

ENTERTAINMENT, EDUCATION, AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



The importance of recalling engaging storylines and characters

Program Details

LOCATION:

Seven towns in southwest Nigeria

TARGET GROUP:

18–25-year-old from the general population

IMPLEMENTING AGENCY:

MTV Staying Alive Foundation, Nigeria National Agency for the Control of AIDS

NUMBER OF PROGRAM RECIPIENTS:

The third season was aired on more than 150 broadcast television stations worldwide in all sub-Saharan countries.

TIMELINE:

2014–2019

FUNDING PARTNERS:

PROGRAM: African governments, UNICEF, PEPFAR, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Elton John Foundation, among others.

STUDY: The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and UK Department for International Development.

Key Findings

- An experimental evaluation of a domestic violence subplot of the TV series MTV Shuga suggests that even a small dosage of high-quality edutainment can change attitudes and behaviors related to gender-based violence (GBV).
- Eight months after program exposure, male viewers were *21 percent* less likely to justify forced sex or wife beating (no effects on female attitudes).
- The treatment group (men and women) was a *third* less likely to report sexual violence (control=23.4%, treatment=15.8%).
- The reporting of physical violence declined by *more than half* among female viewers (control=21.9%, treatment=9.0%), with the effects for men being in the same direction but not statistically significant.
- Program effects were larger among viewers that reported thinking about the characters and remembering specific facts about them. Identification with the characters seems to play a lesser role.

Context

Over one-third of women around the world are victims of physical or sexual violence. Many of them live in low-income countries where individuals are often socialized to accept and tolerate gender-based violence. In Nigeria, one in five married women experienced some form of violence from their spouse in the last year. The television series



Malaika is a young woman who is enrolled in university and is married to Nii, a businessman who is very jealous and limits his wife's freedom. Nii would like to have a child, while Malaika wants to finish her studies first.

MTV Shuga, produced by MTV Staying Alive Foundation, seeks to address the spread of HIV/AIDS by fusing sexual health messaging with engaging storylines. A recent DIME study found that its third season, which lasts a total of three hours, was effective in improving HIV knowledge and attitudes, and substantially promoted safer sexual behaviors among viewers (Banerjee A, La Ferrara E, Orozco-Olvera V, 2019a). This season included a GBV subplot about a young couple.

Impact Evaluation

This trial is a cluster randomized trial conducted in 80 urban and semi-urban communities in Nigeria. 18-25-year-old youth were invited to a series of entertainment screenings. While the treatment group was exposed to MTV Shuga, the comparison group was exposed to a “placebo” television series that lacked educational messages. Hosting community screening events in both the treatment and comparison communities enabled researchers to attribute any impacts they found to the MTV Shuga program itself, rather than the community screening component of the activity. Following standard GBV questionnaires, study participants were asked if (i) a husband is justified in forcing his wife to have sex when she does not want to; and (ii) if a man is justified in hitting or beating his wife for a set of reasons ranging from a wife going out without telling the husband to burning the food.

The study collected baseline and eight-month follow-up surveys. The incidence of GBV was measured directly and indirectly through items list (respondents were read a list of statements and were asked to say not which ones are true but rather how many are true, with the sensitive item randomly added for half of the respondents). To shed light on the workings of edutainment, the follow-up survey collected information on what viewers remembered about the plot (by asking them about its main themes) and its characters (by showing them pictures about all key characters and asking them if there had been times when they remembered a specific character).

Results

After eight months of program exposure, the study found no average effects on GBV attitudes, though this masks significant heterogeneity by gender. While the program did not change attitudes of women, it did improve the attitudes of men. Men were 6 percentage points less likely of justifying forced sex or wife beating, a 21 percent decrease over the control group. The study provides suggestive evidence about the mechanisms behind these results. While attitudes towards GBV

were not significantly different for viewers who recalled domestic violence as one of the main themes; viewers who recalled Malaika or Nii held more negative views about violence against women. The number of instances in which violence was justified by women who thought of Malaika was about three-fourths of that of respondents who did not. For treated men, it corresponded to two-thirds. Viewers who remembered facts that happened to the GBV characters were 7 to 9 percentage points less likely to justify violence. In general, identification with characters was not significantly correlated with attitudes towards GBV. While the relationship of these edutainment mechanisms cannot be interpreted as causal, the analysis suggests they play an important role in explaining how edutainment works in improving attitudes and behaviors.

The study found no effects on GBV incidence when respondents were directly asked. However, the items list show substantial impacts. Treated men and women were a third less likely to report sexual violence (control=23.4%, treatment=15.8%). The reporting of physical violence declined by *more than half* among female viewers (control=21.9%, treatment=9.0%), with the effects for men being in the same direction but not statistically significant.

Policy Implications

Despite the fact that domestic violence was a secondary theme of MTV Shuga, this study showed that (random) exposure to this educational TV series improved attitudes of men, reduced sexual violence for both genders, and reduced physical violence reported by female viewers. The study finding that effects were larger for audiences that reported thinking about the characters and remembering specific facts about them highlights the importance of high-quality and engaging programming. These findings call for a deeper analysis of the links between attention, empathy and the policy impact of edutainment programs. Rigorous evidence is key for scaling up effective edutainment interventions. Program-spinoffs of MTV Shuga are planned for Egypt and India with a focus on family planning and GBV.

REFERENCES

- Banerjee, Abhijit; La Ferrara, Eliana; Orozco Olvera, Victor Hugo. 2019a. The Entertaining Way to Behavioral Change: Fighting HIV with MTV (English). Policy Research working paper; no. WPS 8998. Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group.
- Banerjee, Abhijit; La Ferrara, Eliana; Orozco Olvera, Victor Hugo. 2019b. Entertainment, Education, and Attitudes Toward Domestic Violence. AEA Papers and Proceedings 109:133–37.



The Narrating Behavior Change program of the World Bank's Development Impact Evaluation department links project teams across Global Practices with researchers and edutainment producers to develop rigorous and innovate evaluations that both improve the evidence-base for policymaking and induce the systematic use of edutainment in development investments.
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/research/dime/brief/edu-tainment>