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It Is a Scandal: What Are the Results of Media Scandals on Nursing Home Policy?

What is this research about?

The quality of nursing home care is an ongoing concern for Canadians. This concern grows as our population ages. Media scandals revealing poor practice are common. Do these scandals affect state policy? This study seeks to answer this question by analyzing recent media scandals. An international context is used to account for social, economic and cultural factors that might affect the states reaction. Nursing home scandals in five countries were analyzed. These countries were: Canada, Sweden, Norway, the UK and US.

What did the researchers do?

One recent media scandal was chosen from each of the five countries. Inclusion criteria were:

- The scandal caused serious concern about care in nursing homes;
- That the scandal had enough impact to create change in the public and political levels.

A case study, answering 5 questions, was prepared for each media scandal. Other documents, such as government reports or legal hearings—that were connected to the scandal—were reviewed. The lead researcher then reviewed the case studies to find themes.

What you need to know:

The media helps bring the larger picture into personal concerns. It can then help to take these concerns to the public, which could create change to policy. Media focus on nursing care scandals helped people to question the current belief that the for-profit sectors will provide better, more effective, care services in nursing homes.

Then all researchers discussed the themes and highlighted the most influential ones.

What did the researchers find?

The researchers found three themes connected to media scandals. The themes were:

- For-profit ownership of nursing homes: There is belief that for-profit nursing homes are more efficient. Research suggests this is a myth. Some problems with nursing homes were caused by cost-cutting measures, which reduced the level of care and services provided. This research reveals how far some businesses have gone to avoid being blamed for problems.
- Role of the state: Scandals have played an important role in policy development. Scandals

caused quick action from the governments of Norway and Sweden. These countries began investigation and cancelled contracts. This may be due to the recent history of for-profit care in Sweden and the low levels of for-profit care in Norway.

- Role of the media: Family members, staff and unions were important to identification of scandals. Journalists played a key role in bringing these scandals to the public and pushing for state action. In all cases, each scandal led journalists to find other appalling activities.

How can you use this research?

Policy makers will learn that relying on the for-profit sector to provide nursing home care may not be the most effective system. They may want to consider policies that support the non-profit or public sector being in the nursing home field.

Community members will learn that working with the media can help to raise their concerns to the public, which could then lead to policy change. However, possible change will depend on the investment by the media, who needs to ensure the story is well rounded and stays in the public eye.

About the Researchers

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