

# Newsprint representation of the alcohol sales bans during the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa: A mixed methods analysis

**IJADR** International Journal of Alcohol and Drug Research

The Official Journal of the Kettil Bruun Society for Social and Epidemiological Research on Alcohol

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**GLOBAL ALCOHOL POLICY  
CONFERENCE OCTOBER**

The Global Alcohol Policy Conference (GAPC2023), "Investing in People before Profits: Building Momentum towards the Framework Convention on Alcohol Control" will be held from 24 - 26 October 2023 in Cape Town, South Africa.

# Introduction

- Coverage of harmful effects of alcohol in news influence politicians' and publics' perceptions of the need for stricter laws (Hilton et al., 2014; Slater et al., 2012)
- Growing corruption necessitates stronger checks-and-balances (Hadland, 2012).
- Alcohol industry, protect their sales through “sophisticated campaigns to undermine public health interventions” (Hawkins et al., 2021; Moodie et al., 2013)
- CDoH is defined as “strategies and approaches used by the private sector to promote products and choices that are detrimental to health” (Kickbusch et al., 2016)
- CDoH: Hidden, visible or invisible methods of power that influence the narrative.

# Introduction

## Forms of power used by industry called **Commercial Determinants of Health (CDoH)**

### **Hidden power:**

- lobbying politicians to protect their product sales,
- donating or removing funds,
- framing the narrative in the news coverage,
- using litigation to protect product sales (Wood et al., 2021)

### **Invisible power:**

- When corporations infiltrate health- or non-profit organisations,
- E.g. send out misinformation, which undermine scientific facts by manipulating evidence (Bryden et al., 2012; Petticrew et al., 2020)

### **Visible power:**

- Industry friendly modes of governance are allowed by regulations,
- E.g. self-regulation or public-private partnerships (Carriedo et al., 2020; Wood et al., 2021).

# Aims and Objectives

The aim of this research was to explore the framing of the alcohol sales bans, key themes used, who the newspapers suggested should take responsibility to prevent alcohol misuse, and whether indirect evidence of CDoH was present in newspaper articles.

- Objective 1: Thematic analysis
- Objective 2: Calculate the prominence score
- Objective 3: Use the prominence score to determine the Media Vectors for Framing, Responsibility for preventing alcohol misuse → Newspaper Media Exposure formula
- Objective 4: Identify indirect evidence of CDoH if present in article

# Study design, procedures, materials, methods, instruments, tools, techniques

- Mixed method (Quantitative-qualitative) newspaper, thematic analysis
- Highest circulated newspaper of four newspaper outlets in SA (Pollock, 2014)
- Time frame: 26 February to 26 September 2020
- Audit Bureau of Circulations of SA, quarter one report of 2020,
- English language newspapers with a cover price,

## **Newspaper included were:**

- The Sunday Times (Arena holdings; Broadsheet, weekly, 150 972 sold),
- Daily Sun (Naspers; Tabloid, daily, 94 506 sold),
- The Star (Independent media, Broadsheet, daily, 33 128 sold)
- Mail and Guardian (Media development investment fund, Broadsheet, weekly, 13 830 sold)

# Study design, procedures, materials, methods, instruments, tools, techniques

- Search terms: *alcohol, liquor, drinking, sale, ban, COVID, corona and virus NOT sanitizer* and *'NOT sewage'*
- SA-binet media database & Arena Holdings database
- 317 articles identified for analysis- after cleaning n=261
- Overarching and main-themes were identified iteratively, to create a theme manual
- Agreed upon by two researchers after reading a sub-sample of 20 articles, and creating a word map in Atlas Ti 8 (ATLAS Ti, 2020)
- Annotation guidelines and Conceptual alignment between raters (Oortwijn et al., 2021)
- Ethics: This research was approved as part of a PhD public health thesis by the Biomedical Science Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Western Cape reference number BM21/5/11.



# Data processing and statistical analysis

## Qualitative-quant analysis:

- Eleven themes were coded in Atlas Ti, Excel spreadsheet and SPSS
- Opinion/ factual
- Framing: positive, negative or neutral toward the alcohol sales bans
- Responsible for preventing alcohol misuse: government, society/individuals or neutral
- CDoH: Invisible, hidden and visible power
- **SPSS: Interrater agreement test Cohen's *kappa*** : <0.41 fair agreement, 0.41-0.6 moderate agreement, 0.61-0.80 substantial agreement and 0.81-1 almost perfect agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977)

## Quantitative analysis:

- Date,
- Outlet,
- Placement/page number in the newspaper,
- Number of graphics present,
- Number of words per article,
- Number of words in heading
- Prominence score

# Thematic analysis related to alcohol sales bans

## Overarching themes:

- Physical health related to alcohol
- Socio-economic issues related to alcohol
- Laws and regulations related to alcohol
- Economics of alcohol in the country
- Religion related to alcohol

## Main themes:

- Prevention of short-term alcohol related incidents and statistics thereof.
- Prevention of long-term alcohol related incidents and statistics thereof
- Effects on personal ability to make money due to alcohol abuse/addiction
- Effect on the family due to alcohol abuse/ addiction.
- Existing alcohol laws
- New COVID-19 alcohol rules/regulations
- Detrimental effects of alcohol sales ban on the economy
- Improvement of the economy after or during the alcohol sales ban
- Supportive role of religion
- Negative role of religion
- Alcohol as remedy of COVID-19



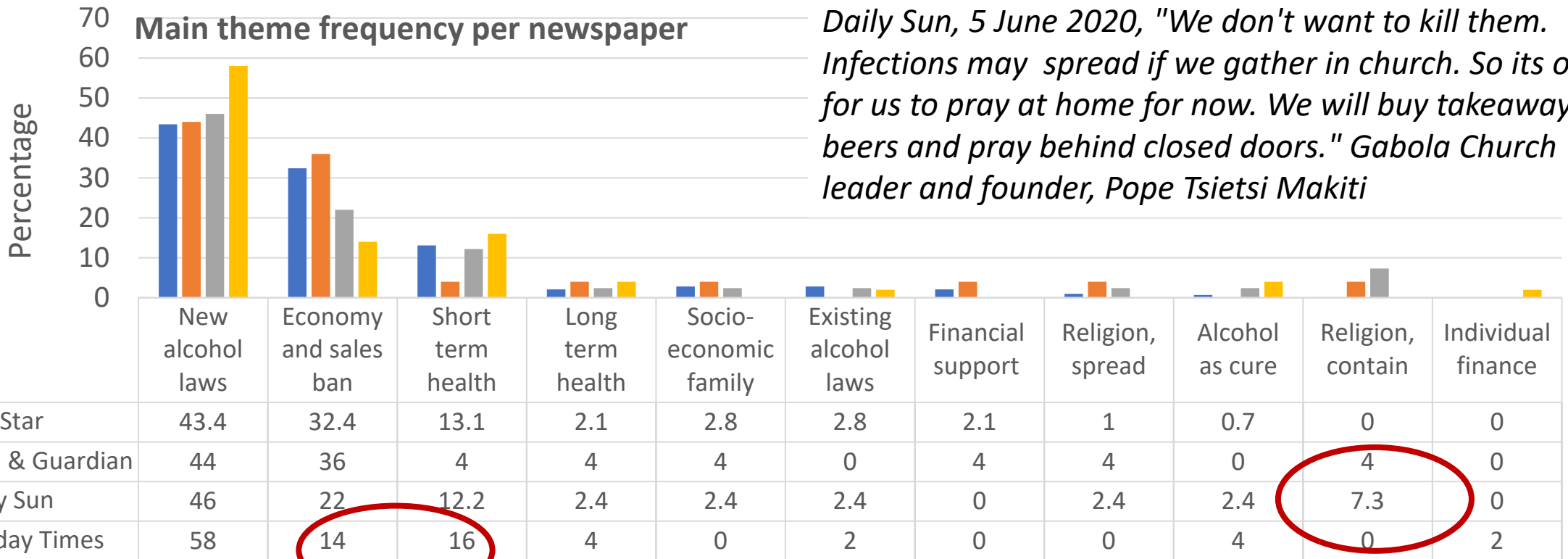
# Results: Descriptive comparison between newspapers

<b>Descriptors of newspapers</b>	<b>Star</b>	<b>Mail &amp; Guardian</b>	<b>Daily Sun</b>	<b>Sunday Times</b>
<b>Total number of articles extracted n(%)</b>	179 (56.5)	33 (10.4)	47 (14.8)	58 (18.3)
<b>Articles excluded as not alcohol sales bans related n(%)</b>	34 (19)	8 (24.2)	6 (12.8)	8 (13.8)
<b>Daily or weekly publication</b>	Daily	Weekly	Daily	Weekly
<b>Broadsheet or Tabloid</b>	Broadsheet	Broadsheet	Tabloid	Broadsheet

# Results: Descriptive comparison between newspapers continued

Descriptors of newspapers	Star	Mail & Guardian	Daily Sun	Sunday Times
Distribution within South Africa	Provincial	National	Provincial	National
<b>Number of graphics:</b>				
None n(%)	86 (59.3)	7 (28.0)	11 (26.8)	24 (48.0)
One graphic n(%)	52 (35.9)	15 (60.0)	23 (56.1)	19 (38.0)
Two or more graphics n(%)	7 (4.8)	3 (12.0)	7 (17.1)	7 (14.0)
<b>Reporting on:</b>				
Specific event n(%)	81 (55.9)	5 (20)	20 (48.8)	24 (48.0)
Opinion n(%)	64 (44.1)	20 (80.0)	21 (51.2)	26 (52.0)

# Results: Objective one-Thematic analysis



Main themes found in newspapers during COVID-19 alcohol sales bans related to alcohol

# Results: Objective one-Thematic analysis

- New alcohol laws: *Daily Sun, 27 March 2020, “When ministers responsible for state security laid out on Wednesday night how the lock down will be implemented, **it sounded as if the country was at war.**”*
- Economic effect of alcohol laws: *The Star, 27 March 2020, “Vinpro, which represents 500 South African wine grape producers, and cellars, said that switching off cellars would have **catastrophic economic and socio-economic implications.**”*
- Short term health related to alcohol: *Sunday Times, 19 July 2020, “**Prior to the lockdown and alcohol ban, trauma cases were 50% higher than in the following few weeks.**”*

# Results: Objective two- Calculate prominence score

Step 1  
(Excel)

TABLE 1  
Prominence Score (for Coding Databases)

Step 2  
(SPSS)

The Star

Mail &  
Guardian

Daily Sun

Sunday Times

Dimension	4	3	2	1
Placement	Front page first section	Front page inside section	Inside page first section	Other
Headline size (no. of words)	10+	9-8	7-6	5 or fewer
Article length (no. of words)	1,000+ (1,250+)	750-999 (1,000-1,249)	500-749 (750-999)	250-499 (500-749)
Photos/graphics	2 or more	1		

Prominence  
score

Median (IQR)  
7 (6-9)

Mean ± SD  
7.8 ± 2.3

Median (IQR)  
8 (7-9)

Mean ± SD  
8.24 ± 8

Note. Prominence score, © John C. Pollock, 1994-2014.

f = sum of the prominence scores coded "favorable"  
u = sum of the prominence scores coded "unfavorable"  
n = sum of the prominence scores coded "balanced/neutral"  
r = f + u + n

If f > u (the sum of the favorable prominence scores is greater than the sum of the unfavorable prominence scores), the following formula is used:

Favorable Media Vector:  $FMV = \frac{(f^2 - fu)}{r^2}$  (Answer lies between 0 and +1.00)

If f < u (the sum of the unfavorable prominence scores is greater than the sum of the favorable prominence scores), the following formula is used:

Unfavorable Media Vector:  $UMV = \frac{(fu - u^2)}{r^2}$  (Answer lies between 0 and -1.00)

Step 3 Atlas Ti  
then Excel & SPSS

Note. Media Vector, © John C. Pollock, 2000-2014.

TABLE 2b  
Calculating a Media Vector (Government Responsibility/Societal Responsibility)

g = sum of the prominence scores coded "government responsibility"  
s = sum of the prominence scores coded "societal responsibility"  
n = sum of the prominence scores coded "balanced/neutral"  
r = g + s + n

If g > s (the sum of the government prominence scores is greater than the sum of the society prominence scores), the following formula is used:

Government Media Vector:  $GMV = \frac{(g^2 - gs)}{r^2}$  (Answer lies between 0 and +1.00)

If g < s (the sum of the "society" prominence scores is greater than the sum of the "government" scores), the following formula is used:

Society Media Vector:  $SMV = \frac{(gs - s^2)}{r^2}$  (Answer lies between 0 and -1.00)

Government  
0 to +1

Note. Media Vector, © John C. Pollock, 2000-2014.

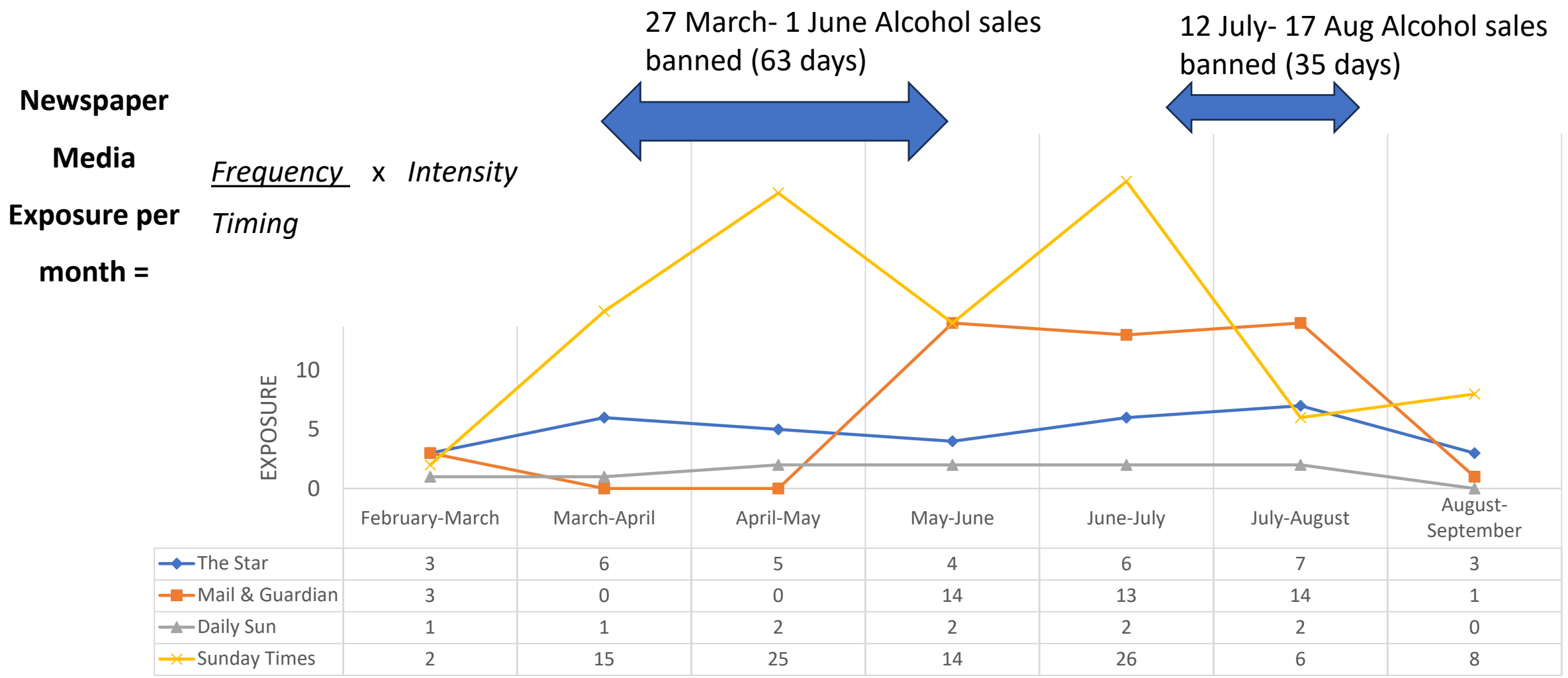
# Results: Objective three- Media Vectors for Framing, Responsibility for preventing alcohol misuse.

New formula created using the number of articles per month divided by number of editions for that newspaper, times the average of the prominence score for that newspaper.

	The Star	Mail & Guardian	Daily Sun	Sunday Times	(Cohen's Kappa)
<b>Prominence score</b>	Median (IQR)	Mean $\pm$ SD	Median (IQR)	Mean $\pm$ SD	NA
	7 (6-9)	7.8 $\pm$ 2.3	8 (7-9)	8.24 $\pm$ 8	
<b>Framing toward the alcohol sales ban <sup>a</sup></b>	Unfavourable	Unfavourable	Balanced/ Neutral	Balanced/ Neutral	Substantial agreement
(vector total)	(-0,13959)	(-0,33368)	(-0,06187)	(0,009155)	(0.602***)
<b>Who the article states should take responsibility to prevent alcohol misuse <sup>b</sup></b>	Government	Government	Balanced/ Neutral	Balanced/ Neutral	Almost perfect agreement
(vector total)	(0,43572)	(1.00000)	(0.06994)	(0.04602)	(0.927***)
<b>Newspaper Media Exposure</b>	Medium	Medium	Low	High	NA
(average over seven months)	(5)	(6)	(1)	(14)	



# Results: Newspaper Media Exposure



NEWSPAPER MEDIA EXPOSURE OVER SEVEN MONTHS

# Results: Objective four- Identify indirect evidence of CDoH if present in article

	The Star	Mail & Guardian	Daily Sun	Sunday Times	IRA (Cohen's Kappa)
<b>Indirect Commercial Determinants of Health found in articles n(%)</b>					Substantial agreement (0.612***)
No evidence/reporting of CDoH	98 (67.6)	17 (68.0)	39 (95.1)	36 (72.0)	
Invisible CDoH: Reporting on media-or health-industry infiltration	2 (1.4)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (2.0)	
Hidden CDoH: Reporting on litigation/lobbying by alcohol industry	32 (22.1)	6 (24.0)	1 (2.4)	11(22.0)	
Visible CDoH: Reporting on industry friendly modes of governance	13 (9.0)	2 (8.0)	1(2.4)	2 (4.0)	

# Strengths & limitations

- Most read newspaper from four different agencies, including both tabloid and broadsheet
- Additional reviewers to rate subjective variables of a subsample of newspaper articles.
- Conceptual alignment and annotation guidelines used to guide reviewer decisions.
- The research did not include other forms of media such as television, radio or social media.
- Qualitative data analysis involves subjective decision making.

# Discussion

## **Themes relevant to alcohol sales bans that were barely spoken about:**

- a) Long term alcohol related health issues, such as:
  - NCD's like cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and hypertension
  - Mental health, foetal alcohol spectrum disorders and addiction,
  - Communicable diseases like HIV and TB,
- b) Individual socio-economic abilities related to alcohol misuse, such as:
  - dropping out of school,
  - being unemployed and lower socio-economic status due to alcohol misuse,

# Discussion

- c) Family socio-economic outcomes related to alcohol misuse, such as:
  - emotional and psychological impact on the family due to alcohol misuse,
  - financial burden on the family,
  - being ostracised from family and
  - socio-economic issues like overcrowding due to alcohol abuse,
- d) Existing alcohol related laws and regulations, such as:
  - legal BAC when driving, legal age limit,
  - marketing of alcohol, labelling of alcohol, illegal alcohol sales, 'shebeens' and
  - The draft liquor amendment bill of 2016

# Discussion

- Journalists are neglecting the public health topics related to alcohol harms in South Africa.
- By using the prominence score average the alcohol sales bans were of equal importance in all four newspapers, but when the Newspaper Media Exposure score is used The Sunday Times had the highest influence on what people would perceive is important (e.g. Short term health is more important than economic effect of alcohol sales bans, Balanced framing of alcohol sales bans and Neutral regarding responsibility for prevention of alcohol misuse)
- The Sunday Times had the second least CDoH influence, with 72% of reporting not influenced by industry. Tabloid had the least CDoH.
- Found indirect evidence of CDoH benefitting the alcohol industry by using litigation, lobbying or funding to frame the narrative in the news, which is referred to as a hidden form of power (Gaventa, 2006).



# Conclusion and Recommendations

- News agencies should ensure balanced reporting on matters of health,
- Put measures in place to prevent undue influence by large corporations, especially hidden forms of power used by the alcohol industry.
- Newspapers have the potential to influence opinions, not only during emergency situations such as COVID-19, but also on an ongoing basis in all health-related matters, and should in effect act as the ‘Watch dog’
- ‘Watch dog’: provides surveillance and checks government actions and is independent from powerful institutions/ industries (Donohue et al., 1995; McLeod, 1989).

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# Publication & Funding



National  
Research  
Foundation



- **Funding sources:** The author Marieke Theron is the recipient of a Department of Science and Innovation – National Research Foundation (DSI-NRF) Centre of Excellence in Food Security (CoE-FS) PhD bursary. No other financial support was received for this research.