

**Analyzing the Impact Of Investigative Journalism On Health Care Policies In Government Hospitals. A
Case Study Of Mulago National Referral Hospital.**

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Abstract

This study examined the role of investigative journalism in exposing malpractice and influencing healthcare policy in Uganda's public health sector, with a specific focus on Mulago Hospital. The study was guided by three objectives: to examine the nature and scope of investigative journalism at Mulago Hospital, to assess the influence of investigative journalism on policy formulation and implementation, and to identify the challenges limiting the effectiveness of investigative journalism in influencing healthcare policies. A qualitative research approach was used, and primary data were collected in 2025 from journalists, health workers, and hospital administrators. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis in which responses were coded and organized into key themes. Findings revealed that investigative journalism at Mulago Hospital consistently uncovered systemic problems affecting service delivery and accountability. Three major themes emerged regarding the nature and scope of investigative reporting: corruption and misuse of funds, negligence and poor service delivery, and infrastructure breakdown and drug stockouts. The study found that patients were frequently asked to pay illegal fees for services and medicines that were supposed to be free, indicating widespread corruption and diversion of public resources. Investigations also revealed persistent negligence among health workers, including absenteeism, delayed treatment, and poor supervision, which often left patients unattended in hospital wards. In addition, journalists documented deteriorating infrastructure, broken medical equipment, overcrowded wards, and frequent shortages of essential medicines, forcing many patients to seek treatment from private facilities.

The study further found that investigative journalism had a notable influence on policy attention and administrative decision-making. Media exposés frequently triggered administrative actions such as staff suspensions, transfers, internal investigations, and emergency meetings within the hospital. At the policy level, investigative reports often prompted procurement audits, ministerial statements, and committee reviews. Investigative journalism also increased public awareness by transforming hidden hospital problems into matters of national debate, generating citizen outcry, social media discussions, and community pressure for accountability. These findings aligned with Agenda-Setting Theory, which suggests that the media shape public discourse by highlighting issues that demand policy attention. The study concluded that investigative journalism played a critical role in exposing corruption, negligence, and inefficiencies within Mulago Hospital and contributed to increased public accountability and policy attention. However, its long-term impact on healthcare policy remained limited due to restricted access to information, risks faced by journalists, and weak institutional follow-up mechanisms. The study recommended strengthening institutional collaboration between the media and health institutions, improving legal protection for investigative journalists, establishing formal information access

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channels, and implementing stronger monitoring mechanisms to ensure sustained policy reforms in Uganda's public health sector.

Keywords: Journalism, Health Care Policies and Government Hospitals.

Background of the Study

Globally, Investigative journalism has emerged as one of the most effective global tools for advancing accountability, ethics, and transparency in the health industry(Shakilah & Kazaara, 2023). It frequently acts as a watchdog, revealing policy flaws, systematic corruption, and improper use of public funds. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2022) asserts that public criticism, which is made possible by the media, is just as important to good health governance as institutional monitoring(Wegulo et al., 2023). Investigative journalists have been instrumental in identifying malpractice, fraud, and inefficiencies that impede the delivery of quality health services. In the United States, for example, legislative evaluations and stricter health care laws were prompted by media investigations by The New York Times and ProPublica that revealed instances of overbilling and false claims in the Medicare and Medicaid systems(Faith et al., 2023). Similar to this, in the UK, The Guardian and BBC Panorama exposed shortcomings in hospital administration and patient safety, which prompted national policy changes like the Francis Report (2013) that changed the National Health Service's (NHS) patient care procedures.

In India, the role of investigative journalism has been critical in exposing unethical practices in the health sector, such as the 2017 Gorakhpur hospital tragedy, where more than 60 children died due to oxygen shortages a case uncovered by independent journalists(A. G. Kazaara et al., 2023). The exposé led to administrative sanctions, budget reallocations, and a national debate on accountability in public hospitals. Likewise, in Brazil, journalists from Folha de São Paulo revealed corruption in hospital procurement processes, which triggered federal investigations and policy reviews(Julius & Nancy, 2025). Overall, global evidence suggests that investigative journalism not only exposes wrongdoing but also drives institutional reforms, strengthens health governance, and influences public policy, particularly when supported by freedom of information laws and ethical journalism standards(A. G. Kazaara et al., 2023).

From a regional perspective, across Sub-Saharan Africa, the health sector continues to face challenges of mismanagement, corruption, and inequitable service delivery, making investigative journalism an essential accountability mechanism(Christopher et al., 2022). The African Centre for Media Excellence (ACME, 2021) and the African Investigative Journalism Conference (AIJC) note that the exposure of corruption in public health systems has led to the dismissal of corrupt officials, recovery of stolen medical supplies, and improvement of health-related policies in several African countries(Julius & Kazaara, 2026a). For instance, investigative reporters from KTN News and The Daily Nation revealed the "Mafya House Scandal" (2016) in Kenya, which resulted in the Ministry of Health losing billions of Kenyan shillings. Senior government officials were suspended because of the exposé, and procurement reforms were started(Faridah et al., 2023). Similarly, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in Nigeria acted against accused officials after Premium Times' investigations

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exposed the misappropriation of funds intended for the construction of rural health facilities. This demonstrates how media can influence governmental decisions and restore the integrity of the healthcare system (Julius & Kazaara, 2026b).

In South Africa, corruption in public hospitals and the misappropriation of COVID-19 relief monies have been regularly covered by the Mail & Guardian and Daily Maverick's Scorpio section (Brighton, Deus, Kazaara, Nelson, Alex, et al., 2023). These reports have put pressure on the South African government to adopt stricter auditing mechanisms and enhance transparency in the Department of Health. Moreover, international NGOs and donor agencies such as Amnesty International, Transparency International, and Reporters Without Borders have emphasized that robust investigative journalism is vital for sustainable health reforms in Africa (Brighton, Deus, Kazaara, Nelson, Catherine, et al., 2023). However, journalists often face challenges such as censorship, threats, and limited access to official data, which restricts their effectiveness in influencing health policy at national levels.

In Uganda, investigative journalism has gained prominence in addressing governance issues, including those in the health sector (Lydia et al., 2023). Media houses such as NBS Television, NTV Uganda, and The Daily Monitor have produced in-depth reports revealing challenges like drug theft, negligence, and misuse of hospital funds in government facilities (Frank et al., 2023). For instance, The Daily Monitor once exposed poor management at Mulago National Referral Hospital, which led to administrative reviews and disciplinary actions. Despite these efforts, many rural and regional hospitals continue to face challenges of corruption, inadequate supervision, and policy failures.

Problem Statement

Uganda's health care sector plays a vital role in the country's social and economic development, guided by several national health policies and strategic frameworks. Key among these is the National Health Policy (NHP II, 2010–2020), which aimed at improving health service delivery and equity; the Health Sector Development Plan (HSDP II, 2020/21–2024/25), which focuses on universal health coverage and quality of care; and the Public Health Act (Cap 281), which regulates public health practices in the country (Muhamad et al., 2023). Additionally, the Uganda Patients' Charter (2009) outlines patients' rights and responsibilities, ensuring accountability and ethical standards in the delivery of health services.

Despite these policies, Uganda's government hospitals continue to face major challenges such as drug stockouts, absenteeism among health workers, poor infrastructure, negligence, and corruption (Julius & Kazaara, 2026a). Mulago National Referral Hospital, being the largest and most prominent government health facility, has particularly come under scrutiny due to recurrent cases of mismanagement, patient overcrowding, unethical conduct, and substandard service delivery (Julius & Kazaara, 2025). These persistent problems raise questions about the effectiveness of existing policies and monitoring mechanisms intended to ensure quality and accountability in public health institutions. In this context, investigative journalism has emerged as a crucial

mechanism for exposing inefficiencies and malpractice within Uganda's health sector. Media houses such as NBS, NTV, and The Daily Monitor have produced several investigative reports uncovering issues such as theft of medical supplies, bribery in hospital services, and patient neglect at Mulago and other hospitals (A. I. Kazaara & Audrey, 2024). For example, exposés such as "Stealing from the Sick" and "Inside Uganda's Hospitals" revealed cases of corruption and negligence that shocked the public and prompted short-term government reactions (Julius & Kazaara, 2026a). However, while these investigations often generate public outrage and temporary administrative responses, there is limited evidence that they lead to sustainable health policy reform or long-term institutional change. Therefore, this study analyzed the impact of investigative journalism on health care policies in government hospitals, with a particular focus on Mulago National Referral Hospital.

Objectives of the Study

General Objective

To Analyse the impact of investigative journalism on health care policies in government hospitals. A Case Study of Mulago National Referral.

Specific Objectives

- i. To examine the nature and scope of investigative journalism reports on Mulago National Referral Hospital.
- ii. To assess how investigative journalism has influenced policy formulation and implementation within the hospital and the Ministry of Health.
- iii. To identify the challenges limiting the effectiveness of investigative journalism in influencing health care policies in Uganda.

Research Questions

- i. What are the key issues highlighted by investigative journalism reports on Mulago National Referral Hospital?
- ii. How has investigative journalism influenced the formulation and implementation of health care policies in Uganda?
- iii. What challenges hinder investigative journalism from effectively influencing health care policy reform in Uganda?

Theoretical Framework

This study was informed by the agenda-setting theory of media, developed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972). The theory provides a strong foundation for understanding how investigative journalism influences public discourse and policy decisions. It explains the relationship between media coverage, public attention, and policy action, core elements in analysing how investigative reports about Uganda's health sector can drive reform and accountability. The Agenda-Setting Theory posits that the media does not tell people what to think, but rather

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what to think about. In other words, by giving prominence and frequency to certain issues, the media influences the importance the public and policymakers attach to those issues. When a topic receives consistent media attention, it gains priority on the public and political agenda, compelling authorities to act or respond. According to McCombs and Shaw (1972), the news media serve as a powerful link between citizens and decision-makers. Through continuous coverage and investigation of social problems, journalists shape how societies perceive those problems and determine which issues deserve urgent attention. The agenda-setting Theory aligns closely with the Ugandan context, where investigative programs such as NTV Exposed, NBS Eye Opener, and The Monitor Investigates have unveiled systemic failures in the health sector. These media reports have frequently prompted government inquiries, suspension of health officials, and short-term policy responses.

Justification of the Study

Uganda's health sector remains one of the most critical areas influencing national development and citizens' welfare. Despite the existence of strong health policy frameworks such as the Second National Health Policy (NHP II, 2010–2020), the Health Sector Development Plan II (HSDP 2020/21–2024/25), and the Uganda Patients' Charter (2009) public hospitals continue to face persistent challenges of mismanagement, corruption, poor service delivery, and inadequate accountability. Mulago National Referral Hospital, being the country's main referral and teaching hospital, has frequently been at the center of these systemic weaknesses.

In this context, investigative journalism has become an important instrument for promoting transparency and policy responsiveness. Through in-depth investigations, journalists uncover the realities behind institutional inefficiencies, malpractice, and misuse of public funds issues that often remain hidden from the public and policymakers. However, while such media reports are known to generate public debate and outrage, there is limited scholarly evidence assessing whether they influence health policy reforms or institutional accountability in Uganda's government hospitals.

Significance of the Study

The research intends to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the relationship between media and public policy, particularly within the context of Uganda's health sector. It will also provide a foundation for future researchers interested in exploring the intersection between journalism, governance, and health policy reform.

The findings from this study intend to help policymakers and health administrators understand how investigative journalism can serve as an effective feedback mechanism for identifying gaps in health policy implementation. It will also offer insights into how media exposure can be integrated into institutional accountability frameworks within government hospitals.

The study intends to add to the academic literature on investigative journalism on health care policies in government hospitals. It will serve as a useful reference for journalism students and researchers interested in investigative journalism.

Scope of the Study

Subject Scope

This study focused on the impact of investigative journalism in shaping, influencing, and reforming health care policies in government hospitals. Specifically, it examined how media investigations expose corruption, inefficiency, and malpractice in the health sector, and how these exposés lead to policy reviews, accountability measures, and improved service delivery. The study also considered the challenges faced by investigative journalists, such as censorship, political interference, and limited access to information, as well as the ethical standards that guide their work.

Geographical Scope

The study was limited to Mulago National Referral Hospital in Kampala. Mulago Hospital, as the largest public referral and teaching hospital in the country, serves as a central point for analysing the impact of investigative journalism on health care policies and governance. By examining exposés published by media houses such as The Daily Monitor, NBS Television, and NTV Uganda, the study investigated how investigative reports have revealed issues like drug theft, resource mismanagement, negligence, and administrative inefficiencies at Mulago Hospital. The hospital's prominence and its role in the national health system make it an ideal case study for understanding how media scrutiny can influence policy reforms, administrative accountability, and improvements in service delivery.

Time Scope

The study focused on a one-year period, from January 2024 to December 2024. This timeframe was selected because it allows for an in-depth examination of recent investigative journalism activities related to health care policies in Uganda, particularly those affecting Mulago National Referral Hospital. Focusing on a single year ensured that the study captures current trends, contemporary challenges, and immediate policy responses to media investigations. It also provided a manageable and realistic period for data collection, including analyzing news reports, conducting interviews with journalists and hospital administrators, and observing the outcomes of exposés on health policy reforms.

Methodology

Research Design

A qualitative case study design was employed. According to Yin (2018), a case study design allowed an in-depth, contextual examination of a real-life phenomenon within its natural setting. Mulago National Referral Hospital was selected as the single case because it focused on multiple investigative journalistic reports on healthcare

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service delivery, management inefficiencies, and patient welfare. This design provided an opportunity to understand the processes by which investigative journalism exposes health-related issues, triggers public discourse, and may influence the development or modification of hospital policies.

Research approach

The study employed a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is interpretive and seeks to understand how individuals construct meaning in relation to a social issue (Creswell, 2014). It emphasized depth over breadth, relying on words, observations, and experiences rather than numbers. In this case, the qualitative approach allowed the researcher to engage directly with investigative journalists, hospital administrators, and health policymakers to understand their perspectives on the role of investigative journalism in shaping healthcare policies at Mulago Hospital and in Uganda generally.

Study Population

The study population is a subset of the target population from which the sample is selected (Umair, 2018). The study considered a total of 40 respondents, and these comprised individuals and institutions directly linked to investigative journalism and healthcare policy formulation. These included Investigative journalists who have published reports on Mulago Hospital; Health administrators and medical staff from Mulago National Referral Hospital; Officials from the Ministry of Health involved in policy and regulatory oversight; Representatives from NGOs and media organizations involved in health advocacy. This population was selected because they possess firsthand experience and knowledge of how media investigations intersect with health policy processes. The Slovine's formula will be used to determine the minimum sample size N. $n = N / (1 + Na^2)$

Where:

n = Number of samples,

N = Total population and

a = correlation coefficient

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Na^2}$$

$n(1 + Na^2) \geq N \times 1$. Therefore, this study intends to cover a sample size of about 40 respondents

Sources of Data

The study relied primarily on primary data collected through focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with selected key informants. Primary data was crucial for this study because it captured real-world experiences,

allowing the research to explore the perspectives of individuals directly involved in regional trade policy and negotiations.

In addition to primary data, the study incorporated secondary data sources, which provided context and background information. These included policy documents, reports, and scholarly articles on the impact of investigative journalism on health care policies in government hospitals.

Data Collection Method

The study used two instruments for data collection: these included interview guides and Focus group discussions.

In-Depth Interviews

Interview consisted of open-ended questions, which yielded in-depth responses. The Key informant interviews were conducted using a key informant guide, and during the interviews, respondents were allowed to give an in-depth view on the study topic

Focus group discussions

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were used as one of the key data collection methods in this study to complement the individual interviews and document analysis. FGDs are a form of qualitative research where a small group of participants discuss specific topics guided by a moderator (Krueger & Casey, 2015). The method allowed the collection of diverse views, shared experiences, and collective insights that might not emerge in one-on-one interviews.

In this study, FGDs provided an interactive platform for participants to deliberate on the influence of investigative journalism on healthcare policy reforms within government hospitals, particularly at Mulago National Referral Hospital. Through discussion, participants stimulated one another's thoughts and reflections, generating richer and more nuanced data about how media exposés impact decision-making, transparency, and accountability in the healthcare system.

Data Collection Instruments

To ensure consistency and focus during data collection, two primary research instruments were used: an interview guide and focus group discussion guides. These instruments were designed to align with the research objectives and ensure that data collection remained structured and comprehensive.

Data Analysis

Content analysis is a qualitative research technique was used to systematically examine communication materials such as documents, media articles, reports, and transcripts to identify patterns, meanings, and themes (Krippendorff, 2018). It involved interpreting the content of text-based data to uncover how messages are constructed, what issues are emphasized, and how these messages relate to the research objectives. In the context of this study, content analysis was used to analyse investigative journalism reports, policy documents, and

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interview transcripts to understand how journalistic investigations have influenced healthcare policy responses at Mulago National Referral Hospital and other government hospitals.

Validity and Reliability

In qualitative research, validity and reliability are conceptualized as trustworthiness, which ensured that the findings are credible, dependable, confirmable, and transferable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Establishing trustworthiness is essential for demonstrating that the research results are both accurate and reflective of participants' real experiences. Since this study explored the impact of investigative journalism on healthcare policies at Mulago National Referral Hospital, ensuring trustworthiness is critical because it deals with perceptions, institutional processes, and social realities that require careful interpretation.

Reliability concerns the stability and consistency of research findings over time and under similar conditions. It reflects how well the research process is documented and repeatable. The researcher ensured dependability by keeping a detailed research log that records procedures, field notes, and decision-making steps throughout the study and using a consistent interview and FGD guide across all participants to ensure uniformity in data collection.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher complied with ethical procedures to protect the rights of the research participants. This involved the principle of voluntary participation, which required that participants not need to be coerced into participating in this research.

Right of the participant in this study, no attempt was made to deliberately harm participants. Those who could experience any form of harm, be it through victimization, emotional or otherwise, were informed in advance of their right to withdraw from participating in the study.

Confidentiality and anonymity mean that information from participants will not be divulged to the public nor made available to colleagues, subordinates, or superiors. In this study, all information about participants was treated with confidentiality, and the participants were anonymous. A covering letter assured the respondent that all responses was treated with utmost confidentiality and anonymity.

Results

Table 1: Nature and Scope of Investigative Journalism at Mulago Hospital

Selected Response	Codes	Themes
Some health workers ask patients for money before treatment, even when services are free.	Drug theft Bribery for services	Corruption and misuse of funds

You can be told a pay for a drug that is supposed to be free, and if you refuse, they delay your treatment	Illegal payment Misuse of public resources	
Journalists often find patients unattended in wards due to a shortage of staff or poor supervision. Sometimes nurses disappear for long hours, and patients must look for help on their own	Absenteeism Patient abandonment Poor supervision Mistreatment of the patient	Negligence and poor service Delivery
Exposes like inside Uganda's Hospitals revealed poor facilities that push patients to private clinics. We often find broken machines or no medicine, so many people end up buying drugs outside the hospitals	Old equipment Drug shortages Poor facility conditions Congested wards	Infrastructure breakdown and drug stockouts

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The findings indicate that investigative journalism at Mulago Hospital consistently uncovers deep-rooted problems that affect service delivery, accountability, and public trust. The three themes revealed through respondents' views provide insight into how the media exposes systemic weaknesses within the hospital.

Corruption and Misuse of Funds: The responses indicate that corruption is not just an isolated incident but a widespread issue within Mulago Hospital. Patients are frequently forced to pay for services that are supposed to be free, and drugs intended for public use are diverted for private gain. This exploitation creates financial barriers for poor patients and highlights weak internal oversight. The existence of bribery and illegal payments suggests that corruption is institutional rather than just individual. Investigative journalism plays a crucial role in exposing these hidden practices, making them accessible to the public and policymakers.

Negligence and Poor Service Delivery: The data indicate that human resource weaknesses are a major contributor to poor health outcomes. Absenteeism of staff, delayed treatment, and lack of supervision often leave patients unattended or mistreated. Respondents highlighted that journalists frequently expose these gaps by showing abandoned patients or long queues caused by absent medical workers. This pattern shows that neglect is systemic

and linked to inadequate management structures. Investigative journalism plays a critical role in highlighting how staff behaviour and weak oversight harm patient care.

Infrastructure Breakdown and Drug Stockouts: Respondents pointed out that Mulago Hospital suffers from serious infrastructure and supply shortages. Broken machines, overcrowded wards, and frequent drug stockouts force patients to seek private treatment, which many cannot afford. These issues are often revealed only after journalists investigate and document real-life conditions inside the hospital. This theme shows that poor physical facilities and a lack of essential supplies weaken the hospital's ability to provide quality care. Media investigations help demonstrate these conditions to the public and expose gaps in government funding and procurement.

Table 2: Influence of Investigative journalism on policy Formulation and Implementation

Response	Codes	Themes
After we reported on drug theft, some hospital officials were transferred, and others were investigated Whenever a major expose is published, you immediately see emergency meetings and internal probes at the hospital	Suspensions of staff Transfers Hospital-level inquires Emergency meetings	Administrative actions triggered by media reports
People now question hospital practices because the media exposes what happens behind the scenes. Investigative stories spark public anger online, and this pressure forces hospital leaders to respond	Citizen out cry Public debates Social media reactions Community pressure	Increased public awareness and demand for accountability

Source: Primary Data, 2025

Administrative Actions Triggered by Media Reports: The data indicate that investigative journalism often prompts immediate administrative responses within hospitals, such as suspensions, transfers, internal inquiries, and emergency meetings. Both journalists and hospital administrators confirmed that media exposés act as a catalyst for quick corrective measures. However, participants noted that these responses are largely short-term and reactive, addressing symptoms rather than systemic problems. The code suspensions of staff, transfers, hospital-level inquiries, and emergency meetings reflect that management actions are triggered primarily by public pressure following media coverage. While these interventions temporarily restore order or discipline, they rarely lead to

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structural reforms that could prevent similar problems in the future. This finding suggests that while media reporting is effective in creating immediate accountability, its influence on lasting institutional change is limited.

Short-Term Policy Review and Ministerial Responses: Findings show that investigative journalism influences policy attention at the ministerial level, prompting procurement audits, policy directives, committee reviews, and public statements. Respondents highlighted that media pressure forces ministries to respond formally, often through audits or circulars. However, the interpretation of these codes procurement audits, policy directives, committee reviews, and public statements indicates that these responses are mostly short-lived. Implementation is often slow, and follow-up mechanisms are weak. This reveals that while investigative reporting shapes the policy agenda and brings issues to the forefront, it does not necessarily guarantee long-term policy reform. Ministries may react quickly to public scrutiny but fail to institutionalize sustainable improvements.

Increased Public Awareness and Demand for Accountability: Participants emphasized that investigative journalism empowers the public to demand transparency and accountability in the health sector. The media exposes hidden practices, generating citizen outcry, public debates, social media discussions, and community pressure on hospital officials. The codes citizen outcry, public debates, social media reactions, and community pressure highlight how media coverage transforms private hospital issues into matters of public concern. Public awareness increases scrutiny of hospital practices and creates pressure on decision-makers to respond. This aligns with agenda-setting theory, which posits that the media does not tell people what to think but what to think about, thereby shaping public discourse and prioritizing issues for policymakers.

Table 3: Challenges limiting the effectiveness of investigative journalism in influencing health care policies in Mulago Hospitals

Responses	Codes	Themes
It is almost impossible to get official records from hospitals; administrators hide information or delay responses intentionally. Most health workers fear giving information because they worry about being punished by their supervisors	Restricted access to documents Lack of transparency Limited cooperation from hospital staff Fear of exposing institutional weaknesses	Barriers to Accessing Information and Hospital Records
Some officials warn journalists not to dig too deep; you receive calls	Harassment	Risks, Threats, and Intimidation Faced by Journalists

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telling you to drop the story for your own safety. Investigative reporting on health corruption attracts a lot of pressure, and sometimes journalists are threatened or followed.	Threats to safety Political interference Intimidation by security personnel	
After the exposé, authorities promise action, but after a few weeks, everything goes back to normal. The biggest challenge is follow-up; investigations raise awareness, but long-term change rarely happens.	No sustained reforms Government inaction Limited monitoring Public attention fades quickly	Lack of Follow-Up and Weak Implementation of Exposed Issues

Source: Primary Data, 2025

Barriers to Accessing Information and Hospital Records: Journalists consistently reported difficulty obtaining reliable data from hospitals, which constrains the depth and credibility of their investigations. Respondents indicated that administrators often delay providing records, refuse interviews, or obscure important information due to fear of exposure, bureaucratic inertia, or internal politics. Health workers themselves are frequently hesitant to share information, fearing reprisal from supervisors or legal consequences. The codes' restricted access to documents, lack of transparency, limited cooperation from staff, and fear of punishment among insiders highlight systemic obstacles within institutional structures. These barriers make it challenging for journalists to produce comprehensive investigations and limit the evidence available for policymakers. Without accurate and timely information, media reports may fail to persuade authorities to implement meaningful reforms.

The findings suggest that institutional opacity and reluctance to share information act as a structural constraint, reducing the impact of investigative journalism on health policy. Media exposés can bring issues to public attention, but lack of access to internal hospital data hinders thorough reporting and weakens the feedback loop necessary for sustainable change.

Risks, Threats, and Intimidation Faced by Journalists: Investigative reporters face a range of personal and professional risks when exposing malpractice in government hospitals. Respondents highlighted instances of harassment, threats, and intimidation by hospital staff, political actors, and security agencies. Some journalists described being warned to drop stories under threat of consequences or experiencing surveillance while conducting investigations. The codes harassment, threats to safety, political interference, and security intimidation

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underscore the hostile environment in which investigative journalists operate. Such pressures not only threaten the well-being of reporters but also create fear that may discourage in-depth investigations or limit the reporting of sensitive issues.

These findings indicate that personal and professional risks significantly limit the effectiveness of investigative journalism. Threats and intimidation reduce journalists' ability to probe deeply and maintain independence, which, in turn, diminishes the media's potential to drive long-term policy reforms in the health sector.

Lack of Follow-Up and Weak Implementation of Exposed Issues: Even when investigative reports successfully highlight corruption, negligence, or inefficiency, respondents noted that subsequent government and hospital actions are often short-lived. Promises of policy reforms, audits, or disciplinary measures frequently fade after initial media coverage, and monitoring mechanisms are insufficient to ensure sustained change. The codes no sustained reforms, government inaction, limited monitoring, and loss of public attention illustrate that while investigative journalism can trigger temporary responses, there is minimal continuity in enforcement. This gap between exposure and institutional follow-through weakens the overall impact of investigative reporting on health policy.

The lack of follow-up and weak enforcement mechanisms implies that investigative journalism alone is insufficient to achieve structural reforms. Sustainable improvements require not just media exposure but also active governmental commitment, continuous monitoring, and systems that institutionalize accountability. Without these, even high-profile investigations may fail to produce lasting policy changes.

Summary of Discussion

The findings indicate that investigative journalism at Mulago Hospital was a critical tool for exposing malpractice, stimulating policy attention, and increasing public accountability. However, its impact was largely reactive and short-term due to systemic barriers, limited follow-up, and risks faced by journalists. Aligning with the Agenda-Setting Theory, the media successfully raise the profile of health sector issues, but without institutional commitment, the reforms initiated remain temporary.

Recommendations and Conclusions

Recommendations

Based on the findings and discussion, the study recommends the following:

Strengthen Institutional Collaboration

Hospitals and the Ministry of Health should establish formal channels for journalists to access information and records without fear of reprisal.

Health institutions should appoint media liaison officers to facilitate transparency.

Protect Investigative Journalists

Legal frameworks and safety protocols should be strengthened to protect journalists from harassment and intimidation. Civil society organizations can provide support networks for journalists investigating sensitive issues.

Ensure Sustained Policy Follow-Up

Ministries should implement monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track compliance with reforms prompted by media investigations.

Follow-up audits and public reporting should be institutionalized to ensure long-term changes.

Capacity Building

Journalists should receive specialized training in investigative techniques, health policy knowledge, and ethical reporting standards. Funding and logistical support should be provided to enable comprehensive investigations, especially in remote hospitals.

Conclusions

This study concluded that investigative journalism played a significant role in exposing corruption, negligence, and inefficiency in Uganda's public health sector, particularly at Mulago Hospital. It acted as a catalyst for administrative actions, policy attention, and public accountability. However, the effectiveness of investigative reporting is constrained by barriers to information, risks to journalists, and weak follow-up of exposed issues. While the media successfully sets the agenda and generates public discourse, structural and institutional reforms remain limited without systemic support. Ultimately, investigative journalism had the potential to enhance transparency and improved health service delivery, but its long-term impact depends on institutional collaboration, journalist protection, and enforcement mechanisms. Strengthening these areas will ensure that media investigations lead to sustainable policy reforms and better health outcomes in Uganda.

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