

# THE ENTERTAINING WAY TO BEHAVIORAL CHANGE

## FIGHTING HIV WITH MTV



### Using soap operas for large-scale behavior change

#### 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 MTV Shuga in Nigeria suggests that edutainment can have substantial effects on improving HIV knowledge and attitudes towards HIV-positive people, and promoting safer sexual behaviors.
- Eight months after program exposure, viewers were *half* as likely to report concurrent partners and were almost *twice* as likely to get tested for HIV (control=3.3%, treatment=6.4%).
- Exposure to MTV Shuga led to a *55 percent* decrease in the likelihood that women tested positive for chlamydia. Women with positive test results declined from 3.1 percent in the comparison group to 1.7 percent among viewers. The effects for men were in the same direction, though these were not statistically significant.
- The intervention increased participants' friends' knowledge about HIV transmission, suggesting that people who watched MTV Shuga conveyed its messages to their friends.
- This is among the first studies to explore the social mechanisms through which edutainment works. Individual rather than social channels seem to drive the program's effects for this private behavior.



## Context

In 2017, an estimated 1.2 million people in sub-Saharan Africa became infected with HIV. More than one-third of these infections occurred in youth between the ages of 15 and 24. Nigeria, where this study took place, has the second highest HIV/AIDS burden in the world. Unsafe heterosexual sex is the primary source of transmission, causing about 80 percent of new cases of HIV in 2014. Systematic reviews of HIV prevention campaigns show that while there are effective in promoting awareness, they often are not effective in reducing risky sexual behaviors and HIV (Krishnaratne et al 2016). Governments and development agencies are increasingly turning to entertainment media to communicate with youth and other high-risk populations. This type of outreach, known as entertainment education or “edutainment,” is often easier to remember than abstract information and faces less psychological resistance from viewers than traditional health education campaigns. Edutainment programs can inspire audiences to engage in new thinking about what is possible, and change audience perceptions of what is “normal” and socially acceptable behavior.

The television series MTV Shuga seeks to address the spread of HIV/AIDS by fusing sexual health messaging with engaging storylines. Weki’s story aims to improve attitudes towards HIV-positive people.

## Impact Evaluation

This study (Banerjee A, La Ferrara E, Orozco-Olvera V, 2019a) is a cluster randomized trial conducted in 80 urban and semi-urban communities. 18–25-year-old youth were invited to a series of entertainment screenings. In 54 randomly selected communities, participants viewed eight 22-minute episodes of the MTV Shuga television drama in two blocks of four episodes. In 26 other randomly selected communities, participants viewed 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.

In addition to measuring the effectiveness of MTV Shuga, this study investigated the role of two types of channels through which edutainment may work: an individual channel and a social channel. From an individual perspective, the entertaining format may encourage the viewer to pay more attention and reduce resistance to top-down advice, resulting in increasing audiences’ knowledge about show messages. To identify impacts related to social channels, the study employed a variety of strategies. First, in half of the MTV Shuga locations, after watching the show individuals viewed short video clips that contained interviews and statistics



**Weki’s teammates find his HIV medicines in his locker, forcing him to reveal his HIV-positive status. The parents of his teammates ask the coach to kick Weki out of the team. Weki decides to stop playing football. The show was produced by the MTV Staying Alive Foundation.**



**Sophie is happy to receive her HIV test results. She tested negative. However, to fully discard the possibility that she is infected with the virus, the nurse tells her she needs to get tested again in three months.**

about the HIV views of peers who had watched MTV Shuga in other communities. Second, the study tested whether exposure to the show affected individuals' beliefs about social norms in their own communities. Third, in a cross-cutting arm in all treatment communities, individuals were randomly selected to receive extra tickets to bring up to two friends to the community screenings. Finally, the study investigated spillover effects—e.g., whether people who were exposed to the show shared knowledge with others—by surveying participants' acquaintances who had not seen MTV Shuga.

For both treatment and control groups, the study collected baseline and an eight-month follow up survey, and objective measures for HIV testing, condom demand and Chlamydia biomarkers.

## Results

MTV Shuga improved participants' knowledge about HIV, including greater awareness about transmission, testing, and available drug therapies, by 0.13 standard deviations. Viewers were 14 percent more likely to know about the need to take a second HIV test and that this test should be after at least three months. The show positively influenced viewers' attitudes toward people living with HIV by 0.10 standard deviations. Viewers reported being more willing to buy from an HIV-positive shopkeeper; and closer to Weki's story, more likely to allow an HIV-positive boy to play football. Most importantly, the program promoted safer sexual behaviors. Youth

in the treatment group was almost twice as likely to have visited local HIV centers and been tested in the last six months than youth in the comparison group. Viewers were less likely to report having concurrent sexual partners than youth in the comparison group, particularly those who had initially reported having more than two partners. The intervention did not have effects on self-reported and objective measures for condom use. Despite the lack of effect on condoms use, and consistent with the reduction in the number of concurrent partners (and possibly with a more general shift away from risky behaviors), the show reduced the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases. Exposure to MTV Shuga led to a 55 percent decrease in the likelihood that women tested positive for chlamydia. Women with positive test results declined from 3.1 percent in the comparison group to 1.7 percent among viewers. The effects for men were in the same direction, though these were not statistically significant.

What drove these positive results? The different strategies adopted to test for the presence of social norms effects did not reveal robust results. The study found no evidence that exposing individuals to the views of peers or watching the show with friends led to further improvements in attitudes or behaviors (though findings suggested some positive impacts on knowledge for those who brought friends of the opposite sex to a screening). Overall, individual responses, rather than social channels, seem to drive the positive results. The study found evidence of knowledge spillovers. The intervention increased participants' friends' knowledge about HIV

transmission, suggesting that people who watched MTV Shuga conveyed its messages to their friends. The effect was particularly strong for friends of the opposite sex to the participant. We see no significant effects on untreated friends' attitudes and behaviors, however, suggesting that direct exposure to the show may be needed to trigger change at a deeper level.

## Policy Implications

Overall, these results suggest that entertainment education can educate and positively change deep-seated attitudes and behaviors in the context of HIV. The study suggests that the value of edutainment comes from its ability to convey information that is difficult to transmit through traditional formats. While our findings do not suggest that social effects are unimportant, they do highlight the complexities of their role for this private behavior. Given that mass media can reach large segments of the population at low marginal costs, edutainment has the potential to be more influential and cost-effective than traditional HIV behavior change campaigns. MTV Shuga is broadcast in public and private channels in all sub-

Saharan countries. Preliminary results of a cost-benefit analysis suggest the investment could have been recovered by as little as 1% of the show's potential youth audience in its five main market countries. Even small "dosages" of high-quality edutainment may prove effective. Researchers also found the MTV Shuga's short subplot on domestic violence was effective in improving attitudes and behaviors of viewers (Banerjee A, La Ferrara E, Orozco-Olvera V, 2019b).

## 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.
- Krishnaratne S, Hensen B, Cordes J, Enstone J, Hargreaves J. Interventions to strengthen the HIV prevention cascade: a systematic review of reviews, *Lancet HIV*, vol. 3: e307–17, 2016.



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>