

research in brief

Newspapers and Community Development

The role of the non-metropolitan newspaper and its editor (gatekeeper) in community improvement has been of concern to development agents and specialists. They may be able to find a few needles of value in a large haystack of computerism reported by Larry Whiting from his study of 31 newspapers in Iowa.

Asked about major community problems, editors regarded lack of housing as by far the most serious. Ranking second was lack of job opportunities for young adults. Third was inadequate physician and medical services.

Editors of newspapers under 2,000 circulation are more inclined to become personally involved with community

issues than are editors of larger papers. Whiting comments that "in the case of very small newspapers it is more difficult to differentiate between a personal role and a newspaper role" because the editor is the newspaper. Asked about community conflict, more small-paper editors feared the damaging effects of controversy in their communities.

Preferred way for handling controversial matters in the newspaper is "to present all the facts objectively and then take a position editorially," Whiting writes. He found a 94% agreement with a statement that "if a journalist feels he can do something about a community problem through taking some personal action, he should do it."

"Mass Media Gatekeepers and Community Development—Aspects of Role, Perceptions, and Performance." Larry R. Whiting. Ames: Iowa State University, Journalism Department, 1976.

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