

**A Qualitative Analysis On Methadone Maintenance Programme In The Malay Language Newspapers**

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**ABSTRACT**

*How do the Malay language newspapers in Malaysia report the Methadone Maintenance Therapy programme? Based on this main question, the study investigates the news reports of the Berita Harian and Harian Metro, to see how the Methadone Maintenance Therapy (MMT) were being treated in their news reports. The researchers adopted interpretive approach to analyse a sample of 11 news reports on MMT published on these newspapers throughout the year 2009. Five research questions were generated from the samples studied, namely "how do the newspaper reports on methadone-related issue", "does the report portrayed addiction as a sickness?", "is there any misconception on the reporting of methadone issues", "does the government care about methadone issues" and "what were people's reactions on MMT". Study findings suggested that methadone has not been reported negatively by the newspapers, but there is a general idea in Berita Harian that the MMT programme has not been fully successful. On the contrary, Harian Metro prefers to give an idea that the MMT is a promising programme for drugs addicts to actually lead a normal life. These newspapers too have been treating drug addictions as sickness and not as social problem, therefore answered the main question that the newspapers has portrayed methadone as a recommended substitution for therapy and not a type of harmful drug. News reports too were often medically-sound and had highlighted the government's intention to champion the programme as a main effort to help drug addicts become a productive members of the society. The study found out that the newspapers too has treated the public as the antagonist in their reports, and that it is a task uphill to correct their persistent misconception on MMT programme and drug addictions.*

**Keywords:** *drugs, methadone maintenance, news coverage, public reaction.*

**Introduction**

Methadone Maintenance Therapy (MMT) is a government-supported programmed introduced in year 2005 to provide methadone as a substitute for heroin addicts. Drug addicts enrolled in this programme therapy are given legal access to synthetic opioid (a safe substitute drugs) which stops craving for drugs and the withdrawal symptoms, allowing addicts to carry on with life. The MMT is an office-based treatment with addicts voluntarily coming in to receive their oral dosage of methadone (in liquid form) during the induction period and taking the substitute drug at home during the maintenance period (DJ. Paul, 2009). The personnel who attend to these addicts will also monitor the treatment progress. Methadone blocks the craving the addicts have for heroin, and it is not sedating when the dosage is right for the patient (Gwinnell & Adamec, 2008). Generally, the addiction can be managed by switching from illicit drugs to legal drugs obtained from physicians, hospitals and other legal avenues.

Although the programme has been around for a while, there has been a general negative perception the MMT programme. According to newspapers, generally, the programme has not been widely accepted by the society. DJ. Paul (2009) for instance, said that there were cases where the police nabbed many of the patients when they were under MMT. News too reported on how doctors have stopped the programme because they are getting a bad name (Gomez, 2009). Professor Dr Mohamad Hussain Habil University Malaya Medical Centre psychological medicine department addiction specialist as reported by the *New Straits Times*, said as a result, only two from the first batch of 52 doctors trained in using methadone in 2003, are still employing the therapy. Apart from the presence of cultural belief that no treating drugs abuser with more drugs will not solve any problem, Professor Dr Mohamad

Hussain Habil, in a separate news articles, said the society are worried that MMT programme is just “substituting one addiction with another” (DJ. Paul, 2009).

Based on many of these perception of MMT program as reported by the news, the researcher realize the need in understanding the media’s stand in reporting this issues, thus the researchers are keen in understanding the reporting style of the popular newspapers in reporting on the issues on methadone.

### **Research Questions**

How do the newspaper reports on methadone-related issue?

Does the report portrayed addiction as a sickness?

Is there any misconception on the reporting of methadone issues?

Does the government care about methadone issues?

What were people’s reactions on MMT?

### **Significance of study**

This research is significant to other researchers whom are interested in understanding the scenario of drug addiction phenomena in Malaysia especially on the campaign of public acceptance on the MMT. It also gave insight on the style of news reporting of Malaysian local Malay language newspapers on drug-related issues. Apart from that this research will benefit other social science researchers would be interested in studying social issues such as drug addiction.

### **Scope of study/Limitations of study**

The scope of study revolves around the MMT for drug addict to gradually treat their drug addition. The main limitation of this study was the time constrain. The researcher had only couple of months to complete the data collection as well as reporting the findings. Therefore the researcher only managed to collect the data from only two mainstream Malay newspapers. The data would be a lot richer if the researcher can collect it from all of Malaysian mainstream newspapers as well as interview the reporters who wrote the news. This would enable the researcher get insight on the reasons behind their news reporting.

### **Definition of terms**

For the first question, the researcher would determine on how both newspapers were reporting news on methadone. The researcher had to determine this by analysing whether the reporting is positive or negative. The positive reporting would mean that news will report methadone news in positive light and on the contrary, the negative reporting would mean the report would reflect negatively on methadone.

As for the second question, the researcher identified whether the news report portrayed addiction as a sickness. This is because based on a number newspaper reports, the public would see drug mistreatment as a social problem instead of sickness.

The third question identified the misconception on the reporting of methadone issues. Misconception means that the news would misreport the fact of what methadone really is.

The fourth questions concentrate on reports that are related to the Malaysian government. The researcher identified news that shows how much does the government care about methadone issues. Before, the researcher had argued on the fact that the government is concern about the methadone issues as mentioned earlier, the government had allocated some budget to counter measure the issues of drug addiction. Therefore the researcher is interested in identifying government’s effort regarding this issues based on the newspaper’s report.

The last questions focus on people’s reactions on methadone issues based on the news report. In the newspapers the news report would report on the opinions of the public on methadone issues. Based on the literature review the public’s responses on methadone issues is mixed. Even though many of the report on methadone are mixed, generally the media would have negative report when it comes to reporting on drugs. Thus in this research the researcher

intention is to understand Malaysian's responses based on the newspaper report.

## Literature Reviews

### Media Representation of Drug Use

Media play an important role in disseminating news and information for the Malaysian public. Apart from popular medium such as electronic media, and the World Wide Web, Malaysian public still seeks news from the newspapers, both mainstreams newspapers such as *Berita Harian*, *Utusan Malaysia*, *The Star*, and *The New Straits Times* and tabloid newspapers such as *Harian Metro* and *Kosmo*. *Harian Metro*, for example, is a Malay tabloid newspapers which has the highest daily circulation of 338,552 copies followed by *Berita Harian* at 183,187 copies per day (*Harian Metro*, Disember 11, 2009). These newspapers for example contribute towards forming some of the public opinion and encourage social change. Thus, understanding the media's agenda towards the public will help in explaining, some of the social changes that is happening in our society.

Many people are well aware of media influence in shaping public's opinion. This is because according to George Gerbner's analysis, media was "agenda setter" of our culture (cited by Barcus & Jankowski, 1975). Realizing this fact in Britain, British Government utilized media in their campaign to fight illegal use of drugs (Davies, 1988). These campaigns have been based on an indirect model of behaviour change. In this case media was used to create awareness, increase and maintain the knowledge on specific health issues as well as indirectly trying to change public's attitudes and behaviour on health care. Therefore, the British government had set the agenda and used the media to execute their plan. In most of the country in the world, the media roles and function would usually align with the ruling government (Faridah Ibrahim, 2007). According to Faridah Ibrahim (2007), in Malaysia, the government considered the newspapers and other media as the medium for distributing information to the public on behalf of the government. Unfortunately, this is not necessarily true when it comes to the drugs related issues.

According to Taylor (2008), the media around the world have the common theme when it comes to reporting news on drugs. Most of the time theme would include something negative about the drug, the drug's users, and also the suppliers. The media tends to exaggerate, distort, sensationalize, and sometimes the news can also be inaccurate (Coomber, Morri, & Dunn, 2000). The newspapers would usually associate drug related news with criminal activities (Elliott & Chapman, 2000). These portrayals serve to add to public's believe that drugs are a menace to the society. Even though media around the world had 'unspoken' understanding when it come to drugs issues, it could posed to be a disadvantage to the government when they need to introduce harm reduction method in countering drugs misused. This is because the public for a long period of time had been educate to see only negative things about drug related news.

Furthermore journalists have their stereotype when dealing with drug issues. Journalists would try to organize the social reality that would suit the image of drug related issues. Schudson (1991) believed that we should examine the 'cultural given within which everyday interaction happens in the first place' for these were source of the 'generalized images and stereotypes' employed by the journalist in their routine work. Again, these issues are usually negative in nature.

The media also would choose to carry on with news that has more values than the other. As far as journalists, chief reporters, sub editors, news editors, feature writers, columnist and the likes concern, the news that has more values would be commercial news (Faridah Ibrahim, 2003). This means that the reporters change their style of writing to suit it with the current commercial needs.

Newspapers had been the source for news for many since the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Newspapers had braved the years of yellow journalism and sensationalism, but public still have much trust on the news articles. Even though the style of writing news articles had changed over the years, but the newspaper's main concern had forever been whether they could have bigger and wider circulation. Therefore in order to sell this news, it raises concerns regarding the inaccurate, partial and over dramatized manner in which issues are often presented to the public (Hodgetts & Chamberlain, 2006). Thus, those readers who only have the newspapers as their source of information may be misinform.

However there was also research that relates media to the problem of drug use (Barcus & Jankowski, 1975). It was

said that the contents of media in advertisement, television entertainment, and songs' lyrics suggest the use of drugs. This was because media are part of an environment, which is composed of many factors that led to social change. Barcus & Jankowski (1975) realized that the existence of media perform certain functions in the society for the individual, for sub-groups of the society, and for the culture as a whole. Therefore, we should realize that these functions have the tendency to influence society and could become the contributing factors in social change.

The selection of news in the newspaper would also depend on news value, for example Manning (2006) had done a research to comparative analysis between volatile substance abuse (VSA) and ecstasy. The research analyzed the reporting of ecstasy- related death and those associated with VSA. What was interesting about the findings of the research was that ecstasy got more news coverage than VSA, even though VSA death- related story were prove to be higher than ecstasy. The reason ecstasy got more news coverage was because there were more people championing ecstasy causes than VSA.

Ecstasy was portrayed as dangerous and as threat to everyone. Furthermore because Manning (2006), suggested looking at politics of the news source to understand why ecstasy had more coverage than VSA. This was because the political marginal group was championing the ecstasy course were able to secure access to news media agenda in particular situations, and yet the usual routines of news production frequently privilege the news definitions offered by the powerful (Schlesinger & Tumber, 1994; Manning, 2001). This could also prove apart from the news value, in dealing with drug issues, the driving force behind the issues should be powerful enough to command media attention.

Manning (2006), identifies four symbolic frameworks in organizing the news coverage. He believed that to understand the substance misuse in terms of how dimensions such as location, behaviours and identities, substance images, and cause and consequences are constructed. Based on this framework he concluded that home is where the drug abuse would usually happen, and it was also associated with crime and violence, the image of the abuser would be painted to be negative, and it will lead to social disorder.

### **Moral Panic**

Moral panic is always associated with public, as it will talk about society and how society reacts toward certain issues that would put society at risks. According to Cohen (cited by Garland, 2008) moral panic can be defined as excessive feeling of the alarm or fear, usually affecting a body of persons, and leading to extravagant or injudicious effort to secure safety. Cohen (2004) also mentions that the term moral panic emerges in 1960s from the social reaction theory. This was part of media's role in stereotyping and misinterpreting deviance and the perception that might contribute to a deviancy amplification spiral. This means that excessive exaggeration in news could lead to public thinking too seriously about deviance and deviancy. In relation to journalism, moral panic could be triggered by for instance; the journalists' sensationalize style of writing on certain issues. After being exposed in the news, if the public realizes the possible threat they might be facing they would start to have unnecessarily panic.

According to Goode and Ben Yehuda (1994), media report can trigger panic immediately, but the panic would disappear as quickly. This most probably because, if it is really bad the public would most probably follow-up on the story with other sources and the anxiety would be clear once the truth is revealed. Moral panic can affect those whose deviant conduct appals onlookers so powerfully precisely because it relates to personal fears and unconscious wishes (Garland, 2008).

Garland (2008), also believed that mass media are typically the prime mover and the prime beneficiaries that contribute to the public's moral panic. Referring to the commercial news that was discussed earlier, Jock Young (1971) noted that the commercial media have an institutionalized need to create moral panics. In another word, the media would intentionally create moral panic by generating news to ensure the news would appeal to the public.

### **Methodology**

#### ***Study design***

Based on the research questions, the research adopted qualitative method. The researcher collected the data by analysing the content of two newspapers report on methadone. This is to understand the show the newspapers is reporting news on methadone, whether the news report consider drug addiction as a sickness, were there any miscon-

ception regarding the methadone news report, is the government care about methadone issues, and what were the publics reaction on methadone as reported in the news.

### **Research paradigm**

Like many qualitative research, this research adopted interpretive approach. This approach is very subjective in nature and qualitative researchers will look at social life from multiple points of view and explain how people construct identities (Nueman, 2006). Thus in this research the researcher also look at the finding subjectively based on the wordings used in the news report, the arrangement of the news report in term of the structure of the news to understand the issues holistically, as well as comparing it to the reality of the situations. Interpretive approach framework and practice within social science research is invested in philosophical and methodological ways of understanding social reality (Given, 2008).

### **Research instrument**

In this research the researcher act as the instrument. This is because the researcher examined and analyse the content of the newspaper and the research question emerge from the examination. According to Cresswell (1994), in qualitative research the researcher can be the key instrument because the researcher collects data themselves through examining documents, observing behaviour, and interviewing participants. Therefore in this research the researcher does not tend to use or rely on questionnaires or instrument developed by other researchers.

### **Sampling**

In this research the sampling procedures used was purposive sampling. The researcher collected newspaper reports on methadone from two local newspapers inclusive of Harian Metro and Berita Harian. The rationalization of using only these two newspapers was because Harian Metro has the highest circulation of 338,552 followed by Berita Harian with circulation of 183,187 per day (*Harian Metro*, Disember 11, 2009). These are the top ranking newspaper among Malaysian readers.

### **Data collection**

The data was collected from news reports starting from January 2009 until December 2009. 11 news reports have been identified. Six news reports were from Harian Metro that also includes the weekend newspaper Metro Ahad, and five from Berita Harian that also includes the weekend newspaper Berita Minggu. News featured on Harian Metro dated from 2<sup>nd</sup> January 09, 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2009, 26<sup>th</sup> January 2009, 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2009, 7<sup>th</sup> June 2009, and 20<sup>th</sup> July 2009. News featured on Berita Harian started from 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2009, 24<sup>th</sup> March 2009, 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2009, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2009, and 31<sup>st</sup> December 2009.

### **Data analysis**

The data was analyzed by using comparative analysis. The data was coded into categories by using ‘emergence coding’, and interpret using constant comparative analysis (Cresswell, 2003). The constant comparative analysis involves taking one piece of data, such as a statement, an interview, or a theme, and comparing it with others to identify similarities or differences (Given, 2008). Thus in this research the researcher compared between the news report from Harian Metro and Berita Harian and the data ‘emerge’ from the findings. To identified the emerging data, the researcher focus on the wordings that are used in the news reports. This is a convenience way of identifying the codes and analyzing the findings.

### **Reliability and validity**

Reliability in qualitative research means dependability or consistency (Nueman, 2006). In qualitative research validity means truthful, the researchers are concerned with the portrayal of social life that is true to the experience of people being studied (Neuman, 2006). In honouring that, the qualitative researchers develop ‘logical’ validity that emphasize in conveying insider’s view to others (Neuman, 2006). With regard of this research, the researcher identified the consistency of the data from the initial coding that the researcher did to determine the research questions. The researcher supports the research with logical validity by conveying the news message to others.

### **Ethical considerations**

In this research, the researcher manages as best as possible to uphold the ethic during the process of conducting

this research. This was because the news was in Malay language and the researcher needs to translate the sentences as accurate as possible so that the content of the data would be meaningful. The researcher realize that, in doing qualitative research it would be easy to break any of the ethical consideration as qualitative research is not as rigid as the quantitative research. Thus the researcher tries not to compromise any unethical method in collecting and analysing the data.

## Results

In this context the researcher compared between the two newspapers and realized that both newspapers report news on methadone on difference date and the subject that both newspapers choose to report also differs. In one example, on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2009, in one of the headline in Berita Harian highlighted on “Saringan HIV/Aids Bantu jaga kesucian keturunan manusia: Beberapa jabatan agama negeri wajib ujian sejak 2001” (Some state Islamic department enforced HIV/Aids checkups since 2001 in guarding the innocence of human kind). In this news report it only briefly mentioned about methadone therapy was used to curb the spread of HIV/Aids disease. Meanwhile on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2009, the headline on Harian Metro reports on “Terapi Methadone Berkesan” (The Methadone’s Therapy Is Effective), that reports in detail about the effectiveness of methadone therapy. Understanding this the researcher analysed both newspapers by comparing the news that reports on methadone and not the date of the news released. This research focussed on collecting evidence to answer the research questions.

### *How are the newspapers namely Berita Harian and Harian Metro, reporting on methadone?*

According to Taylor (2008), the media around the world have the common theme when it comes to reporting news on drugs. Most of the time theme would include something negative about the drug, the drug’s users, and also the suppliers. Based on the findings from the two newspapers, the researcher found that Berita Harian had more negative news on methadone than Harian Metro. For instance in one of the news it was reported there was a drop in cases with addict treated with methadone. The bold words in the sentences shows the negative or positive implication on the news reports on methadone. The researcher also focused on the wording of news to identify whether the news had tendency to be negative or positive.

Metaphorically, the bold words in the news implied negatively that the program is not as successful as they would hope it would be, as the number did not reach its target. Even tough in this scenario, the news report only reports the news from other sources.

*“General Chief Auditor, Tan Sri Ambrin Buang, said that **only 7,065 addict that registered to be treated with methadone last year compared to their original target of 10,000.**”*

*Berita Harian 22-10-09*

Almost a month after the news was released, another news report was published and this time it mentioned that methadone was not properly distributed. In the abstract sentence below, again the researcher bold the words to show that the news report was telling the public clearly that the program did not reach its target.

*“The program that include giving out free needle and condom as well as the use of methadone on drug addict is **not reaching its target** due to the insufficient staff and the unorganized distribution of methadone.”*

*Berita Harian (22-11-2009)*

The only authorised distributors of the drug are government’s clinic as well as private clinics that were given license for authorisation to treat addicts with methadone. The news sounded like the clinics were incompetent in handling methadone treatment therefore the program was failing. In the same report, it was also mentioned that the alternative treatment was actually good in contrast with the previous report. The bold words in the sentence are positive in nature as it shows functionality and it implied that the program is working.

*“Basically methadone **treatment program is actually working** as there was a drop statistically in the intake of drug addict in substance rehabilitation centre from 12,430 (2006) and 17,419 (2005) to 7,810 in 2007 but the figure is not enough to change years of public social stigmatization on drug addicts. Therefore it is not strange to see drug addict being caught by the police after receiving methadone treatment at local clinic. ”*

Berita Harian (22-11-2009)

In the same news also, it also reported that there is an increased in the patients registering for methadone treatment. The news reports compare the previous data with the later data and it shows increment thus implying positive results.

*“From the perspective of the amount of patients, until October this year **around 21,319 patients registered for the program compared to 18,744 last year.**”*

Berita Harian (22-11-2009)

It seems that the news report are somewhat inconsistent with the reporting. The only explanation for this probably because different reporters reported the reports and they do not keep track on the previous news on that had been done on methadone issues. In addition, the reporter only reports the news based on the information they received thus the news may varies depending on their sources. In different news report it was also mentioned that there were many doctors in government’s hospital do not want to treat addict as patient. Here in the sentence, it is implying that even some of the doctors in the government hospitals (who are suppose to support government’s vision) were refusing to follow through with the program.

*“Part of the reasons that **the program failed** because many of the doctors in government hospitals **refuse to treat addict as patient** or with the same respect of other patients like those suffering from heart condition or diabetic.”*

Berita Harian (31-12-2009)

As reader of the newspapers, we are receiving inconsistent reports on methadone issues, but the only thing that is consistent expected from Berita Harian was that they report more negative news than positive. In contrast with Berita Harian, the Harian Metro mostly report positively on methadone. Harian Metro used positive wording such as **“give hope”**, **“increase the health condition”**, **“improve the quality of lives”**, **“decreases the crime rate”**, **“lots of effort to prevent”**, **“treatment was successful”**, **“best treatment for drug addiction”**, and **“legal”**. These were the words used in the Harian Metro news reports. It implies that methadone treatment is a positive thing. For instance,

*“Probably Methadone Substitute Therapy Program (MSTP) that started in 2005 afford to **give hope** to the addicts to gradually recover from the addiction...”*

*“...Objectively **the therapy can increase the health condition and improve the quality of lives of the addicts, it would also increase the psychosocial ability** including their ability to get job and in term **decreases the crime rate among addict.**”*

Harian Metro (03-01-2009)

According to different report within the same newspaper, the report again reported on the advantage of methadone treatment and the success of the treatment in changing the lives of the addict.

*“... there **are lots of effort to prevent this problem from worsening.** Among other are the Methadone Substitute Therapy Program that was used worldwide in combating drug addiction...”*

*“...test proves that methadone **treatment was successful** in allowing the drug addict to lead a normal life placing it as the **best treatment for drug addiction.**”*

Harian Metro (07-06-2009)

In a different report, it also mentioned that the methadone treatment is legal, and this in a way is telling the public that the government acknowledge the treatment and the public should not have doubted the treatment.

*“According to the law of this country, methadone treatment is **legal.** The treatment could improve the lives of the addicts...”*

Harian Metro (27-07-2009)

### Does the report portrayed addiction as a sickness?

For this question, the researcher is trying to identify whether the news reports recommended methadone maintenance as treatment for drug addicts portraying the addicts as “patients” and their addiction as “sickness”. This is because Krantz and Mehler (2004) state that they favour methadone maintenance as a treatment. Furthermore, Drs. Vincent Dole and Marie Nyswander who pioneered the methadone research in 1964 also believed that addiction was a disease (cited from Gwinnell & Adamec, 2008). Favouring this, the researcher also considers the addicts who are receiving this treatment as patients. In the news reports the researcher found that overall Harian Metro and Berita Harian do treat drug addiction as sickness. This is because, in the news reports in both newspapers mention about treating drug addiction. Terms like ‘**treated**’, ‘**treatment**’, ‘**disease**’, ‘**patients**’, ‘**therapy**’, and ‘**healing**’ are usually used in medical environment.

*“General Chief Auditor, Tan Sri Ambrin Buang, said that only 7,065 addict that registered to be **treated** with methadone last year compared to their original target of 10,000.”*

*Berita Harian 22-10-09*

It was very noticeable that both newspapers are also treating addicts as patient on going a treatment. Referring back to drug substitute treatment program, the addict need to go through series of therapy and daily dose of methadone to get better and get rid of the addiction. It was even mentioned in one of the report in Harian Metro that the addiction is ‘**chronic mental disorder**’. Referring to the addict who went through rehab to detoxify the illegal substance in their body, the process is quite gruesome, they have so much to fight the urge of their physical addiction as well as the mind to battle the addiction. Most of the addict lost the battle when they re-enter the society and as the pressure mount and the society prejudice lead them back to drug addiction.

*“... access to **drug substitute treatment (DST)** in private community increased 59 percent in August 2007 with 474 doctors was given authorisation to treat the addiction compared to only 298 doctors in March within the same year. The figure increased to 528 doctors and 16,545 **patients** in 2008”.*

*“...methadone is only taken to cure the **disease** until it is stabilized. The stability can include the patients back into the working world, the role as the leader of the family, and finally for them not to depend on the treatment anymore.”*

*Berita Harian (22-11-2009)*

As the reader of the newspapers, the use of these terms may go unnoticed as the total of news on methadone is quite few and most of this news does not make it to the front page. The chances that the public is going to notice the usage of these terms are quite slim.

*“Methadone is an example of synthetic opioid that encourage the **patients**’ productive function.”*

*Harian Metro 03-01-09*

*“The **therapy** not only reduce the addiction but also to prevent them from risk of AIDS.”*

*“...furthermore it is also a **chronic mental disorder** that disturb the psychology and physiology functions of an addicts.”*

*“... heroin addiction is a **sickness**, thus the drug abuser need to be treated as other patients.”*

*Harian Metro 07-06-09*

*“Methadone was proven to be effective to treat heroin addiction, but the **healing** process need a long time.”*

*Harian Metro 20-07-09*



Based on the terms that had been used by both newspapers it seemed that the newspapers are treating addiction as sickness. Judging by this, even though both newspapers may not have the same way of reporting the methadone issues but both newspapers seems to agree that drug addiction is a sickness.

***Is there any misconception on the reporting of methadone issues?***

Based on the newspaper reports of the two newspapers, the researcher found that there is no misconception on the report of methadone. Most probably because there is not so much news reports on methadone in 2009. The researcher had counter-check all the facts reported on the news and found that there is no alteration in facts, or misreporting of the news. The news reports regarding methadone treatment is very straightforward and easy to understand. Thus the public's negative reaction towards the issues is puzzling the researcher. Because as far as the news reports are concerned everything is well founded.

*"Methadone dosage will be lessens to accommodate the need of the patients. A dose usually contains 40 to 60 milligrams and can last up to 24 hours..."*

*"For the first three months. Addicts need to meet the doctors or the pharmacists to acquire methadone as the substance fall under the Act of "*

*"The medication will gradually be reduce up to the point the patients no longer need to rely on the substance anymore."*

*Berita Harian 02-11-09*

*"Methadone works until 38 hours after treatment as it can slowly reduce the addiction to heroin."*

*Harian Metro 03-01-09*

*"Three main effects that methadone produce is to prevent the addiction, stop the use of illegal drug and reduce the 'need' in drugs."*

*Harian Metro 25-02-09*

***Does the government care about methadone issues?***

The researcher is also interested to determine whether the government care about methadone issues. The researcher found that the government actually play an important part in enforcing the program in the country. In fact the government had been battling with drug addiction issues for years. It is a tough battle to win as the many of the addicts will revert back to their old habit even though they had went to rehab. Alarmingly the there has been an increase in drug addictions. According to United Nations 2007 World Drug Report, in 2005 to 2006 about 5% in the world population age between 15-64 years old were using illegal drug (Sandeep Chawla & Thibault le Pichon, 2008). Thus the government bare the responsibility in providing solution to drug addiction. Malaysian government especially had allocated million of ringgit and putting in a lot of effort in solving this issues. Since the launching of MMT program in 2005, the government had been promoting and encouraging its cause. The efforts were seen in the news reports. For instance Berita Harian reported that the government was trying to help former drug addict to have footing in the society by encouraging them to farm, and the government was willing to provide land for the farming. In another news reports the government also increased the number of methadone treatment centre and more medical doctors were authorized to treat addiction with methadone.

*"Tampin District council has guaranteed that the Meta Friends club consists of former drug addicts enrolled in MMT programme will be given the priority to develop a number of abandoned lands into live stock and agricultural projects."*

*Berita Harian 08-02-09*

*"... Health Ministry starts Methadone Drug Substitute Therapy Program in October 2005."*

*"National Anti-drug Agency will open ten more treatment centre to 1,300 addicts through Methadone Drug Substitute Therapy Program in this year and next year."*

*"... access to **drug substitute treatment (DST)** in private community increased 59 percent in August*

*2007 with 474 doctors was given authorisation to treat the addiction compared to only 298 doctors in March within the same year. The figure increased to 528 doctors and 16,545 patients in 2008”.*

*Berita Harian 22-11-09*

Harian Metro also reported almost similar news reports on the drug treatment and government’s effort in championing the cause. Comparing to reports from Berita Harian, Harian Metro once again reported more news on government’s effort in handling addiction issues. It is obvious that Harian Metro were more detailed in reporting the government’s activity regarding these issues. There could be possibilities that the reporters working for Harian Metro are more conscious about this issues that those reporters from Berita Harian. As mention earlier the date of the reported news on both newspapers varies from one another, implying that the reporters did not cover on similar news. It is also true that most of the times the reporters reports on a particular news based on the assignment that they were assign to. If this were to be the case, it means that the editors in Harian Metro in particular most probably have their own agenda regarding this issue.

*“Tampin Health Clinic has recently grabbed all main awards of an augural state level methadone convention held in a hotel”.*

*“MMT is part of Health Ministry approach in handling the drug addictions using harm-reduction concept apart from the Needle Exchange Program (NSEP)”.*

*“According to Vice Minister of Health, Datuk Dr. Abd Latiff Ahmad, said that government allocated RM191 million to enforce Harm-reduction program for the year 2006 to 2010”.*

*“Since the Harm Reduction Program was launched in October 2005 until last August, 72 service centre was established around the country and this includes 27 government hospitals, 32 government clinics, nine private clinics, three service centre for National Anti-Drug Agency, and one prison.”*

*Harian Metro 02-01-09*

*“...National Anti-Drug Agency will open another 10 service centre to give treatment to 1,300 drug addicts through Methadone Drug Substitute Therapy Program within this year and next year.”*

*Harian Metro 22-05-09*

*“PPUM established University Malaya Centre for Addiction Sciences (UMCAS) and Methadone Research Clinic to give more room for research and place where heroin addicts to seek treatment.”*

*Harian Metro 07-06-09*

*“... is a good program for drug addicts and the government wish to locate 75,000 registered users in the program and now the program has 7,000 registered addicts .”*

*Harian Metro 20-07-09*

Based on the reports of both newspapers, the government do care about the addiction issues, and the only way to let the public aware of their effort is trough media, unfortunately if the media make little effort in highlighting the news it would also be useless.

#### ***Based on the report, what were people’s reactions on methadone?***

Based on news reports on both newspapers it is quite obvious that the public were having negative reaction on methadone treatment and drug addiction issues. The news reports report of the public ‘antagonistic’ on the issues. As mention earlier, the public have had long history with drug related issues. Before this the media had long painted the ugliness of drug related issues such as drug addiction, drug trafficking, drug abuse, the criminal activity that has been associated with drug and the consequences of drug addiction which had the public formed negative opinion on drug. Thus the news report from both newspapers seems to have the public ‘unanimous’ voice on this issue.

“... hope that the room and chances given will benefit ex-addicts that join the club. This is to **prove to the public** that they can change and succeed in life.”

*Berita Harian* 24-03-09

“... since the program’s announcement, the public **does not agree**. To them, the Methadone Drug Substitute Therapy Program will encourage the drug addicts to be more addicted to heroin.”

“Apart from that **the program is seen as a way to decrease the statistics of HIV/Aids patients not to deal with the drug addiction itself**.”

“... figure are not able to wipe the **social stigmatization that the public** have towards drug addicts. Therefore it is not surprising when an addict was apprehend by the police right after he received the methadone treatment.”

*Berita Harian* 22-11-09

“The program initially invited different reactions from the public. **Some see the huge amount allocated to the program as a way to encourage more drug abuse**, but to the drug addicts who are looking for a way out, the program is like ‘a light at the end of the tunnel’.”

*Harian Metro* 03-01-09

“Even though we have to immediately cure the growing number of addicts in this country, we also have to handle **society’s misconception on drug addiction and MMT**.”

*Harian Metro* 07-06-09

“... **the society can’t see the drug addict as the criminal**, this is because this will disappoint them until they loose the spirit to seek treatment.”

*Harian Metro* 20-07-09

The drug issues had been with us longer than the methadone treatment. Therefore it is quite hard to penetrate public’s believe that methadone is a good alternative in combating addiction. Most probably because methadone itself is a form of drug even though it is legal drug. The public should be able to understand that addiction is a formed of sickness and therefore the methadone is medicine to cure the sickness, and then most probably the public will change their opinion on methadone treatment.

## Conclusion

*Berita Harian* and *Harian Metro*, are both newspapers linked to the government and both are the most read Malay newspapers in the country, therefore their power in creating public opinion is undeniable. In the researchers effort to understand the popular newspapers reporting styles on the issues on methadone, it was find out that the newspapers have not reported MMT negatively, but there is a general idea in *Berita Harian* that the MMT programme has not been fully successful. *Harian Metro* on the other hands prefers to give an idea that the MMT is a promising programme for drugs addicts to actually lead a normal life. These newspapers too have been treating drug addictions as sickness and not as social problem. News reports too were often medically-sound and had highlighted the government’s intention to champion the programme as a main effort to help drug addicts become a productive members of the society. The study found out that the newspapers too has treated the public as the antagonist in their reports, and that it is a task uphill to correct their persistent misconception on MMT programme and drug addictions.

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