

MEDIA COVERAGE AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN ZIMBABWE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

The media are central institutions in any democratic society. They inform and educate citizens about political and socio-economic issues. The media further provide citizens with information they need to make informed decisions. As powerful institutions, they promote human rights by creating public forums where different views in a democratic society can be expressed. Informed by the agenda-setting and social responsibility theories, this paper analyses the extent and nature of media coverage regarding human rights in Zimbabwe in the context of the covid-19 pandemic. Utilising the qualitative research methodology, the paper scrutinised how The Standard Newspaper reported about Covid-19 and human rights-related issues for a period of one month after President Emmerson Mnangagwa declared a 21-day national lockdown on 30 March 2020. The paper concluded that the newspaper responded quickly in its coverage regarding human rights in the context of the unfolding pandemic. However, although most of the stories were informative, they were not educative since they were event-based and single sourced. This paper suggested that The Standard should use more comments and analysis and multiple sources to give diversity and weight to human rights issues covered.

Key Words: Covid-19, democracy, health communication, human rights, media

1.0 Introduction

Covid-19, a viral disease first detected in Wuhan, China in December 2019, has affected business, travel, religion, education, entertainment and the health of people globally. To slow the spread and severity of this virus, the World Health Organisation (WHO) encouraged governments to take urgent action and world leaders deployed various strategies including social distancing, self-quarantines, lockdowns and curfews. On 27 March 2020, Zimbabwean president Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa announced a 21-day lockdown from 30 March 2020 to 19 April 2020 to slow down the viral infection rate. The decree was gazetted in a Statutory Instrument (SI) 83 of 2020 cited as the Public Health (*Covid-19 Prevention, Containment and Treatment*) (*National Lockdown*) Order, 2020). During the onset of the national lockdown, people were exposed to various human rights violations by police officers (Mangirazi, 2020). These violations were widely circulated on digital media platforms in the country.

While some information about Covid-19 and human rights violations was correct, much was also false. This resulted in waves of misinformation on the pandemic and human rights violations in the country. This paper, therefore, analysed the role played by the mainstream media in reporting Covid-19 and human rights in Zimbabwe. The paper scrutinised the extent and nature of coverage of Covid-19 and human rights in *The Standard* in April 2020. Informed by the agenda-setting and social responsibility theories, the paper looked at the collective number of articles published and styles used in the coverage, distribution of articles in *The Standard*, and voices used in covering Covid-19 and human rights issues in *The Standard*.

In this viewpoint, the paper first explains the methodology and theoretical framework underpinning the study. Second, it contextualises the human rights dimension of the coronavirus pandemic response. The paper further scrutinises the intersection of media, health communication and human rights before presenting findings. Last, the paper provides a conclusion and recommendations.

2.0 Methodology

Methodologically, the paper proceeds through a qualitative research methodology where qualitative content analysis is used as a data collection tool. The paper analyses 35 articles published in the e-edition (Portable Document Format, PDF) of *The Standard* in April 2020. The analysed articles were purposively sampled. The paper identified articles related to the Covid-19 pandemic and human rights, focusing on Zimbabwe. Articles that discussed similar topics, but not related to the covid-19 pandemic were excluded. *The Standard* was selected because it is critical of the government and played a significant role of exposing human rights violations, government mismanagement, corruption, crime and the deepening socio-economic crisis in Zimbabwe. The paper is owned by Trevor Ncube. It was launched in 1997 and is published every Sunday by Alpha Media Holdings (AMH). *The Standard* covers different sections mixing hard and soft news. Its distribution is largely urban, particularly towns and main cities around the country.

3.0 Literature review

3.1 Media and human rights: a theoretical analogy

Anchored on the agenda-setting and social responsibility theories, this study analysed *The Standard's* coverage of Covid-19 and human rights. The agenda-setting theory, promulgated by Walter Lippman, (1922) and enhanced by McCombs and Donald Shaw, (1968), presumed that people can only see reflections of reality in the media and these reflections provide the basis for the pictures (perceptions) they have of the world. To McCombs and Reynolds, (2002), the agenda-setting theory described the ability of the news media to influence the salience of topics on the public agenda. The theory further assumed that the media repeatedly and notably present certain issues to make them more important than others (McCombs & Reynolds, *ibid*). The more coverage these issues receive, the more important they are to audiences (Freeland 2012; Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006). The theory also projected that reporters decide which news items to

report and which to ignore (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). The coverage of Covid-19 and human rights by *The Standard* was, therefore, determined by this selection process.

This paper was also informed by the social responsibility theory, which was developed by Frederick S. Siebert, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Scramm, (1956). According to the theory, the media and media practitioners have social obligations towards society to provide reliable and relevant news and opportunities for diverse voices to be heard in the public arena. The media are also expected to use their power to ensure correct delivery of reliable and relevant information to audiences. To McQuail (1987) and Owens-Ibie (1994), the media are further expected to report professionalism, objectively and reflect the diversity of the cultures they represent. They are obliged to provide checks and balances on those who are in the position of power (Owens-Ibie *ibid*). Fourie, (2007) and Day, (2006) also aver that the media have an obligation to create a forum for different viewpoints in the society. Consequently, *The Standard* was expected to provide truthful, accurate and meaningful covid-19 and human rights information.

3.2 Unpacking media, health communication and human rights

This study revolved around three concepts, namely media health communication and human rights. The media refers to all mechanical or technological devices engaged by a source to reach a diversified and heterogeneous audience with messages simultaneously (Odorume, 2015). Examples of the media include newspapers, magazines, radio, television and social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and LinkedIn. The media play a significant role in providing the public with health information.

Health communication was also conceptualised. Ikems (2020: 96) defines health communication as “the use of various means of communication to spread messages that are health-based”. Ikems further posit that health communication involves the use of communication tactics to influence public decisions that enhance health. The same scholar argues that health messages are shared with the intention to inform people and also to influence them to make necessary behavioural changes based on accurate information (Ikems, *ibid*).

This paper also conceptualised and operationalised human rights. Various scholars define human rights in different ways. To Donnelly, (1995), human rights are rights that people have because they are human beings. These rights are based on the principle that all people are created equal (Beetham, 2000). Human rights are not earned, bought or inherited; they are possessed by every human being. Humans are equally entitled to them regardless of history, geography, gender, culture, class, ideology, race, political structure or economic system (Beetham, 2000). The Human Rights Trust of Southern Africa (2003) also endorses that, human rights are universal, equal and inalienable. After unpacking key concepts, the paper explored the link between media and health promotion.

3.2.1 Media and health promotion

The media play an important role in providing health information, promoting the right to health and enhancing democracy (Balkin, 2018). Sharing the same sentiments, Mheidly and Fares, (2020) add that the media are powerful avenues for the dissemination of health and wellness education. They play an essential role in the public response to a pandemic like covid-19. Mheidly and Fares further argue that the ‘invisible’ nature of covid-19 and other pandemics dictates an important role for media as the “eye” of the public. The media are windows through which people look for accurate information, government decisions and people’s reactions.

For Helberger, (2019: 994), the media “significantly probe and report about pandemics and warn citizens about problematic situations that require their attention”. The same scholar avers that the media create a diverse public forum where different ideas and opinions in a democratic society can be expressed, debated and weighed. Chambers and Costain, (2001) add that reliable and accurate reporting of political and socio-economic issues not only promote good health and human rights, but also nurture democracy. For Anderson, (2007), in-depth reporting creates an enlightened citizenry that is able to participate meaningfully in society.

McNair, (2009: 239) acknowledges that the media “critically scrutinise the powerful, be they in government, health institutions, business or other influential spheres of society.” As the Fourth Estate, the media not only provide checks and balances on the leaders; they also give voice to the voiceless. They speak on behalf of certain groups who are denied powerful spokesperson in the media (Janowitz, 1975: 619). Journalists are thus guided by a reformist impulse to promote perspectives that are typically under or misrepresented in the media (McNair, Hibberd, & Schlesinger, 2003).

Commenting on media and health promotion, Ikems, (2020) underscores that the media through devoted distribution of health stories can uphold the adoption of health practices among citizens. Media messages should promote healthy behaviour and persuade people to change their behaviour. However, this can only be realised if the media set the agenda of covering health-related matters as well as promoting human rights during pandemics (Ikems *ibid*).

When reporting on health, the media are expected to be guided by their social responsibilities of protecting the lives of individuals and society at large (Turner & Orange, 2013). Their stories should be thorough and of interest to many people. Turner and Orange also underscore those ordinary citizens should be part of the sources of information because they are the most affected by pandemics. The scholars also affirm that the media should interpret health messages in ways that are easy to understand. To achieve this, journalists should use styles that provide more in-depth health information to readers (Mheidly and Fares, 2020).

4.0 Presentation of findings and analysis

Findings and analysis focussed mainly at collective number of articles published, distribution of human rights articles in *The Standard*, and voices used in the coverage.

4.1 Numbers don't lie: collective number of published articles

During the period under study, *The Standard* published 35 articles regarding human rights and the covid-19 pandemic. Categorisation of these articles showed that 23 reports were Hard News stories, 10 were Opinion reports and two were editorials. Analysed Hard News

articles presented covid-19, lockdown and human rights facts without providing additional information. They included some of the Ws, describing what has happened to who, where, when, and why. The articles were mostly single-sourced. Analysed Opinion articles allowed journalists or correspondents to express their views about covid-19, lockdown, and human rights. These articles were educative as they explained in detail how people were suffering due to lockdown measures imposed by the government. They also furnished readers with details about the importance of promoting, protecting and upholding human rights. Analysed Editorial articles also provided in-depth information about the lockdown, human rights and the coronavirus pandemic in Zimbabwe.

Study analysis showed that *The Standard* provided a considerable coverage regarding human rights in Zimbabwe in the context of the covid-19 pandemic. This further showed that human rights were treated as crucial in shaping the pandemic response. By publishing covid-19 and human rights stories, *The Standard* managed to set the agenda of focusing readers' attention on who was suffering most, why, and what can be done about it. However, most stories published by the weekly newspaper were Hard News and only informative rather than educative. Danesi, (2009: 142) defines Hard News as "news articles that are designed to help readers make rational judgments about an issue or event, with little accompanying commentary." Hard News articles published in the weekly private newspapers helped in setting the agenda of informing people about their basic human rights.

Some of the articles were well-written as they included all the 5 Ws (What? Who? Where? When? Why). Pape and Featherstone, (2005: 27) posit that a "well-written article will incorporate all the 5 Ws, detailing what has happened to who, where, when, and why." However, they failed to educate people about coronavirus and human rights because they were not supported by commentaries. The fact that these stories were mostly single-sourced further showed lack of seriousness on educating people about covid-19 and human rights issues. As evidenced from findings, *The Standard* also used Opinion pieces to report about human rights in the context of coronavirus. These articles helped journalists to articulate and express their views on the virus, lockdown measures and human rights. Further, the weekly newspaper used Editorial reports to buttress its

seriousness in reporting about covid-19 and human rights in Zimbabwe. Editorials are the heart of newspapers because they mirror the press' institutional voice (Tsarwe and Mare, 2019).

4.2 Spotlight: distribution of human rights articles in *The Standard*

Content analysis revealed that out of 35 articles published in *The Standard* in April 2020, 13 articles focused on access to information, seven articles were on right to health care, five articles focused on the right to food and water respectively and two articles were on the right to education and labour rights respectively. One article focused on the right to personal security, right to life, rights of women, freedom of assembly and association and equality and non-discrimination, respectively.

The Standard published 13 articles regarding access to information in the context of the covid-19 pandemic. For instance, in a news article titled '*Covid-19: ZBC faces court action*' (5-11 April 2020), the newspaper reported that the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) was sued for allegedly ignoring the deaf community in the dissemination of covid-19 information. The article urged ZBC to avail, on a regular basis, sign language interpretation on covid-19 related issues and also to raise awareness about the disease. The article quoted Roselyne Hanzi, the executive director of the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights. Another article published in the same edition titled '*Covid-19 wake-up call: Zacras*' urged the government and its development partners to free-up airwaves to community radio initiatives to ensure marginalised communities are up-to-date on measures to deal with coronavirus. The article quoted Zimbabwe Association of Community Radio Stations coordinator, Vivienne Marara. An opinion piece titled '*Covid-19 lockdown: Things are not adding up*' (5-11 April 2020) questioned the tendency by the government of Zimbabwe to militarise responses to covid-19. According to the article, militarisation of responses halted access to critical information and also threatened freedom of expression in Zimbabwe. The same article claimed that the lockdown imposed by President Mnangagwa was used by the government to prevent the smooth flow of information and manipulate covid-19 figures for its political gains. A news article titled '*Man fined for spreading Covid-19 falsehoods*' (19-25 April 2020) noted that Elliot Mafuta was fined \$500 at Chivhu Police Station for contravening Section 14 of Statutory

Instrument (SI) 83 of 2020, which prohibits publication or communication of false news during the lockdown period. Mafuta falsely reported on *WhatsApp* that a nurse based at Sadza District Hospital in Chikomba had died of covid-19. The article further alleged that the government was hiding behind lockdown to stifle access to information and freedom of expression in the country. The article quoted Tawanda Dzvairo, Sadza District Hospital administrator. Another news article titled '*Coronavirus: Zimbabwe consumers left in a lurch*' (19-25 April 2020) advocated for critical information on health, safety and consumer rights. The article quoted Philip Bvumbe, the Consumer Council of Zimbabwe chairperson.

Analysis showed that the Zimbabwean government curtailed access to information as well as detained people for reporting on coronavirus on social media platforms like *WhatsApp*. Analysed articles revealed how the government's militarised responses to Covid-19 were harming human rights and democracy in the country. However, *The Standard* acted responsibly by urging the government to respect the right to access to information, as enshrined in Section 62 of the country's Constitution. The weekly newspaper encouraged the government to avail information about coronavirus in multiple languages, including sign language for televised announcements.

Content analysis also confirmed that out of 35 articles, *The Standard* published seven articles focusing on the right to health. An article titled '*Covid-19: City residents' step in*' (12-18 April 2020) noted that international donors, corporates and individuals in Bulawayo donated sanitizers and Personal Protective Equipments (PPEs) to health workers to protect them from covid-19. The article quoted Effie Ncube, coordinator of Citizens Covid-19 Monitor. Another article titled '*Covid-19: Chamisa chides government*' (19-25 April 2020) was on the dilapidated health delivery system in the country. The article encouraged the government to prioritise health delivery system to save human lives during the period of coronavirus. The article quoted Nelson Chamisa, MDC leader. In '*Coronavirus: lockdown puts pregnant Zim women at risk*' (26 April-2 May 2020), *The Standard* reported that pregnant women in Zimbabwe were struggling to access health care due to lockdown measures put in place by the government. According to the article, pregnant women were forced to deliver at home or in unsafe environments, where they

were prone to infections. The article quoted Ethel Mpfu; Gogo MaZimbili; Soneni; Fungai Sithole of Citizen Health Watch; Fortune Nyamande, Zimbabwe Association of Doctors for Human Rights spokesperson; and Bernard Madzima, Family Health director in the Ministry of Health and Child Care. *'Covid-19-struck family speaks of ordeal'* (5-11 April 2020) and *'Covid-19: B/bridge under spotlight'* (19-25 April 2020) focused on the health of people in quarantines. These articles stated that quarantine centres in the country were not ready to host people, and health personnel manning these centres were vulnerable to the virus since they do not have PPEs.

Evidence from content analysis publicised that *The Standard* promoted health rights by reporting about lack of PPEs by health practitioners. The privately-owned weekly newspaper demanded action from the government and its development partners. By so doing, it performed the watchdog role function. This is in line with the assertions of McNair (2009), who argues that in order to avert health crises and prevent human rights abuses, the media should constantly encourage the government to protect the lives of citizens.

Content analysis revealed that *The Standard* also published five articles focusing on the right to food and water. For instance, in *'WFP declares Zimbabwe a hunger hotspot'* (5-11 April 2020), the newspaper reported that the World Food Programme (WFP) pleaded with donor organisations to ensure humanitarian aid continued in Zimbabwe as the country fight hunger and covid-19. Another article titled *'Zimbabwe under lockdown: the struggle for survival goes a notch higher'* (5-11 April 2020) urged the government to provide citizens with food and clean water during the lockdown period. The non-availability of water, as also noted in the news article titled *'Tackling the coronavirus in Zim'* (5-11 April 2020) was exposing citizens to the infectious disease.

After scrutinising the findings, this study noted that *The Standard* promoted the right to food and water in tune with the provisions of Section 77 of the Zimbabwean Constitution. By urging the government to provide citizens with sufficient food in addition to safe, clean and portable water, *The Standard* also acted as the primary conduit of life-saving information flow, which is one of the major tenets the Social Responsibility Theory (Day, 2006). The paper urged the government to provide food and clean as these rights are important in fighting the virus.

During the period under study, *The Standard* published two articles focusing on the right to education. These two articles '*Universities can do more in covid-19 fight*' (12-18 April 2020) and '*Life for youth under Zim's lockdown*' (26 April-2 May 2020), lamented the closure of educational institutions in Zimbabwe due to the coronavirus pandemic. They reported that the closure of schools disrupted the learning and education of most, if not all, students in the country. The two articles, therefore, urged the government to fulfil the right to education even if educational institutions were closed. Although the government urged tertiary institutions to use online learning platforms, these articles bemoaned the cost of data and urged the government to introduce technology-friendly methods of education delivery in the entire education system.

The social responsibility theory obliges the media to promote human rights like the right to education. Analysis showed that *The Standard* performed this function by urging the government to fulfil the right to education even if primary, secondary and tertiary education institutions were closed. The paper also set the agenda of promoting, protecting and upholding the right to education of students in the country by advising the government to introduce technology-friendly methods of education delivery. However, the newspaper only published two articles on the right to education and this showed that it was undermining this right.

Content analysis corroborated that *The Standard* also published only two hard news articles focusing on labour rights. In the article '*Covid-19: Workers mull lawsuits against Chinese contractor*' (12-18 April 2020)', the newspaper reported that Sino Hydro Corporation employees were pondering a lawsuit against their company for failing to protect them against coronavirus. According to the article, the workers were living under unhygienic and overcrowded conditions and they were also not screened for coronavirus. The article said workers were also grieving over poor remuneration, use of unapproved contract forms and non-provision of protective clothing as well as unfair dismissals. The story quoted two unnamed male workers, Zimbabwe Construction and Allied Trades Worker's Union secretary general Muchapiwa Mazarura, Hwange Central legislature Daniel Molokele and Sino Hydro/ZPC project manager Forbes Chanakira. The follow-up article '*Covid-19: Chinese contractor sends workers packing*' (19-25 April 2020) reported

that Hydro Sino Corporation fired some of its workers for complaining against alleged exposure to coronavirus. According to the article, fired workers were forced to complete forms showing that they felt unsafe working on the site and were returning to their homes. The workers also complained that their Chinese bosses verbally or physically abused them. The story quoted Hydro Sino Workers Union chairperson Fungai Simbine, Zimbabwe Association of Doctors for Human Rights chairperson Fortune Nyamande, Hwange Central legislature Daniel Molokele and Energy and Power Development minister Fortune Chasi.

This study noted that *The Standard* fulfilled its social responsibility function in society by exposing how Sino Hydro Corporation was abusing its employees. The behaviour of the company was against Section 61 (1), which provides that employees have rights to fair and safe labour practices and standards. In line with the assertions of McNair, (2009: 239), *The Standard* critically scrutinised the behaviour of Sino Hydro Corporation in order “to avert health crises and prevent human rights abuses.”

Content analysis also showed that *The Standard* published two articles focusing on the right to personal security. A news article titled ‘*Lockdown cops injured in Chirundu*’ (5-11 April 2020) reported that police officers in Chirundu used violence and heavy-handed tactics to ensure residents comply with national lockdown. The story quoted police spokesperson Assistant Commissioner Paul Nyathi, who blamed civilians for injuring police officers. It also quoted another source only identified as Godfrey. Another news article ‘*Lockdown: Find resolve to carry on*’ (12-18 April 2020) also reported that police officers used violence to ensure citizens comply with national lockdown. The article quoted Njube Mpofo, Peter Banda and Pastor Evan Mwarire.

Analysis suggested that *The Standard* provided checks and balances on the police by reporting on how they abused their power and violated citizens’ rights and freedoms during the lockdown period. Using violence, heavy-handed tactics and torture to ensure residents comply with national lockdown was against the provisions of Section 52 (right to personal security). The weekly newspaper urged the police to safeguard the security of citizens instead of endangering it.

Study findings also revealed that *The Standard* published one article on the right to life. An opinion article '*Human rights in fight against Covid-19*' (12-18 April 2020) clearly stated that the fight against the coronavirus pandemic was the fight for life. The article encouraged the government to ensure that human rights were at the centre of the fight against covid-19 and as such necessary measures should be taken to ensure that citizens were safe from Covid-19. The article also urged the government not to use lockdown measures to limit space for civic discussion, silence political dissent or cover up human rights infringements.

Although the government imposed national lockdown, *The Standard* made sure that human rights issues were at the centre of the fight against Covid-19. The newspaper urged the government to respect human rights and protect citizens from all forms of violence and this in sync with the principles of the social responsibility theory which state that the role of the media is to promote human rights and nurture democracy.

The Standard also published one news article on the rights of women. The article titled '*City women bemoan worsening violence*' (19-25 April 2020) reported that there was a spike in Gender Based Violence (GBV) since the start of the national lockdown on 30 March 2020. The article added that the Covid-19 outbreak reinforced longstanding gender imbalances in the country. Consequently, the article encouraged the government to take necessary steps to alleviate gendered impacts and guarantee that responses do not maintain gender inequity. The article quoted Emthonjeni Women's Forum Melissa Ndlovu and Bulawayo police spokesperson Inspector Abednico Ncube.

Evidence from content analysis showed that *The Standard* advocated for the promotion of women's rights in the country, in line with Section 80 of the Zimbabwean Constitution, which provides for rights of women. The newspaper acted as the mouthpiece of women since they are annihilated in the media. In line with the submissions of Janowitz, (1975: 619), the paper pushed "for specific interests of women and strived to redress power imbalances in society."

Findings also revealed that the weekly paper published one article focusing on freedom of assembly and association. A news article titled '*First lady's donation haunts MP*' (26

April-2 May 2020) reported that MDC-A Marondera Central legislature Caston Matewa was under fire for associating with Angel of Hope, an organisation linked to first lady Auxillia Mnangagwa. Matewa took part in a ceremony where Angel of Hope handed over donations to vulnerable people. The article quoted MDC-A Mashonaland East Province spokesperson and Marondera mayor Chengetai Murowa as well as MDC-A Marondera Central legislature Caston Matewa.

Exploration of findings revealed that political polarisation was rife in Zimbabwe and *The Standard* utilised the conflict frame to write the story. The article was more on political conflict than the donation given to beneficiaries. The article also showed that prominence was given to politicians and not to ordinary citizens.

Content analysis showed that *The Standard* also published one news article on equality and non-discrimination. The article titled '*Covid-19 brings mental health issues to the fore*' (19-25 April 2020) reported that people with mental health issues were discriminated and stigmatised. The article urged the government to promote equality as well as to advance the rights of people with mental health issues. Further, the article urged the government and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to expand public awareness on human rights to cater for all people in the country.

The Standard set the agenda of reminding the society that human beings are equal and they should be treated equally. In the article titled '*Covid-19 brings mental health issues to the fore*' (19-25 April 2020), the newspaper adhered to its standards for professionalism to bring issues of mental illness to the fore. People with mental illness are shunned in societies and the media sometimes perpetuate this stigmatisation.

4.3 Voices matter: analysis of sources used by *The Standard*

Content analysis showed that *The Standard* used high-ranking government officials, ordinary citizens, officials from nongovernmental and civil society organisations, politicians, business officials and a pastor as sources in its coverage regarding human rights in the context of coronavirus. Furthermore, the weekly newspaper used 14 high-ranking government officials including the Ministry of Health and Child Care secretary Agness Mahomva, Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare secretary Simon Masanga, police spokesperson Assistant Commissioner Paul Nyathi, Minister of Small to Medium Enterprise Development Stembiso Nyoni, and Minister of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare secretary Paul Mavima. It also quoted the Beitbridge District Development coordinator Sikhangezile Mafu, District Environment Officer in the Ministry of Health and Child Care Caroline Siphuma, immigration officers Nqobile Ncube and Mpumelelo Maphosa and Sadza District Hospital administrator Tawanda Dzvairo. *The Standard* also quoted the Minister of Energy and Power Development Fortune Chasi, Bulawayo police spokesperson Abednico Ncube, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Services Nick Mangwana and Family Health director in the Ministry of Health and Child Care Bernard Madzima.

Further assessment of *The Standard* revealed that it used 13 ordinary citizens as sources in its coverage regarding human rights in Zimbabwe in the context of the covid-19 pandemic. Voices of Saul Nyakudya, Godfrey, Sheunesu Mudzviti, Kennias Magodo, Precious Tangwara, three unnamed male workers, Njube Mpofu, Peter Banda, Ethel Mpofu, Gogo MaZimbili and Soneni were used in news articles published in the weekly private paper.

The Standard, according to content analysis, also used 11 officials from non-governmental and civil society organisations as sources. These officials consisted of the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights executive director Roselyn Hanzi, Zacras coordinator Vivienne Marara, Christian Alliance director Useni Sibanda, Bulawayo Vendors and Traders Association director Michael Ndiweni and Bulawayo United

Residents Association chair-person Winos Dube. It also quoted the Vendors Initiative for Social and Economic Transformation director Samuel Wadzana, Citizens Covid-19 Monitor coordinator Effie Ncube, #Iam4ByofightingCovid-19 deputy chairperson Lindiwe Majele Sibanda and Emthonjeni Women's Forum programme manager Melissa Ndlovu. The weekly publication further used voices of the Zimbabwe Association of Doctors for Human Rights spokesperson Fortune Nyamande and Fungai Sithole of Citizen Health Watch.

In addition, the paper used five politicians as sources and they were Thomas Muwodzeri, Daniel Molokele, Nelson Chamisa, Chengetai Murowa and Caston Matewu. It also used five business officials and executives: Zimbabwe Construction and Allied Traders Workers' Union secretary general Muchapiwa Mazarura, Sino Hydro/ZPC project manager Forbes Chanakira, Sino Hydro Workers Union chairperson Fungai Simbine, data analyst Wes Baal and Consumer Council of Zimbabwe (CCZ) chairperson Philip Bvumbe. *The Standard* also used Pastor Evan Mawarire in its reportage of Covid-19 and human rights issues.

Analysing voices used by *The Standard* in its news coverage was of paramount importance because it showed how balanced, in-depth and fair news stories were. It also revealed whether there was diversity of views as demanded by the social responsibility theory of the media. Analysis, therefore, showed that *The Standard* relied more on elite sources than ordinary voices. The paper used 36 elite sources as compared to 13 ordinary voices. Elite sources refer to people who hold powerful political and socio-economic positions in society (Tsarwe and Mare 2019). By relying on elite sources, the newspaper silenced, erased, ignored and misrepresented ordinary citizens who were "most affected by the pandemic as well as the lockdown for this specific timeframe" (Dayile, 2020: 6).

On gender representation, *The Standard* used male voices more than female voices in its coverage regarding human rights in the context of the covid-19 pandemic. The weekly newspapers used 34 male sources and 15 female sources. The reliance on men as sources points to an ongoing struggle to give voice to women who are treated as second

class citizens in society (Dayile, 2020). *The Standard* should thus change its sourcing strategy and represent more women in the media.

Evidently, black people's voices also dominated. 48 black people were used as sources against only one white person. The weekly newspaper did not quote Indians, Chinese or coloureds. This showed that sources from the White, Indians, Chinese and coloured populations remained marginalised in the Zimbabwean press.

5.0 Conclusion and recommendations

The Standard responded quickly in its coverage regarding human rights in the context of coronavirus. The weekly newspaper published 35 Covid-19 and human rights related articles in April 2020. It covered issues to do with access to information, right to health care, right to food and water, right to education and labour rights. The paper also published articles focusing on the right to personal security, right to life, rights of women, freedom of assembly and association and equality and non-discrimination, respectively. In publishing these articles, *The Standard* set the agenda of promoting, protecting and upholding human rights in the country. The weekly newspaper also fulfilled its social obligation in informing and educating people about basic human rights. However, most of the stories were informative and not educative because the newspaper used single sources instead of multiple voices to give diversity and weight to human rights issues covered.

The Standard also interviewed many sources, but attention was given to elite and male voices. Ordinary people, women, White, Indian, Chinese and coloured people were ignored. Going forward, *The Standard* should include more voices from ordinary citizens, women and other races on the issue of the coronavirus pandemic, national lockdown and human rights in Zimbabwe.

This study recommended that the media in Zimbabwe should play an integral part of governance in matters concerning pandemics and human rights. They should use comments, analysis, editorials to give nuanced and detailed information about political,

economic and socio-cultural issues. Further, non-governmental and civil societies together with the private sector in Zimbabwe should support the media in the area of health communication.

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