

# The Case of Wichita: The Influence of Regional Print Media on Long-term Care Decision-making

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**Abstract.** As the baby boomer generation begins to fill nursing facilities nationwide, the prospect of elder abuse and negligent facility practice becomes a growing concern for key decision-makers. This study evaluates a sample population in Wichita, KS of 17 independent, long-term care facilities by charting their bed numbers and occupancy rates over a five year period. In comparison to the 17 care facilities, the study evaluates over 200 regionally printed articles associated to long-term facility care between the dates of January 1, 2004 to December 31, 2008. By using thematic analysis, a correlation was discovered between the use of negative media and the projected occupancy rates for subsequent years. Although not statistically significant, the data collected by this study provides substantial information concerning the relationship between regional print media and long-term care facilities.

## Introduction

From Gutenberg's invention to the modern hype surrounding internet news, the positive and negative effects of media upon the masses have always been important to the understanding of human interaction and culture at large. The Wichita Case Study provides a critical insight to the potential of print media as a component for decision-makers regarding retirement living. For the purpose of finding just how vast these media related effects can be, this study is based on the following research question; Do enrollment rates between the years of 2004 to 2008 in elderly care facilities correspond to the negative or positive media portrayal in Wichita, KS retirement home communities?

## Significance

This study features an exploratory research design with two variables being analyzed; occupancy rates and negative print media. Research participants include *The Wichita Eagle* and seventeen long-term care facilities in Wichita, KS. *The Wichita Eagle* is a state-wide newspaper that features local, regional and national news columns. The distribution numbers released by *The Wichita Eagle* in May of 2009 suggest circulation rates of over 90,000 daily and 140,000 for Sunday publications. In comparison to the other two top circulations, the *Topeka Capital Journal* and *Lawrence Journal World*, *The Wichita Eagle* ranks first by over 20,000 circulation subscribers. *The Kansas Department of Aging* (KDOA) provided occupancy data for the seventeen, Wichita-based, residual long-term care facilities. These reports provide the number of beds in the facility and their occupancy based on percentage. Five reports were analyzed in the study, ranging from the years 2004 to 2008.

A time frame between the dates of January 1, 2004 and December 31, 2008 was selected for analysis pertaining to the two variables. These dates were used as search cues for the initial exploration of print media using an online database operated by *The Wichita Eagle*. Search queries used included the terms/phrases; nursing home care, long term care and retirement. This search revealed over 3,800 potential articles for review between the years 1984 and 2010. Further limits were established by framing the research to the five year time frame, revealing 256 total articles. Analysis upon the titles and newspaper assigned section of each article determined a majority of the 256 were obituaries referencing the location of death. Omitting the terms "death" and "obituary" limited the number of relevant articles to 20.

### *Coding: Content Analysis*

In the work 'Campaign Media Content Analysis,' Susan A. Banducci highlights two forms of code existing in content analysis, emergent and a priori (Banducci & Karp, 2002). Emergent coding occurs when the researcher begins analysis of the artifact and throughout initial observations records codes that are forthcoming. In opposition

to emergent coding methods, a priori coding occurs when the researcher pre-determines codes before initial observations. In this study the initial review of the 20 relevant articles involved the production of an emergent coding system by highlighting negative terms and analysis in each article. Articles not featuring negative text were labeled as positive.

Negative terms emerging through initial analysis were; “lack,” “crisis,” “difficult,” “risk,” “struggle” and “cuts.” All negative labeled articles featured one, if not more, of these terms. A second session of coding confirmed these articles to be either positive or negative based on the arguments made in text by the authors. Upon further review, two featured articles in the search query were omitted as memorial articles and thus irrelevant to the research question. A third article was omitted as an advertisement, leaving a total 17 articles for analysis. The remaining articles were evaluated with the research question as a criterion for inclusion to the study. Seven of these articles were then omitted as interest and or elderly health related articles. The final summary report for data analysis features the content analysis of 10 remaining articles over the appropriated five year time frame. These articles exclusively relate long-term care facilities as being either positive or negative as a retirement option.

### *Chronological & Statistical Methods*

After featured articles had been coded, a five year time line was created featuring the seventeen KDOA recognized Wichita, KS, long-term facilities. These organizations were listed alongside their bed numbers and occupancy rates for each of the five years. From the information provided by the KDOA, averages were figured for occupancy rates and beds available based on each year. The years of each article, whether labeled positive or negative, were then assigned to their appropriate year alongside the KDOA results. Thematic analysis was then used to determine trends in negative and positive print media as compared to occupancy rates.

### *Literature*

From the Journal of Health Affairs in 1998, Brodie, Brady and Altman’s coverage of negative media relating to long-term care argues from a contextual standpoint, suggesting that location is crucial to the reactionary tendencies of mass audiences to print media. The authors contend that the late 1990s featured resurgence in re-evaluating the disciplines of long-term care facilities and as such a plethora of criticism from numerous fields began to encroach upon print media regarding elderly care (Brodie, Brady & Altman, 1998). Their study determines that the “tone of coverage has become more critical over time” and therefore deciphering the population’s reaction has also become more important to understanding print media effects (Brodie, et. al. 1998, pg. 4). Among their implications, an outline is provided of their difficulties with the coding of negative print media. Because perception is subjective to the receiver, all authors agreed that coding data as either negative or positive can often be more complex than a simple analysis of titles or sections. The technique of Brody, Brady and Altman’s research served as a guide to the coding conducted in this study.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the thematic analysis of the selected articles, 25% of the coded negative print media were published during the year 2005. An overall 2% decline in occupancy rates was calculated for the year of 2005 between all 17 long-term care facilities in Wichita, KS. These figures suggest the among the most concentrated years for negative print media there in turn is a percentage decline in admission levels among elderly care organizations. Specifically, five of the seventeen facilities analyzed reported substantial losses of 5% or more during 2005. Although these figures are not statistically significant to project any reactionary tendencies of the public to negative print media, there still exists a question as to the power of media over decision-making. Future studies may attempt to account for the percentage shortfalls by following up on the organizations reporting them. Furthermore, interviews may prove beneficial in proving the media as an important facilitator of knowledge regarding long-term care decisions.

[1] Banducci, Susan A. and Karp, Jeffery A. How Elections Change the Way Citizens View the Political System: Campaigns, Media Effects and Electoral Outcomes in Comparative Perspective. *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 33, No. 3. Cambridge University Press. 2002.

[2] Brodie, M., L. A. Brady, and D. E. Altman. Media Coverage of Managed Care: Is There a Negative Bias? *Health Affairs*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 1998.