Thinking differently about health

Key communication challenges
Phase 1 Frameworks investigation

December 2018

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The overarching issue: what is health?

- Fundamental differences between public and expert understanding

- Common cultural models:

  o *Health as an absence of illness*

  o *Health as a medical issue*

Researcher: What springs to mind if I say the word *health*?

Participant*:* I'd say bad health springs to mind.

"Good health is never having to go to the doctors. Ironically, good health is never having to use the NHS. I say ironically because of how much I respect the NHS, but, if I never have to use it, […] that's good health."

Communication challenges

Challenge 1: communicating about what makes us healthy in a way that highlights the role of social determinants of health

Individualist cultural models

- *Health individualism:* 'lifestyle', diet, exercise, smoking, alcohol

- *Mentalism*: choice, willpower, self-discipline

- *Genetic exception*: genes or fate explain exceptions to the rule
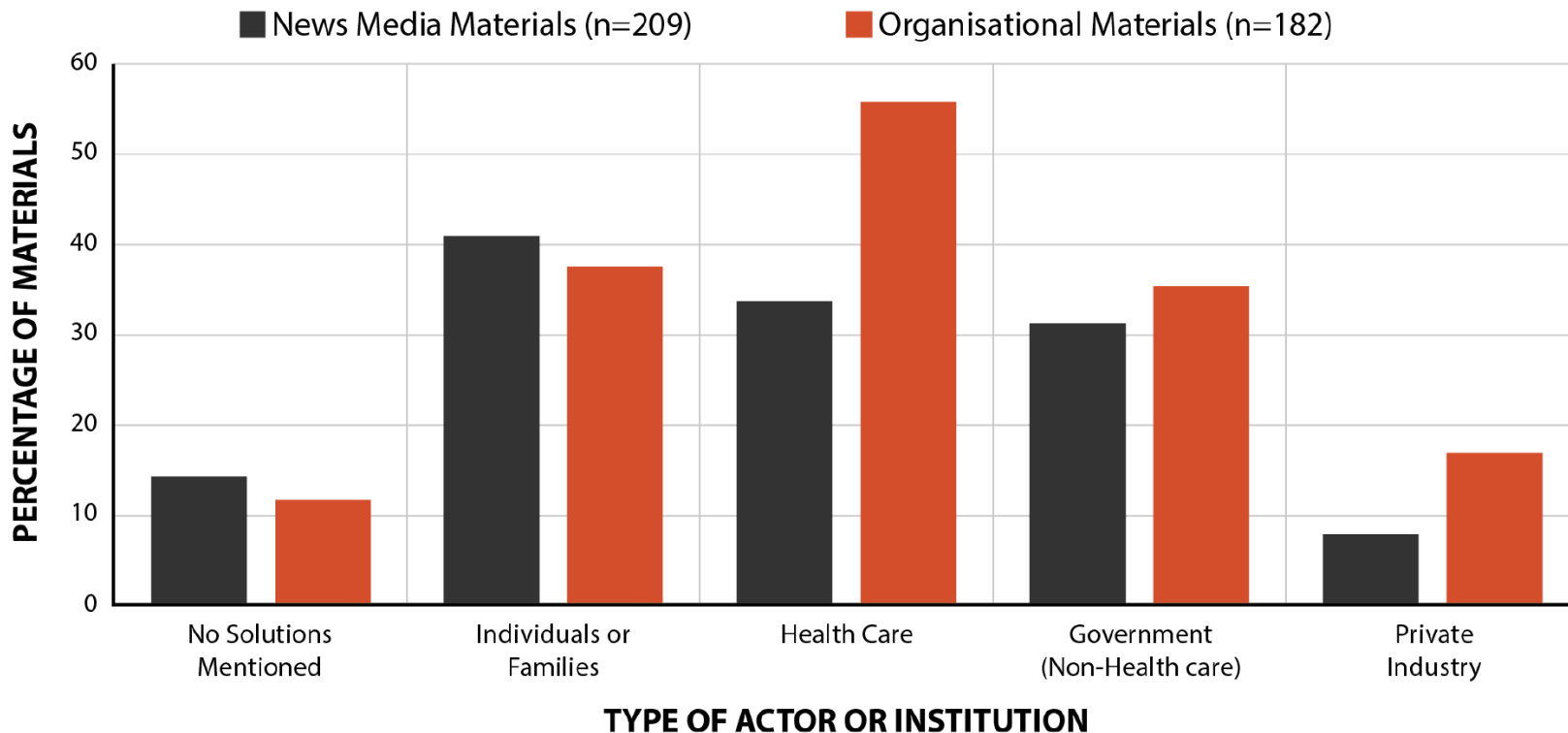
"Yeah, that 'responsibility' word – it starts with you, and it ends with you. Nobody else is responsible for you – nobody."

Deserving ill

vs

Undeserving ill

Media narratives: targets of solutions mentioned by media and organisations

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Challenge 2: Communicating how social and economic factors drive health inequalities

Ecological cultural models

- o *Consumerism*

- o *Behavioural constraints*

- o *Cultural norms*

"[People with money] might be able to buy the more healthy options. Trying to eat healthily does cost more money than the junk food."

"I think you always have a choice…And I think anyone on any budget could work a way out to eat relatively heathy food or significantly less bad food."

*"*There are some people in those communities that don't work…I think there's just a culture at the moment where a lot of people are just after free handouts. It's unhealthy, and it's unproductive… I think that has a big impact on your health and your life expectancy."

o Lack of discussion about health inequalities in the news keeps health inequalities out of sight

Media narratives: *Mentions of health disparities in news-media and organisational materials*

Legend:
- ■ News Media Materials (n=209)
- ■ Organisational Materials (n=182)

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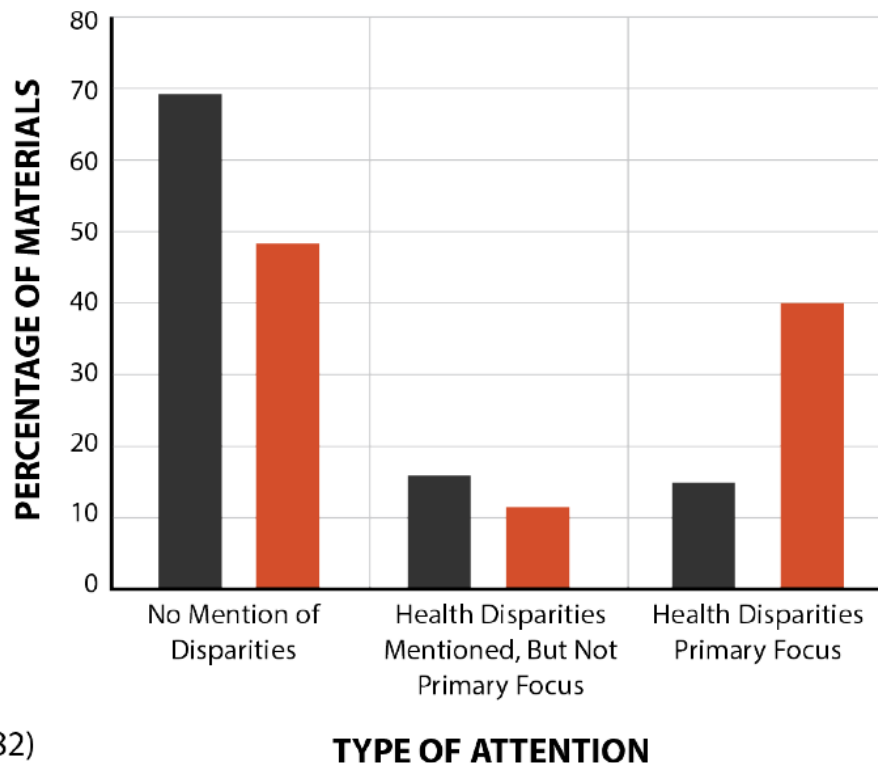
Challenge 3: communicating the limitations of health care and health education for creating a healthy society

o Public health experts > increased government investment in public services that protect and improve the health of the population over the long term

o Public > ultimate responsibility to individuals. Main role of government is providing health care and 'raising awareness'

Researcher: What is the role of government in making sure people are in good health?

Participant: *"One part is awareness. The other part is the NHS – obviously huge. It accounts for just under a third of all government spending. So, obviously, the government is responsible for that. Anything I can't do, the government should be responsible for. I can't install a pacemaker. I set a broken bone. I can't stitch up a giant gash in my neck."*

Media narratives: *Mentions of health care and social factors in media and organisational materials*
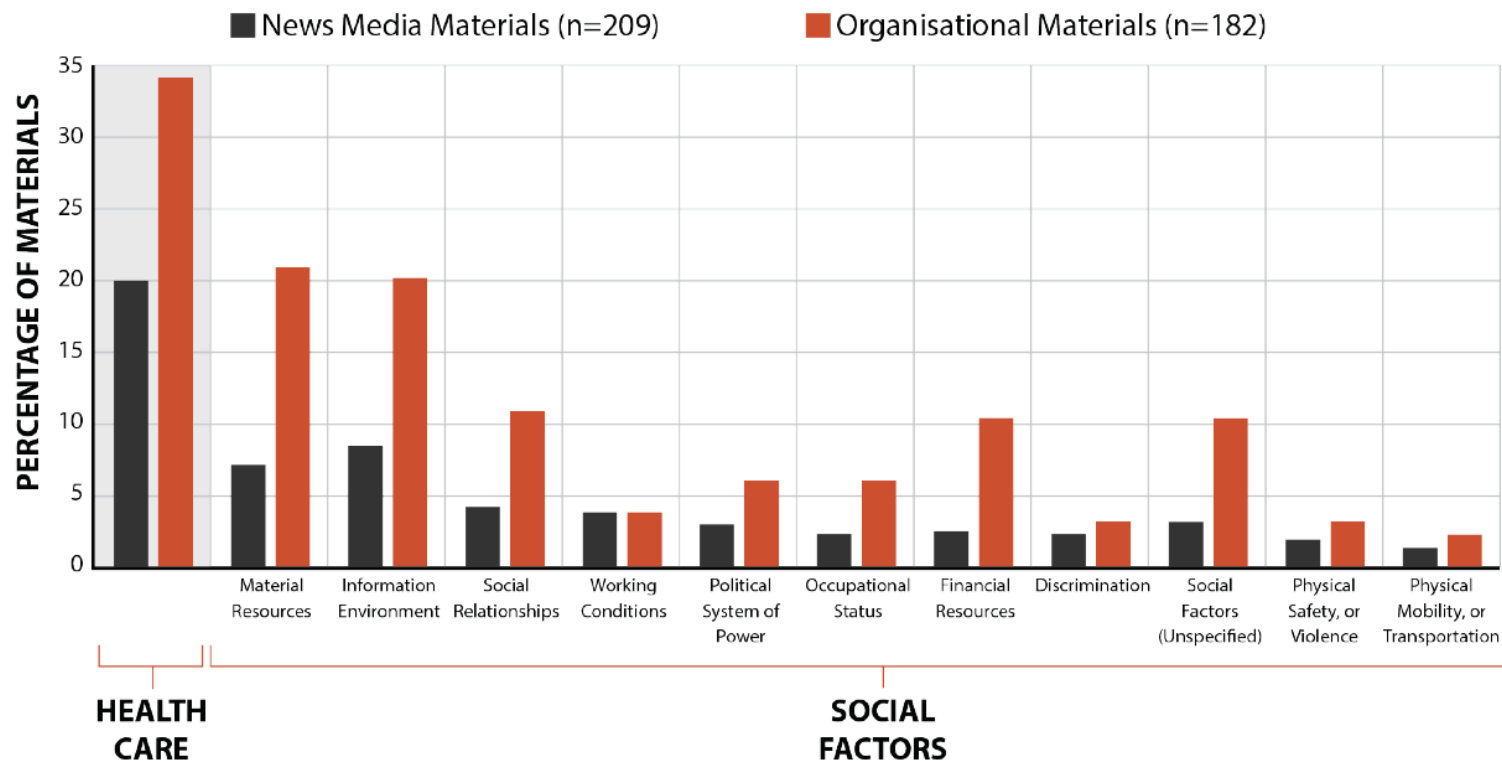
Emerging recommendations

- Don't gesture towards the importance of individual responsibility and individual behaviours.

- Avoid crisis messaging.

- Be careful about the use of language which has a different meaning in expert and public thinking.

- Use step-by-step causal chains to explain how social determinants affect health.

- Provide examples of health creation and an integrated approach to public health across sectors to broaden people's view of solutions.

Table discussion

- How do these findings reflect your own experience of communicating beyond the public health community?

- What would you like to see coming out of the next phase of work (when we develop new, effective ways to communicate about health)?

Next steps

- Phase 2 starting in early 2019

    - Develop and test detailed reframing strategies

    - Develop a multimedia communications toolkit

- Event on Tuesday 29 January 2019

- To get involved, complete the form on your tables

To download the research:
health.org.uk/framing-health

Thank you