

**HUSBAND-WIFE COMMUNICATION
AND
FAMILY PLANNING:**

Impact of a National TV Drama

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Impact of a National TV Drama

Communication between spouses is an important determinant in family planning behavior. Yet there is little experience worldwide in promoting husband-wife communication on a national scale.

This paper examines how "Aahat," a six-episode national social drama in Pakistan, helped increase husband-wife communication on family planning and contraceptive methods. It also examines how exposure to the drama influenced interspousal behavior, increasing joint decision-making and encouraging prospective clients to visit family planning clinics. Finally, it comments on how these findings demonstrate the role of ideational processes in fertility behavior.

BACKGROUND

Between May, 1990, and June, 1993, JHU/PCS had the opportunity to work closely with the Pakistan Ministry of Population Welfare (MPW) under a USAID supported family planning communication project. JHU's role was to assist the Ministry of Population design and implement its national communication strategy and plan of action. The first phase of the strategy, which includes the Aahat Media Campaign, was formulated on the basis of several sources of data. The project followed a systematic process to develop the campaign, starting with analysis, then proceeding through design, development, implementation, evaluation and review. For ease of recall, JHU/PCS has represented these steps in the form of a "P" referring to them collectively as the "P-Process." The first step, Analysis, began with an examination of program resources and audience characteristics.

ANALYSIS

Demographic Profile

Pakistan currently has an estimated population of nearly 120 million, a per capita income of less than US\$ 400, a literacy rate of about 30%, and a Contraceptive

Prevalence rate of approximately 15%-16%. The annual population growth rate of more than 3 percent is one of the highest in the world, particularly among larger developing countries. Though the family planning program was established in 1965, it can still be considered in its introductory or early growth phase.

The Program

In 1990, the service infrastructure consisted of slightly more than 1200 government Family Welfare Centers nationwide, with additional private sector services concentrated in urban areas. These public and private centers provided approximately 20% of Pakistan's couples with access to family planning services, but even they were under-utilized.

Prior to 1990, communication efforts had been limited largely to spot advertising campaigns promoting the small family norm. Such indirect approaches were considered necessary to avoid provoking conservative religious opposition. In general, the National Family Planning Program, especially its communication component was constrained by lack of political support, resulting in a weak mandate to develop and promote services as well as in inadequate institutional alliances with the media and other government Ministries.

But 1990 saw an increased commitment to the population program under the newly elected government, providing JHU and the Ministry with the opportunity for an expanded communication strategy. Additional leverage for the strategy was offered by National Institute of Population Studies (NIPS) findings that the general public would like to see more family planning messages on the media.

Audience Characteristics

To ensure the best possible fit between the audience and the intervention being designed, JHU and the MPW looked for key audience indicators in the existing literature and undertook some additional research studies.

The Pakistan Contraceptive Prevalence Survey of 1986 indicated that an estimated 59% of non-using Married Couples of Reproductive Age (MCRA) either favored spacing (35%) or limiting (23%) births and thus constituted a strong "latent demand" audience for contraceptives.

This "latent demand" audience included many from among Pakistan's middle

and lower-middle income groups, who are high consumers of television and radio. A total of 43% of Pakistan's people watch television, a number rising to 68% in the urban areas. Radio reaches an even greater percentage.

With respect to the sources of motivation for family planning, a 1989 Evaluation of the Communication Program conducted by the National Institute of Population Studies (NIPS) found that, for women, the spouse was the most important motivator (63%); among media sources, television was the most important (16%).

JHU designed and conducted two additional studies to probe the reasons for the high unmet demand for family planning. One study conducted by Domestic Research Bureau, a market research firm, included focus groups with men and women of reproductive age as well as in-depth interviews with religious leaders, family elders, and traditional medical practitioners. The other research was a set of case studies on family planning decision-making in rural Punjab, conducted by Petri Blinkhoff, a Ph.D. candidate in anthropology at the University of Amsterdam.

The results suggested that among the most important reasons for the high unmet demand were:

- a) the desire to have large families due to the pressure to have sons;
- b) a need for improved service delivery; and
- c) a lack of communication on family planning between spouses.

Women were typically the active agents in obtaining family planning, but men were seen to sanction it. The case studies showed instances of wives being hindered by the fear of arousing their husband's disapproval and being unable to negotiate successfully for approval. The results also suggested that child health and improved economic well-being were the chief motivators for family planning and that birth-spacing was regarded very positively.

DESIGN

Based on the audience profile and needs, JHU and the Ministry designed a campaign that would use a popular television drama with radio and TV spots to promote birth spacing, family planning providers and their services. To create the partnerships and obtain the political support necessary to launch a national campaign, JHU and the MPW held a set of conferences in Lahore for high-level population policy makers and media industry planners and professionals. In the conference JHU shared lessons learned from FP communication programs worldwide and presented the new

Pakistan research findings and rationale for the proposed campaign. The gathering was very successful in building cooperation and dialogue among organizations involved in health, family planning and the media. Immediately following the conference, JHU and the Ministry received the consent of the national television network, Pakistan Television (PTV) to produce and air a family planning social drama, the centerpiece of a multimedia campaign and first of its kind in Pakistan.

Objectives:

The objectives of the campaign were to:

1. Increase approval of spacing and family planning;
2. Promote husband-wife communication;
3. Promote gender equality; and
4. Increase clinic attendance and adoption of modern contraceptives.

Audience:

The campaign was aimed chiefly at low-parity couples living in the urban/peri-urban areas where family planning services were concentrated. Project designers felt that among these groups, latent demand could be activated and most readily be turned into practice. Under the existing service structure, the next one percent of family planning acceptors in Pakistan would very likely come from these groups.

IMPLEMENTATION**The Interventions**

The interventions of the campaign included "Aahat," a six-episode social drama, three television spots, radio spots and print IEC materials. The TV spots were the first on Pakistan television to promote modern contraceptive services, though they did so in general terms to comply with strict government regulations and public sensibilities. The health worker in the TV spot counsels, "for the method of spacing that is best for you, come talk to us. Come to your nearest clinic or family welfare center."

The drama, produced by a leading television director and spokesperson on women's issues, Sahira Kazmi, and scripted by one of Pakistan's most popular soap opera writers, Huseena Moin, was broadcast nationally for six weeks in October-November 1991. "Aahat," means 'approaching sound' or 'footsteps' and suggests the arrival of something or someone long-awaited, a word which resonated somewhat with our campaign focus on meeting "unmet demand."

The story is that of a young couple, their dreams for the future, social pressures to have sons, and the consequences of having too many children too soon. The dramatic events take place within a small household where the couple, the three daughters, and the mother-in-law live in familial harmony and disharmony. The drama's messages are not in any way external to the story: they are imbedded in the conflicts, the events and the character interactions. Husband-wife communication develops as the young couple tries to work through the birth of yet another daughter, the mother-in-law's demands, the wife's deteriorating health, and the sound advice of a neighbor and friend who is a doctor.

JHU's strategy was to bring the nation's best artists into the service of the Population Program to create drama with the production values, depth of character and quality of script that would make the show worth watching. The public response to the play was very positive and press coverage extensive. The drama was reviewed and featured in over 50 articles in the national and regional press. Thus, at a macro level, the drama entered into and influenced public discourse on family planning. At a micro-level --that of the family -- what was its impact?

EVALUATION

METHOD

The campaign interventions were evaluated among members of the target group -- men, women and couples -- living in or near the three major population centers in Pakistan: Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad/Rawalpindi. These areas were the focus of the campaign because of the availability of family planning services and high media access. Respondents interviewed for the campaign were selected randomly to reflect Pakistan's population according to sex, age, education and economic distribution.

Two separate surveys were conducted to determine the impact of the campaign media on the areas selected for intervention -- a baseline survey and a post-campaign survey. Prior to the major media campaign interventions, namely the broadcast of the television drama series "Aahat" and 3 television spots, a total of 2,135 people were interviewed to determine their knowledge, attitudes and practice (KAP) regarding family planning.

Following the television drama broadcast a total of 2,118 respondents,

including 1,061 men and 1,057 women were interviewed in the same general locations using a 17-page questionnaire to measure the impact of the radio drama series and the television spots. Each interview lasted an hour.

Project evaluation questionnaires were developed in Pakistan with the assistance of Research and Evaluation and Program staff members at JHU/PCS. All questions were pretested using target audience groups to determine their validity.

FINDINGS

Results of the post campaign survey showed high levels of exposure, comprehension, satisfaction with the drama series and, most importantly, significant behavioral changes. Corroborating evidence from qualitative sources such as extensive favorable coverage in the media, a high volume of fan mail received, interviews of health personnel as well as exit interviews of family welfare clinic clients demonstrated clearly the high profile that "Aahat" achieved. For several weeks, as can be seen from the extensive press coverage cited above the drama series, "Aahat," was the "talk of the town."

Exposure was extremely high. Sixty percent of respondents said that they saw at least one episode of "Aahat" while about a third (31 percent) saw all six episodes. Seventy-five percent of those who saw "Aahat" had high exposures (4-6 episodes). Considering that twenty percent of respondents have no access to television, exposure to "Aahat" reaches the equivalent of more than three fourths of the intended audience. Translated into the American context, this exposure is almost like a "Superbowl" rating. Furthermore, as can be seen in Table 1, viewer loyalty was captured as there was a significant gap between those who saw all six and those who missed some episodes.

Translating the percentages in terms of number of viewers, an estimated 17-20 million people in Pakistan saw at least one episode of "Aahat." This conservative estimate does not include exposure to "pirated" versions of "Aahat" which are available in Bangladesh, India and surprisingly, in communities in the United States and Canada where there are significant Hindi and Urdu speaking immigrants.

Comprehension was relatively high. About three fourths (73 percent) perceived gender preference as a key message of "Aahat." More than half (64 percent) perceived

the need for spacing as a key point of the drama series. About half (48 percent) noted the importance of husband-wife communication as an important message of the drama.

Viewers' satisfaction with the drama was almost unanimous. Ninety three percent indicated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the series.

While the percentage of baseline respondents who strongly approved of family planning was high (65%), there was an increase of ten percentage points among those exposed to the drama (75 percent strongly approved).

Finally, nine percent of viewers said they had visited a family planning clinic after viewing "Aahat." Twelve percent of the viewers surveyed indicated the program had prompted them to take action to space their children.

Husband-Wife Communication

A great number, over 60 percent of those who responded to the baseline and final surveys indicated that they most often discussed family planning with their spouses. This was consistent with the National Institute of Population Studies finding cited above that 60 percent of respondents found their spouses to be the most important source of motivation for family planning.

Participants who watched "Aahat" were asked if the series would cause them to improve communication with their spouses. Some 44 percent said it was very likely to improve communication and 43 percent said it was likely. Five percent of viewers said they had acted to improve communication with their spouses on family planning as a result of watching "Aahat." Three times as many men reported acting to improve communication on family planning as women.

Men and women in the baseline and final surveys were asked how often they discussed family planning with their spouses and which topics were discussed. Forty-six percent of baseline respondents reported discussing family planning with their spouses often, compared to 54 percent of highly exposed viewers (those seeing 4-6 episodes), showing an 8 percentage point increase linked to exposure.

With respect to the topics which spouses discussed, almost three quarters of respondents in both baseline (71%) and final surveys (73%) said they discussed the

number of children they should have. Slightly fewer talked about when they should time the births of their children. A comparison of baseline (66%) and highly exposed groups (69%) shows a slight increase (three points) in discussion of child timing associated with exposure.

The most pronounced impact of the drama on topics that husbands and wives discussed was on family planning methods. While only 71 percent of baseline respondents discussed methods with their spouses, 83 percent of those highly exposed did so, a 12 point increase linked to the drama campaign. This result is interesting because, to be acceptable to Pakistan Television and its viewership, the drama could never mention contraceptive methods explicitly. In the supporting spot advertisements, the health worker could only state, "for the method of spacing that is best for you, come talk to us. Come to your nearest clinic or family welfare center." From the findings, it appears that the reference to modern contraceptive methods was not lost on the viewers of "Aahat."

When asked who makes the decisions in the family, about half of the respondents (47 percent) said that the husband is the sole decision-maker. About a third (34 percent) said that decision-making is shared between husband and wife. After viewing "Aahat," (SES variables were controlled for) this proportion was reversed. About half of the respondents (49 percent) said that husband and wife share decision-making while the number of respondents who said that husbands are the sole decision-maker dropped to 32 percent. The proportion of respondents who said that wives (4 percent) were the sole decision-maker remained stable.

Finally it is worth noting that, consistent with the literature on family planning, spousal communication in this survey was closely linked to family planning behavior. Of the nine percent of respondents who were exposed and acted to go to a clinic, almost all of them (98 percent) had discussed methods. Put in the reverse, 81% of those exposed who discussed family planning methods with their spouses visited a clinic.

CONCLUSION

A number of indicators attest to the success of the Pakistan social drama campaign in influencing the thinking, discourse and family planning behavior of its intended audience. They include:

- increasing awareness of the need for gender equality;
- increasing knowledge about spacing;
- strengthening favorable attitudes towards spacing and husband-wife communication;
- increasing husband-wife communication on family planning and contraceptive methods; and
- increasing clinic attendance

The lesson learned from the Pakistan experience is not simply that a successful communication campaign can influence behavior. That has been amply demonstrated in programs worldwide. Instead, this study has focused on one of the particular ways in which family planning communication can influence behavior change. Interventions such as the "Aahat" social drama influence people's ideation -- how they think about and talk about family planning. Witnessing the experiences of a couple on screen and hearing what they say to one another in the intimacy of their bedroom alters the boundaries of what is thinkable, the limits of what is speakable. New words and ideas and strategies for negotiation enter family discourse, or husband-wife communication. Entertainment dramas using the classic elements of narrative construction are particularly well suited to produce this effect, but how they accomplish it must be the subject of future studies. The present findings have been used simply to demonstrate that the "Aahat" drama campaign had a pronounced influence on couples' attitudes toward the way they communicated with one another, their practice of communication, the frequency of discussion on family planning related topics, and on the balance of spousal decision-making. As this study and others demonstrate, communication between spouses is an important determinant in family planning behavior.

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