Zika Virus: Influence Of Media On Public Perception

The Zika virus is transmitted through the Aedes mosquitoes however there's been cases where the virus has been transmitted through sexual intercourse. This virus usually causes mild infections; it also includes some symptoms such as muscle pain, rash, itching all over the body and fevers which last to 2-7 days. However the Zika virus can have more critical effect on a pregnant woman as scientist concluded that the Zika virus is the cause of birth defects such as microcephaly which means that the baby will have an abnormally small head which can be associated which abnormal brain development. The Zika virus was first found in Uganda 1947 however outbreaks of the virus have been reported in tropical Africa, Southeast Asia and the pacific islands. The virus spread to countries such as Brazil which brought a lot of attention to the virus as the 2016 Olympics were hosted in Brazil. This caused panic within the public; this allowed the media to take on the story and manipulate it in different ways.

For example, The Guardian stated the Zika virus could be a bigger global health threat than Ebola, says health experts. This article shows how the media outlet manipulates the public by making them worried about the virus being a bigger threat than ebola. This can create chaos in the public as some people would believe that the virus could infect them. In the article the scientist states that "In many ways the Zika outbreak is worse than the Ebola epidemic of 2014-15," said Jeremy Farrar, head of the Wellcome Trust. "Most virus carriers are symptomless. It is a silent infection in a group of highly vulnerable individuals – pregnant women – that is associated with a horrible outcome for their babies." There is no prospect of a vaccine for Zika at present, in contrast to Ebola, for which several are now under trial. "The real problem is that trying to develop a vaccine that would have to be tested on pregnant women is a practical and ethical nightmare," added Mike Turner, head of infection and immuno-biology at the Wellcome Trust. This article uses scientific research to create panic within the public as it states that there is no vaccine.

Another example of where a media outlet has influenced public perception would be in the Time article where Headline states that half of brazilian women are avoiding pregnancy because of Zika. This article is emphasising how devastating the Zika virus can be. however the media misled the audience as in the article it states that half of the Brazilian women are avoiding pregnancy, further in the article it says 'The latest report from a Brazilian scientist studying the impact that the epidemic is having on reproductive choices shows that the consequences of the Zika outbreak may be long lasting. In a brief letter published in the BMJ Journal of Family Planning and Reproductive Health Care, the researcher reports that 56% of women in a nationally representative sample who were surveyed said that they avoided getting pregnant because of Zika. More women in the hardest hit areas of Brazil, in the northeastern part of the country, said they didn't want to get pregnant, as well as more black and non–white women' The Time news outlet has manipulated the research and made it into a headline. In reality only half of the women answering the survey would avoid pregnancy. In addition to this The guardian news outlet has created tension in the uk by publishing this article "Zika Virus: three returning UK travellers diagnosed" Three travellers who returned to the UK from South and Central America have been diagnosed with the Zika virus, a mosquito-borne illness that has been linked to brain deformities in babies. Public Health England said in a statement on its website the three people had presented with the virus after travelling to Colombia, Suriname and Guyana, all

countries which are experiencing Zika outbreaks. Once again the media created panic within the public as they have used the headline to manipulate their story. The headlines hides the fact that the virus is not contagious as its can only be transmitted through mosquitoes and sexual intercourse which can have an impact on the public as they may take this as a bigger threat than it actually is. Moreover, The Telegraph has published a more played down article which includes the names of the athletes skipping the rio olympics due to the Zika virus. This article uses high profile names such as Jason day to persuade the public that going to brazil can be very ignorant “The reason for my decision is my concerns about the possible transmission of the Zika virus and the potential risks that it may present to my wife's future pregnancies and to future members of our family. While it has always been a major goal to compete in the Olympics on behalf of my country, playing golf cannot take precedent over the safety of our family. I will not place them at risk”.

A more contrasting example of a Zika virus article would be an article from the guardian, In this article they have stated “Up to 1 in 20 babies born mothers with zika have birth defects, report says” This report is unique to the other articles as it doesn't over-exaggerate the effects of the Zika virus as it states that only up to 1 in 20 babies born with mothers with zika will have birth defects which suggests that this article is a more informative article rather than an article which purpose is to get attention.

On one hand the media has created a positive contribution to the public's perception of the Zika virus as it has made people aware of this virus and taught them how to avoid the virus for example an article posted by The Guardian stated that 53 cases of Zika have been confirmed in the uk, says health agency. This article would cause both a positive and a negative impact. It would have a positive impact as this article would make the UK aware of the virus due to the high number of zika cases in the uk which can allow the uk government to take action. The negative impact is the public panic this would create. Also in this article it states how men and women should use condoms for eight weeks after returning from an area where there is Zika virus and for six months if they experience any symptoms themselves. This would be a positive impact as its stopping the virus from spreading by informing people about it. This information comes from the World Health Organisation and the PHE.The people would trust this information as it proves validity as the source of this information is very reliable as they are huge organisations with a reliable status. Furthermore, another article which contributed positively to the public perception of the Zika virus would be the article mentioned above which was published by The Telegraph which mentioned Jason day isn't going to Brazil“The reason for my decision is my concerns about the possible transmission of the Zika virus and the potential risks that it may present to my wife's future pregnancies and to future members of our family. While it has always been a major goal to compete in the Olympics on behalf of my country, playing golf cannot take precedent over the safety of our family. I will not place them at risk”. This would have contributed to a positive impact as it would make people aware that going to the countries with the Zika virus can have a devastating impact. This would make people not want to visit the countries with viruses due to the zika factor. This article can be proven as valid as the source comes from the social media of the actual celebrity.

However the media can also have a negative contribution to the public perception as it can cause chaos within the public, an example of this would be in the article published by StatNews and it states “first Zika death in the us was indeed caused by the virus, officials say” This would create a negative impact as it can cause people to panic which would only make it worse as people would not get helpful information that could help them avoid getting this virus, in

addition, this article uses the word death to create a shocking vibe to its readers, therefore the public would have false information as its very rare that someone dies from this virus. However this article would not be valid as the source of this is a news report and the writer of this article is only suggesting that the death was caused by the Zika virus, this shows that it cannot be fully trusted.

Another negative contribution that the media can bring to the public's perception of the Zika virus would be that it creates false information. The media can create its own stories about the Zika virus for its own purpose which is to get attention, this can make the situation worse than it is. An example of this would be an article posted by the guardian which states “ Zika virus will spread explosively all over the world”. This suggests that billions of people are in danger due to the Zika virus, where as its stated this virus can only be transmitted through sexual intercourse and mosquitoes, also further in the article it states that anyone who catches this virus would die. This false information would lead to inaccurate public perception of this virus as the virus rarely has any deaths involved; It only has devastating effects on pregnant women. This suggests that this article is not valid as the information used are created to lure people to read this article. Therefore every scientific data needs to be thoroughly researched and carefully checked before it can be published. This can be made possible through laws created by the government. This would improve the public knowledge without creating public panic.

1. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/30/zika-virus-health-fears
2. https://www.yahoo.com/news/half-brazilian-women-avoiding-pregnancy-235145558.html
3. https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/jan/23/zika-virus-three-uk-travellers-diagnosed
4. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/29/three-zika-virus-cases-found-in-uk-hospitals-reports-say
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6. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/0/rio-olympics-which-athletes-have-withdrawn-over-zika-fears/