



Health News Stories Followed By The Public

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The Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard Health News Index is designed to help the news media and people in the health care field gain a better understanding of what health stories in the news Americans are following and what they understand about the health issues covered in the news. Every two months, Kaiser/Harvard will issue a new index report. This third report is based on a survey of 1,000 American adults. The survey asked respondents about major health issues covered in the news between November 1 and December 5, 1996. For comparison purposes, respondents were also asked about other leading issues in the news during the same period.

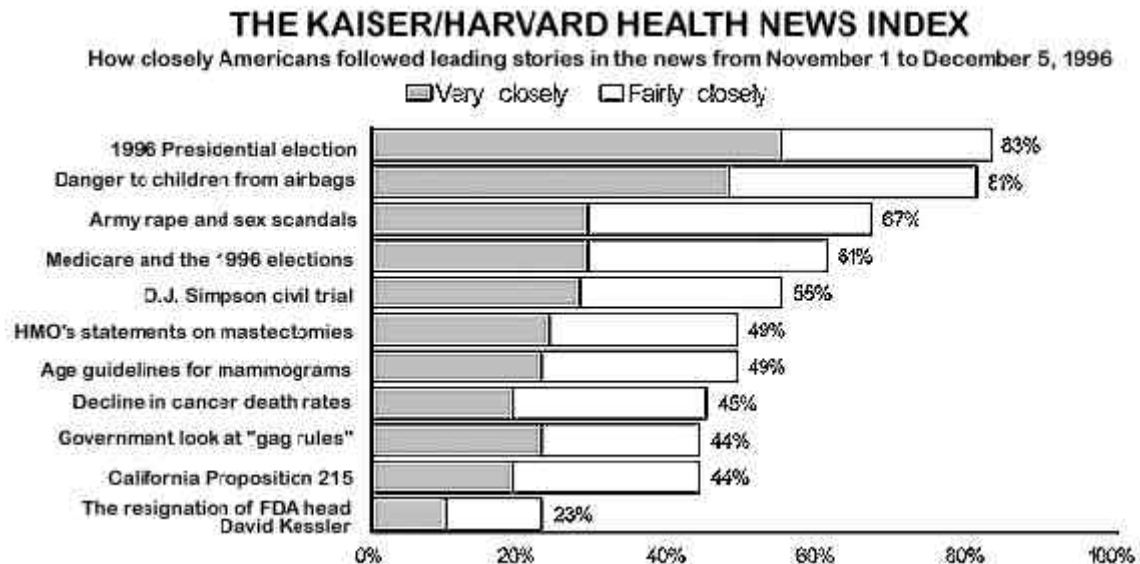
The potential danger to small children from airbags in cars was the health/safety story most closely followed by the public during November (81% said they followed that story very or fairly closely). By comparison, 83% reported following the outcome of the 1996 presidential election very or fairly closely.

One issue discussed during the campaign, Medicare, was followed closely by 61% of Americans. About half (49%) said they followed two women's health issues closely: statements by an association of HMO's about coverage of post-mastectomy hospital stays and new guidelines suggesting the age at which women should start getting mammograms.

Less than half of Americans (45%) followed reports indicating a decline in the death rates from cancer. A similar percentage (44%) said they followed stories on the federal government's

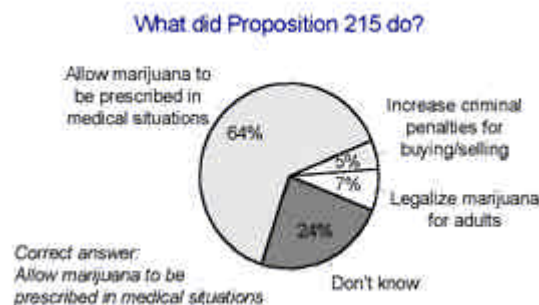
plans to examine medical insurance "gag rules" that prohibit doctors from explaining all possible treatment options to their patients.

Proposition 215, the ballot initiative in California that legalized marijuana for certain medical purposes, was also followed very or fairly closely by less than half (44%) of all Americans in November.



What The Public Understands About Health Stories in The News

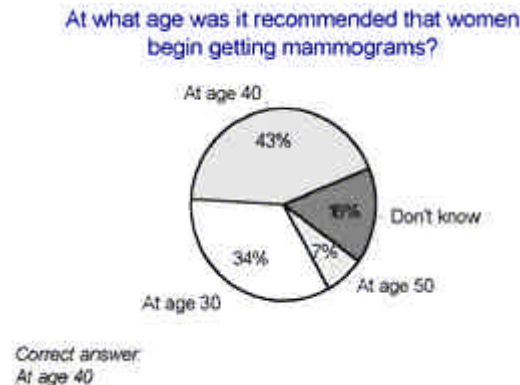
Proposition 215: Nearly half (43%) of those surveyed knew that California Proposition 215 had passed. Fourteen percent thought it had not passed and 43% didn't know. When asked what Proposition 215 would do, almost two-thirds (64%) correctly said it would allow marijuana to be prescribed in certain medical situations. A handful thought Proposition 215 would have legalized marijuana for adults (7%) or would have increased criminal penalties for buying or selling the drug.



(5%). About one in four (24%) didn't know what Proposition 215 would do.

Mammograms: More than two in five (43%) Americans knew that the National Radiological Society (N.R.S.) advised women to start getting mammograms at age 40. About a third (34%) thought the

N.R.S. advised women to start at age 30, 7% thought at age 50, and 16% didn't know.

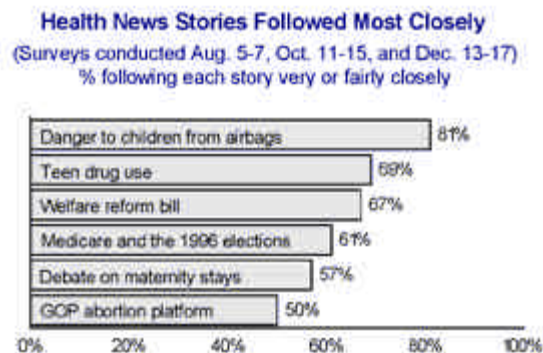


There was a marked difference between men and women in terms of who followed the mammogram story more closely. More than six in ten (62%) women followed that story closely, compared to 37% of men. There was also a gap in knowledge about the N.R.S.'s recommendation. Almost half (48%) of women knew the recommended age to start getting mammograms was 40, while 37% of men knew the correct answer.

Health News Index: June - December, 1996

The health news story followed most closely by Americans during the three news periods surveyed (June 1-August 5, August 27-September 27, and November 1-December

5) was the reported danger to children from airbags in cars (81%). Nearly seven in ten Americans closely followed teen drug use (69%) and the welfare reform bill (67%), and six in ten followed Medicare and the 1996 elections (61%) and Congressional debate about the length of hospital stays for new mothers (57%). Half (50%) followed closely the



discussion of the Republican party's platform stand on abortion.

The Kaiser/Harvard Health News Index is based on a national random sample survey of 1,000 Americans conducted December 13-17, 1996, to measure Americans' interest in and knowledge of health stories covered by the news media during the previous month. The survey was designed and analyzed jointly by the staff of the Kaiser Family Foundation and Harvard University in consultation with the Pew Center for The People and The Press. The survey was conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates. The margin of error is $\pm 3\%$. For additional copies of this report, please call (800)656-4533.