iyengar. L, 2005). In contrast, thematic frames place issues or events in a more explicit context such as economic, social, historical or cultural settings (Iyengar. L, 2005). Hall’s research article showed signs of an episodic frame structure. The common news frames presented in the research report was human impact/interest, and the intention to inform the public of the percentage of women that drink while pregnant. Though the research article featured a number of numerical data collection results and interpretation of those findings, the article focused more on the potential personal impacts of alcohol consumption by pregnant women.

Narratives

In news media articles, narratives are presented in a structural sense (Pajunen. J, 2008). An example of a traditional news media narrative is the inverted pyramid model (Pajunen. J, 2008). The inverted pyramid model refers to putting the most attention-grabbing and important information first in a news article, followed by descriptive or supporting information and then the least essential news at the end (Brecht. J, 2013). The news media article adopted the inverted pyramid model framework. The article portrayed an attention-grabbing headline with the most critical information first such as “Almost half Australian women drink at least some alcohol during their pregnancies” (Hall. B, 2015). However, pregnant women in Australia were “far less likely” to drink than pregnant women in other countries (Hall. B, 2015). The article proceeded to add additional information with collected data of the academic research report – “40 per cent of Australian women, 56 per cent of New Zealand women, 75 per cent of women in the UK, and 82 per cent of Irish women consumed alcohol during pregnancy” to support the articles original

statements (Hall. B, 2015). The article proceeds to provide quotes from the BMJ Open researchers and other reports to remind the reader that it is risky to consume alcohol if you are pregnant. The structure of a news media article should contain the “Five W’s and an H”: who, what, where, when, why, and how, at the beginning of an article (Pajunen. J, 2008). In the research article, there was evidence of the “Five W’s and an H” being used at the start of the report. For example

Who – Information from a number of leading scientific researchers

Where – UK, Australia, New Zealand and Ireland

What – The collected data of pregnant women that have consumed alcohol

When – “...A new study shows” rather than the exact year that the research was undertaken

How – The article discusses “studies of pregnant women’s drinking habits across the four countries” but not how the studies were undertaken (apart from the results of two UK studies) i.e. whether it was the results of a survey and how many pregnant women were surveyed (L. M, O’Keeffe, 2015)

It is important that authors explain how the results they cite were determined. The reader is not informed of this in the news article. Ideologies Ideology is defined as a system of shared ideas and social values that help direct and explain beliefs of a political, religious, economic or social unit (Barnhurst. K. G, 2018, WebFinance, 2018). In Bianca Hall’s newspaper article, dominant ideologies are present. Dominant ideologies act as a system of beliefs and values that have become a ‘natural, common sense’ of things in individuals lives (TKI, 2018). The newspaper article illustrates the roles of ideas in an interpretation of the academic research. The newspaper portrays ideologies of motherhood and reports the researchers’ judgements that pregnant women should be discouraged from consuming alcohol.

Values

The research from the news media article has been represented in a reasonable structure in terms of accuracy of reporting the academic research findings. The term accuracy can be paraphrased as ensuring that information in a report is verifiable (Huisman. R, 2006). The news media article provides factually correct and reliable information with sources predominantly from the academic researchers of the BMJ Open, and small-scale amounts from the National Health and Medical Council of Australia and researchers from Oxford University and University of London (Hall. B, 2015). Objectivity is known as a core news value. News stories do not depend on a journalist’s belief or perceptions but rather, rely on the values of truth (Dorbolo. J, 2002). Objectivity contains five themes: balance, accuracy, completeness, factuality and neutrality (Huisman. R, 2006). In the news media article, the author never states their own opinion or beliefs on the subject matter. Bianca focused on the information and supplied data that researchers have reported in their academic research and other reliable sources to create an unbiased report. Balance relates to allowing different sides of an issue to be presented equally (Huisman. R, 2006). Hall’s article provided information and quotations from both sides to create a balanced “equal space” (Huisman. R, 2006). For example: the institutions – Health agencies worldwide – agreed “that the safest option for fetuses is for their mothers to abstain from alcohol entirely” (Hall. B, 2015). And other organisations – UK’s National Institute for Health and

Care Excellence, Oxford University and University of London – demonstrated that there are no links between maternal drinking and the risks of cognitive deficits or behavioural difficulties to the foetus or child (Hall. B, 2015).

Research methods used in the research article: Qualitative and Quantitative methods In research projects, there are two fundamental research methodologies that can be used: qualitative and quantitative (McLeod. S, 2017). The academic research article and newspaper article used both methods of quantitative research. McLeod notes that quantitative research “gathers data in a numerical form which can be put into categories, or in a rank order, or measured in units of measurement” (McLeod. S, 2017). Quantitative data is generally used to determine whether the research of a theory rejects or supports the content in a controlled questionnaire, experimental observations, survey research or content analysis (McLeod. S, 2017). Tables of raw data and graphs are generally used through numerical analysis (McLeod. S, 2017). Both research articles portray these elements in their report. There were concerns with discovering facts about social phenomena and behaviour. The data was also used – “anonymised, self-administered, postal survey, trained government interview, antenatal midwife-collected data” – for the predictions of alcohol during pregnant women in the academic research, which clearly indicated signs of quantitative research methods (O’Keeffe. L. M, 2015). Raw data and quantifying were also general points evident in each report. Qualitative research refers to collect information that is not based on surveys and statistical research (McLeod. S, 2017). Rather, qualitative research is “concerned with understanding human behaviour from the informant’s perspective” with naturalistic methods to an issue or matter (McLeod. S, 2017). Several methods used to obtain a qualitative study are participation observation, ethnomethodology, ethnography and qualitative interviews (McLeod. S, 2017).

Peer-reviewed

The term peer review essentially means that an academic research article is examined by fellow experts or professionals that are familiar with the subject matter (Coulter. P, 2018). In this case, the academic research paper was peer-reviewed. The news media representation of the academic research provides the most useful data results for readers to examine and understand. The report focused on research concepts that were best represented in the media representation and academic research. Hall’s writing techniques provide an attention-grabbing, factually correct and balanced article that informs readers of the quantity of pregnant women that consume alcohol in different countries across the globe.