

Health Sector Reform
Under Pressure



Bangla News
Dengue Outbreak
Raises Urban Concerns



সবুজ বাং
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Policy Brief

Bridging the Gap in Urban Health Journalism in Bangladesh

Executive Summary

Journalism plays a critical role in shaping public understanding by providing information, holding institutions accountable, and enabling informed public discourse. In Bangladesh, health journalism faces substantial challenges in covering urban health issues effectively. Most health reporting focuses on immediate events like accidents and disease outbreaks. Journalists rarely have the time or resources to investigate underlying health problems that affect communities over time. These include poor sanitation, air pollution, and the spread of antimicrobial resistance.

A notable problem exists in how journalists source their information. They use government health reports most often in their stories. However, in

reality, they trust independent health experts and scientific studies more. Government reports are easier to access and understand. Research papers and expert analysis are often written in complex technical language. This creates a gap between what journalists trust and what they can practically use.

Better health reporting requires two actions. Journalists need easier access to reliable health information. They also need better training in health reporting. These improvements can enable the media to inform citizens about emerging health trends. Thus, the public will receive information beyond immediate emergencies. This will strengthen the public understanding of health issues.

The Current State of Health Reporting

The research aimed to understand health journalism practice in Bangladesh, including the sources used for news, issue prioritization, barriers faced by journalists, and the skills they require, employing a survey among journalists. A survey of 232 journalists across all eight divisions of Bangladesh shows that health reporting is dominated by general reporters and is centered on immediate events. Key findings are as follows.

- **Lack of Specialization:** There is a scarcity of dedicated health reporters. Only 1.7% of journalists work exclusively on health, while the vast majority (80.2%) cover health topics alongside general news assignments.
- **Issue Prioritization:** Reporting is largely triggered by current events (65.1%). Immediate incidents like traffic accidents (57.3%) and waste management (41.8%) receive high coverage, while long-term issues like chronic diseases (27.2%) and nutrition (26.7%) are frequently overlooked.
- **Gaps and Skill Requirements:** Health reporting is limited by gaps in journalists' technical knowledge, particularly of health issues and medical terminology. Inadequate training and limited exposure to specialized health reporting constrain coverage of complex and long-term health challenges.

Policy Brief

The trust-Usage Paradox

Evidence highlights a distinct contradiction in how journalists gather information:

High Usage, Low Trust: Government reports are the most frequently used source of information (64.2%), despite journalists viewing them with skepticism and assigning them lower credibility scores (3.16/5) compared to experts (3.76/5) and scientific papers (3.67/5).

Recommendations

To improve the quality of urban health information available to the public, the following steps are recommended:

Promote Health Journalism: Health must become a popular and priority topic for reporters. Initiatives that build skills and provide access to evidence-based information can encourage more journalists to cover this sector confidently.

Invest in Technical Training: There is a strong demand for skill development. Journalists specifically request help with health terminology (59.5%), analyzing scientific publications (43.1%), and finding reliable information (40.5%).

The Credibility Standard: Journalists consider interviews with experts and scientific research to be the most reliable sources of information.

Barriers to Access: Despite high trust, scientific sources remain underutilized because they are difficult to access or interpret.

Connect Scientists with the Media: Since journalists trust experts but find them hard to access, we need to create easier pathways. This includes building expert databases or providing simplified summaries of research to make data usable.

Support Specialized Reporters: Media houses should encourage dedicated health roles. Increasing the number of full-time health reporters (currently only 1.7%) would allow for deeper, more investigative coverage.

Conclusion

Fact and evidence-based health reporting is essential for building a well-informed citizenry and strengthening public understanding of health issues. Enhancing journalists' access to credible news sources, strengthening their technical skills, recognizing health as a specialized reporting beat, and placing greater editorial emphasis on evidence-based reporting can improve the quality of health journalism in Bangladesh and support more informed public health discourse.



"CHORUS is funded by UK Aid from the UK Government, Grant 301132; however, the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies"