



# Radio-based Interventions for HIV Prevention



## Question

How and with what effect has radio been used as an intervention for HIV prevention?

## Key Take-Home Messages

- Radio spots, when employed as part of larger mass media campaigns, appear moderately effective for reaching target populations with HIV related messages. Across studies approximately one third of respondents within a given population had been exposed to a radio message.
- Messages broadcast on the radio appear moderately effective in raising awareness of HIV but there is conflicting evidence as to whether this translates into behavior change.
- Radio messages, and other media slogans, need to be developed in consultation with target communities and audience tested to ensure the relevance of the messages provided.

## The Issue and Why It's Important

Three decades into the HIV epidemic, modes of transmission and risk factors are well understood. Despite this, new individuals continue to become infected at alarming rates. Community-based organizations, policy makers and service providers continue to seek new and innovative ways to raise awareness of HIV, encourage testing and change high risk behaviors. A community-based organization in Toronto, Canada, asked us to rapidly review the literature for evidence as to the effectiveness of prevention campaigns that use radio as a vehicle for community education.

## EVIDENCE INTO ACTION

The OHTN Rapid Response Service offers HIV/AIDS programs and services in Ontario quick access to research evidence to help inform decision making, service delivery and advocacy.

In response to a question from the field, the Rapid Response Team reviews the scientific and grey literature, consults with experts, and prepares a brief fact sheet summarizing the current evidence and its implications for policy and practice.

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## What We Found

Little research has been done on the effects of HIV prevention campaigns distributed via radio. Of the few studies conducted in high-income countries, we located two that were targeted at youth/young adult communities (1-3), one aimed at prisoners (4), one targeting African American women (5) and one aimed to promote HIV testing among Latinos living on the US-Mexico border (6). In all but one of the studies (4) the radio messages were part of broader media campaigns.

Radio announcements, when employed as part of larger media campaigns, appear to help raise awareness about HIV in target communities, although this increased knowledge is only sometimes accompanied by behavior change (2;7). There is also concern about the lasting impact of exposure to time limited media campaigns (2) as long term evaluations have not been conducted.

To better understand how people learn about healthy sexuality, HIV and other STD's, a national survey was conducted in Italy in 2005 (7). More than three quarters of the adults surveyed indicated that they had received some information from television or radio. These same individuals self-reported that their behavior had changed based on the media messages (i.e. avoiding casual sex or using a condom for casual sex). The authors of the study question whether true education occurs by exposure to media messages or whether they are simply superficially informative. This concern seems to be supported by the fact that on average, respondents answered about 80% of questions about HIV/AIDS correctly however about 40% of the group was engaging in high risk sexual behavior.

American researchers examining the HIV knowledge of young men in their twenties also found broad exposure through media but limited improvements in lowering personal risk (1). Approximately 92% of these young men had heard about HIV in the media (58% via the radio) and for many this was their sole source of sexual health information. It is important to note that this analysis was based on data collected in the late 1980's and early 1990's.

The *Tú No Me Conoces* campaign, launched in Southern California in the United States and Northern Mexico in 2003, consisted of one minute radio spots and printed brochures aimed to inform individuals that they might be at risk for HIV and directing them to an information line and website (6). Following the campaign partner clinics documented an increase in HIV testing, however these results cannot be attributed to the campaign due to seasonal fluctuations in testing. A survey of individuals receiving an HIV test showed that about 30% recalled seeing or hearing an advertisement about HIV testing in the last month. A little less than a third (28%) of those who remembered an HIV message, could identify the radio campaign by name.

A campaign targeting adolescents in Sacramento, California, which included radio spots, posters, ads in transit stations, promotional materials, workshops and an information phone line, found that the radio spots reached approximately 28% of the target population (2;3). Approximately 67% percent of adolescents in the geographical region were exposed to at least one aspect of the mass media campaign. The research team questioned whether the radio spots alone would have been enough to make exposure memorable as an increase in dosage was accompanied by a decrease in HIV risk behaviors. For

example, “the more channels through which an adolescent was exposed to [campaign] messages, the more likely he or she was to have used a condom at last sex with a main partner; the odds that condom use would be reported increased 26% with each additional channel.” (2, p. 1815)

Interestingly, the one third of youth who were not exposed to the campaign did not fit the usual demographic of ‘hard-to-reach’ youth (i.e., male, racialized, history of high risk behavior). “Unexposed adolescents were merely less likely to live in zip codes where program effort was concentrated and more likely to be 18 years old, the oldest age group surveyed” (3, p. 202).

In response to rising rates of HIV and Hepatitis C among prison populations in New South Wales, Australia, the Community Restorative Centre, funded by the NSW Health Department, began a weekly thirty minute radio broadcast targeting those who were incarcerated and their families (4). The radio show consists of interviews, personal accounts, health information quizzes and featured stories. The program has not been evaluated in terms of knowledge or behavior change, but a survey of prisoners reported that 23% of incarcerated women and 16% of incarcerated men had listened to the program at some time.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the United States undertook a national consultation to develop a media campaign targeting single, young African-American women of low socio-economic status to raise awareness of HIV risk and increase HIV testing (5). The campaign, consisting of radio spots, print ads and outdoor advertisements, was implemented in Cleveland and Philadelphia for one year. The campaign was effective in directing women to an information telephone line and/or website indicating an increased, “...willingness to act in the form of information-seeking online, via telephone hotlines or by attending campaign events.” (5, p. e29). There was insufficient evidence to indicate whether the media messages had an impact on HIV testing, although a large number of rapid tests were administered during campaign sponsored events.

Much more research on media prevention campaigns has been conducted in low and middle income countries where the community’s relationship to media is quite different than in high income countries. As an example, see the review of studies completed by Bertrand & Anhang (8), which located fifteen mass media interventions in developing countries that targeted youth. Television was found to reach more young people than radio but requires a much larger investment of resources. The data they found support the effectiveness of media campaigns to, “...increase the knowledge of HIV transmission, to improve self-efficacy in condom use, to influence some social norms, to increase the amount of interpersonal communication, to increase condom use and to boost awareness of health providers.” (8, p. 205).

## References

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## Factors that May Impact Local Applicability

Most of the studies reported herein were conducted in the United States with various specific populations. The media campaigns were each developed in close consultation with the target community, something that appears to be inherent to a campaign's success. It is important to note that, with the exception of one of the studies included in the review of interventions in developing countries, none of the studies looked at radio-only interventions. Radio was regularly used in tandem with other outlets within a larger media campaign.

## What We Did

We searched the Cochrane Library, Database of Reviews of Effects, Health-Evidence.ca, Pubmed and CINAHL using relevant text search terms (HIV AND prevention AND radio).