

# The Prominence of Child Health Concerns in Malayalam Newspapers: A Systematic Content Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

*Child health is a critical concern encompassing many issues, from physical and mental health to environmental and social factors. This study examined newspaper coverage of child health concerns in Kerala. The content of two newspapers (Mathrubhumi and Malayala Manorama) was systematically analyzed concerning their coverage of child health concerns. The use of text, images, and graphics in reporting child health concerns was also examined. Various frames, such as the obesity frame, smoke and drug abuse frame, stress/depression frame, internet addiction, and sexual abuse, were evident in the coverage of these issues. In terms of remedies, the study identified how media outlets reported efforts to overcome challenges and improve child health, such as government schemes, legal assistance, and counseling centers.*

**KEYWORDS:** Child Health Concern, Content Analysis, Malayalam Newspaper, Media Coverage, Print Media

## INTRODUCTION

Healthy children have a much greater chance of growing up into strong, healthy, fulfilled, and productive adults, able to nurture the next generation and carry society forward- but that is not at all. Ensuring that our children are healthy and Being well-nourished is an important end in itself, as it lays the foundation for their physical, emotional, and cognitive development, and helps secure a brighter future for society as a whole.

Today, information is available in various forms, and multiple sources are used to access different types of information. The media is crucial in spreading information to the public. Nowadays, print media plays a significant role in communicating information to users. Different types of newspapers play an important role in the current scenario, although they may sometimes become biased. This paper considers the content analysis of print media, specifically newspapers. It examines how newspapers communicate specific topics to the public. Content analysis of newspapers is a structured research approach employed to examine and interpret the text, images, and other forms of media present in news articles. This approach helps researchers identify patterns, themes, and biases in media coverage, providing insight into how certain topics are presented and the underlying messages conveyed. By coding

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and categorizing different elements of the content, such as language, tone, frequency of coverage, or framing of issues, content analysis enables a detailed examination of how newspapers influence public opinion, reflect societal values, and shape political discourse. It is a valuable tool for understanding the media's role in shaping perceptions and its potential impact on the audience.

A round table conference on the topic "Centralized Child-Friendly Media Policy" was conducted in Kerala in association with UNICEF and the Kerala Media Academy held at the Trivandrum Guest House on July 19, 2024. One such topic is the 'Child Health concerns,' which is crucial in the current situation in Kerala. How did newspapers respond to the child health concerns? What viewpoints did they express? This analysis focuses on the content of articles from a specific period, based on various frames. The word "children" is used throughout this paper to include "all stages of development (fetuses, infants, and children) from conception to 18 years of age"<sup>2</sup>. This paper discusses two main newspapers: Mathrubhumi and Malayala Manorama. 'Mathrubhumi, currently owned by the Mathrubhumi Printing and Publishing Company Limited, has 13 printing units in Kerala and outside<sup>9</sup>. Malayalam Manorama Publications, the publisher of the daily, has 16 printing units in India and abroad. These newspapers have consistently maintained the highest daily circulation in Kerala<sup>8</sup>.

## **2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Ezekiel S. Asemah (2015) analyzed how health issues are reported in two Nigerian newspapers, Daily Trust and Daily Sun, using content analysis to examine the extent and focus of health reporting compared to other topics like politics. Asemah applied the Agenda-Setting Theory to understand how media influences public health priorities. This approach aligns with the work of Deckelbaum and Williams (2001), discussed childhood obesity and its health risks, exploring the causes of obesity in children, such as biological and socio-cultural factors, as well as its long-term health impacts.

The role of media in shaping health-related topics is also evident in the research by McCaw, McGlade, and McElnay (2013), who analyzed how newspapers in the UK and the US report on online health information. Their findings contribute to the ongoing discussion on the media's influence on public health awareness. This is relevant to Madhu S. & Dr. Kannappanavar B. U (2023), who reviewed library websites in top pharmacy institutes in India, focusing on accessibility, Web 2.0 tools, and research services, highlighting the intersection of technology and health information.

Similarly, the Environmental Influences on Child Health Outcomes (ECHO) <sup>6</sup> study, as explored by Emily A. Knapp et al. (2023), examines how various environmental factors affect children's health, tracking outcomes like obesity and neurodevelopment. This connects with the concerns raised by Muppalla et al. (2023), who reviewed "the effects of excessive screen time on children's cognitive, emotional, and social development"<sup>6</sup>. They emphasize the need to manage screen use to avoid negative consequences, such as obesity, anxiety, and academic challenges.

Imran, Hashmi, and Imran (2023) furthered the discussion on mental health, focusing on the growing mental health issues among children and adolescents in low-income countries. They highlighted the potential of AI tools like ChatGPT in addressing these concerns, but also stressed ethical issues related to using such technologies. This concern about technology's impact is mirrored in Ponti (2023), who updated recommendations on screen media for children under five, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, advocating for minimizing screen time to foster healthy development.

Ekanayake, Salibi, & Tzenios (2023) examined the connection between childhood obesity, screen time, and physical activity, emphasizing the role of sedentary behavior and excessive screen time—worsened by the COVID-19 lockdowns—in contributing to obesity and related diseases. Lastly, Hjern et al. (2024) studied parental concerns about children's health and behavior in Stockholm, identifying behavior issues, such as defiance, as the most common concerns, influenced by factors like maternal education and family income. The study advocates for a greater focus on promoting healthy lifestyles for children, thus tying into the broader themes of health promotion found throughout the literature.

### 3. OBJECTIVES

- ✓ To determine the extent to which newspapers cover child health concerns
- ✓ To compare the placement of news stories about child health concerns published in newspapers.
- ✓ To compares the types (text, image and graphics) of content presentation on child health concerns.
- ✓ To analyze the various frames related to child health concerns presented in newspapers
- ✓ Identify the role of newspapers in spreading awareness and remedial measures for child health concerns.

### 4. METHODOLOGY

This study is based on the Thiruvananthapuram editions of two of the most popular Malayalam newspapers in Kerala: Malayala Manorama and Mathrubhumi. The analysis focuses on articles published between July 1, 2024, and December 31, 2024 (Six-month period), during a time of significant coverage of child health concerns. A total of 223 articles were collected for analysis, identified through a comprehensive search of the newspapers. Three sections of the newspapers were considered: the front page, the general news page, and the Main page (also including the leader page). The study also analyzed the types of content presented, including articles, news stories, and editorials. A checklist method was employed to evaluate the news stories, focusing on relevant frames to assess how healthcare concerns were reported. Various frames were used to structure the content analysis and understand the presentation of healthcare-related news during this time frame.

### 5. DATA INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

Data analysis and interpretation involve examining raw data to identify patterns, trends, and insights. A total number of 360 editions of two newspapers were analysed. These include 180 editions of *Malayala Manorama* and 180 editions of *Mathrubhumi*.

**Table 5.1** Stories per newspaper

Newspaper	Number	Percentage
Malayala Manorama	126	56.50
Mathrubhumi	97	43.50
<b>Total</b>	223	100

Table 5.1 shows the number and percentage of stories published in both newspapers: Mathrubhumi with 43.50% and Malayala Manorama with 56.50%, respectively. Both Newspapers published Child Health concern news. Malayala Manorama shows more responsibility regarding child health concerns

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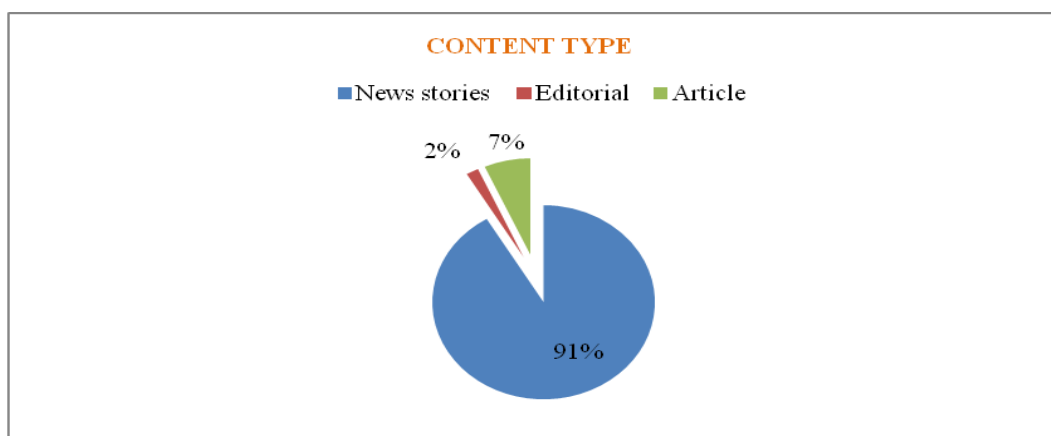
**Table 5.2** Page placements of stories.

Page	Malayala Manorama	Mathrubhumi	Total	Percentage
First page	3	2	5	2.24
Main Page	4	2	6	2.69
General page	119	93	212	95.07

Table 5.2 explains the page placement of news story articles in both newspapers. 2.24% of the total articles come from the first pages, 2.69% from the main pages, and 95.07% from the general pages. The first page and main page are more important than other pages in newspapers. The data shows that both newspapers are irresponsible in publishing child health concerns in an attention mode.

**Table 5.3** Categories of news content

Content Type	Malayala Manorama	Mathrubhumi	Total	Percentage
News stories	120	84	204	91.48
Editorial	1	3	4	1.79
Article	5	10	15	6.73



**Figure 5.1**

Table 5.3 and Figure 5.1 show the content types of news, i.e., news stories, editorials, and articles. Out of the 223 news items taken from both newspapers, 204 are news stories, 4 are from the editorial page, and 15 are articles. 91% of the news stories, 7% of the articles, and 2% from the editorial pages. Both newspapers show less responsibility in publishing editorial-type news and writing additional articles about child health concerns. Mathrubhumi publishes more article-type content than Malayala Manorama and also publishes editorial type news.

**Table 5.4** Type of presentation

Type	Malayala Manorama	Mathrubhumi	Total	Percentage
Text	105	81	186	83.40
Image	15	12	27	12.10
Graphics	06	04	10	4.50

News is presented in formats such as text, images, and graphics. According to **Table 5.4**, 83.40% of child health concern news is published in text format. Only 12.10% includes images, and 4.50% includes graphics. Based on the table, both newspapers do not show interest in presenting the news in an attractive way.

**Table 5.5** Major Health concerns

Concerns	Malayala Manorama		Mathrubhumi		Total	Percentage
	News Stories	Percentage	News Stories	percentage		
Smoke/Drug Abuse	15	11.90	10	10.30	25	11.21
Stress/Depression	36	28.6	9	9.3	45	20.20
Internet addiction	12	9.5	15	15.46	27	12.10
Obesity	21	16.67	6	6.18	27	12.10
Sexual Abuse	42	33.33	57	58.76	99	44.39

The data in Table 5.5 shows the distribution of major health concerns reported in news stories by two newspapers: *Malayala Manorama* and *Mathrubhumi*. The table also presents the overall count of stories for each health concern, along with the percentage of each concern about the total number of health concerns reported. **Sexual Abuse** is the most commonly reported health concern, accounting for 44.39% of the total stories. Both newspapers report a high number of stories on sexual abuse, with *Mathrubhumi* significantly contributing a larger proportion (58.76%). **Stress/Depression** is the second most reported concern with 20.20% of the total stories, particularly emphasized by *Malayala Manorama* (28.6%), while *Mathrubhumi* reported significantly fewer stories on this issue (9.3%). **Obesity** and **Internet Addiction** accounts for 12.10% of the total stories. *Malayala Manorama* tends to report more obesity (16.67%) compared to *Mathrubhumi* (6.18%). On the other hand, *Mathrubhumi* reports slightly more Internet addiction (15.46%) compared to *Malayala Manorama* (9.5%). **Smoke/Drug Abuse** is the least reported health

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concern, making up only 11.21% of the total stories. *Malayala Manorama* and *Mathrubhumi* contribute almost equally to this concern, with a slightly higher contribution from *Malayala Manorama* (11.90%).

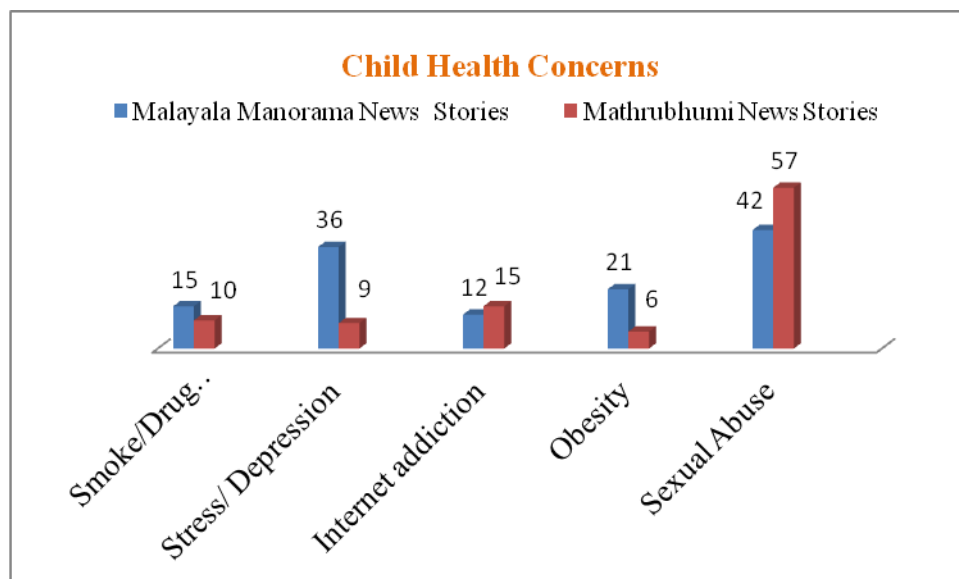


Figure 5.2

Table 5.6 Child health concerns Remedies

Story type	Malayala Manorama	Mathrubhumi	Total	Percentage
Govt .Scheme	51	45	96	65.30
Legal assistance	15	14	29	19.72
Counseling centre	12	10	22	14.98
<b>Total</b>	78	69	147	100

Table 5.6 seems to be presenting data about child health concerns and associated remedies, as reported in two media outlets (*Malayala Manorama* and *Mathrubhumi*). The table shows three main remedies and the frequency with which they were reported in each outlet, along with the total count and percentage representation. **Govt. Scheme** is the most frequently mentioned remedy, comprising more than 65% of the total mentions. This suggests that government initiatives are considered a primary solution to child health concerns in this data set. **Legal Assistance** makes up about 19.72%, which is a moderate portion, indicating legal intervention plays a role but is less significant than government schemes. **Counseling Centers** represent the smallest portion, at nearly 15%, showing that while counseling is important, it is mentioned less frequently in these reports.

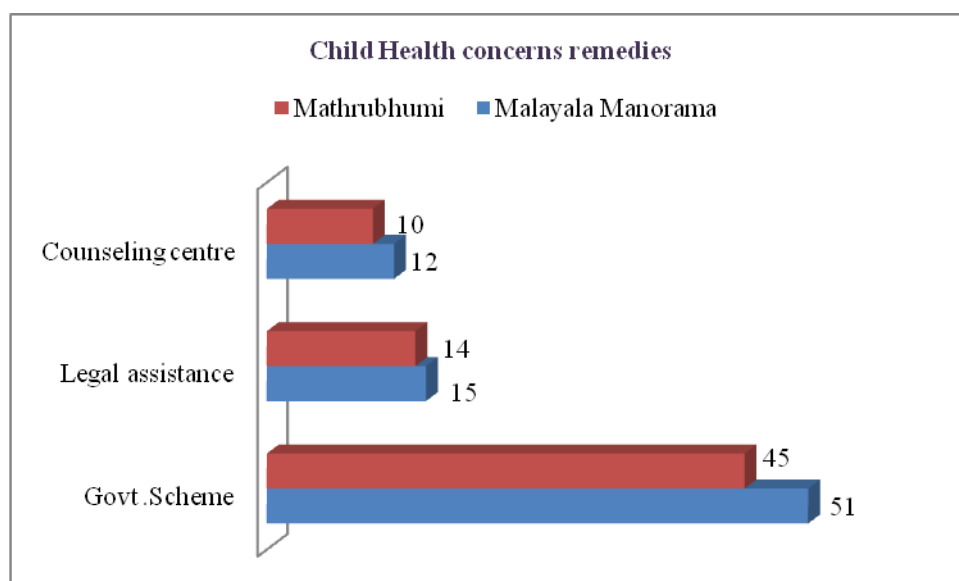


Figure 5.3

## FINDINGS

1. Both Malayala Manorama and Mathrubhumi published news stories on child health concerns. Malayala Manorama showed greater responsibility in covering child health issues.
2. In the case of placement stories, both newspapers were irresponsible in publishing child health concerns in an attention-grabbing manner.
3. Both newspapers show less responsibility in publishing editorial-type news and writing additional articles about child health concerns
4. Both newspapers show little interest in attractively presenting the news, such as through graphics, pictures, and other illustrations.
5. The most significant health concern highlighted in the newspapers is Sexual Abuse, followed by Stress/Depression.
6. While both newspapers focus on different aspects of health concerns (e.g., Malayala Manorama on obesity and stress, and Mathrubhumi on internet addiction and sexual abuse), there is a clear disparity in how these concerns are covered by each newspaper.
7. Malayala Manorama reports a slightly higher number of mentions for government schemes (51) compared to Mathrubhumi (45).
8. Both Publications have a similar the proportion of mentions for legal assistance and counseling centres, but Malayala Manorama reports slightly higher numbers for both categories

## CONCLUSION

The issue of child health concerns has received attention in prominent Malayalam newspapers like Malayala Manorama and Mathrubhumi, yet their coverage reveals both strengths and areas for improvement. While Malayala Manorama has shown greater responsibility in reporting child health concerns, especially through the inclusion of government schemes, legal assistance, and counseling centers, both newspapers have exhibited certain shortcomings in their approach. Both newspapers failed to prioritize the presentation of child health stories in an engaging manner, with minimal use of visuals or illustrations to attract readers. Furthermore, while both outlets covered significant

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issues like sexual abuse, stress, and depression, there was a noticeable imbalance in how they approached these topics. Malayala Manorama emphasized obesity and stress, whereas Mathrubhumi highlighted internet addiction and sexual abuse, suggesting varying editorial priorities. Another concern is the lack of in-depth editorial coverage and additional articles focusing on child health, which are essential for raising awareness and prompting meaningful discussions. Despite these challenges, both newspapers contributed to highlighting important child health issues, underscoring the need for a more responsible and engaging approach to reporting on the well-being of children in society. Moving forward, media outlets must adopt a more holistic, visual, and consistent approach to child health reporting, ensuring that these vital issues receive the attention they deserve.

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