



# Media Bite

Health Reporting in  
Lebanon: Only 25% use  
evidence but incomplete



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**T**he waste problem in Lebanon has paved the way for discussing several other health related crises. From the problem of medical errors, to financing mechanisms of hospitals, to attempts at controlling food-related corruption and other problems, the Lebanese press is trying to report on different health topics whereby more than 300 health related articles are published every week. But, do these articles match the criteria of scientific credibility?

A study conducted by the Knowledge to Policy (K2P) Center at the American University of Beirut showed that more than 75% of the health related articles published in Lebanon do not utilize scientific evidence while 25% of articles that do depend on scientific evidence are incomplete. The reason for this incompleteness is that 40% of them relied on experts' opinions as their source of evidence while only 6% referenced peer-reviewed research studies which were also inaccurately reported.

The study, which was conducted by K2P director, Dr. Fadi El-Jardali and colleagues, and published in PLOS ONE, judged that the quality of media reporting is low since it lacks scientific evidence. This constitutes a source of concern for journalists, researchers, and policy makers. Reasons include lack of time whereby journalists do not have sufficient time to access databases and research studies. Moreover, scientific jargon is dry, difficult, and boring as per a journalist who participated in the study:

*“If I know about something and I need to write it on the same day, I won’t be able to get all the facts, because if someone else picks it up [reports on the scoop], there will be no point in writing about it the next day.”*

One policymaker who participated in the study stated, *“Not once did the media in Lebanon alert me to something useful in my domain that would help me make pertinent decisions.”*

A researcher who also participated in this study indicated that *“Publishing in peer-reviewed journals is great for our personal career and professional development, but it’s not effective in policymaking”.*

The study recommended three main strategies to improve the quality of health reporting and the use of evidence in health journalism:

- Creating a specialization in evidence based health reporting
- Disseminating research summaries through media outlets
- Forming a platform to link media with policymakers and researchers.

The ultimate outcome is to make health reporting more accurate and credible while enhancing the role it plays in bridging the gap between scientific experts and journalists, and also between scientific studies and articles published in the press. Therefore, the press will play its unique three-dimensional role: shaping and influencing public opinion; influencing policymakers and consequently the decision making process; and prompting researchers to conduct studies that meet policymakers’ needs. Hence, evidence-informed health policies will ultimately respond to societal needs. Based on the study findings, K2P Center will support building capacities for evidence-based health reporting in Lebanon.

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