

# Entertainment Education

## 1999 Porter Novelli Healthstyles Survey

### Soap Opera Viewers and Health Information

APHA Executive Summary, November 15, 2000

#### Introduction

Analysis of the 1999 Porter Novelli HealthStyles database was conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The dataset consists of responses from 20 items on the characteristics of daytime TV drama viewers, effects of health content from TV storylines on their learning about health and actions taken. Additional items were analyzed to describe health concerns, beliefs, behaviors, and health status of regular viewers.

The Porter Novelli HealthStyles survey is one of a pair of linked postal mail surveys sent to a sample of adults ages 18 and older, which is drawn to be nationally representative on seven U.S. Census Bureau demographic characteristics. The first survey is a consumer survey in which data on general media habits, product use, interests, and lifestyle are collected. The second survey, HealthStyles, is administered to respondents to the first survey in which data on health attitudes, behaviors, conditions, and information seeking are collected. HealthStyles is a proprietary database product developed by Porter Novelli, a social marketing and public relations firm. The survey was conducted in July and August of 1999 with 2,636 respondents.

#### Key Findings

Based on characteristics of soap opera audiences from this and other surveys, *regular viewers* include some of the age groups, education and income levels, and minorities most at risk for preventable diseases. Findings reveal that among *regular viewers*, i.e. viewers who watch soap operas at least twice a week:

- Almost one-fifth (19%) reported watching **daytime dramas** two or more times a week
- One-third (33%) watched at least a few times a month

- Almost half (48%) report they learned something about diseases and how to prevent them from daytime drama storylines
- More than one-third (34%) took some action as a result
- Have more health concerns, and express more negative beliefs and behaviors about prevention practices than *non-viewers*
- Women and blacks, who are among the groups with largest representation of *regular viewers*, report the highest rates of learning and action as a result of **daytime dramas** viewing.
- Seek out health information more than *non-viewers*, but have more difficulty understanding the information they read

## Implications

The Healthstyles findings suggest TV soap operas can serve a critical health education service by providing accurate, timely information about disease, injury and disability in their storylines for the more than 38 million people who regularly watch daytime dramas. Since *regular viewers* have more health concerns and negative beliefs and practices that may contribute to poor health, and they are highly receptive to health information in the soaps, they are an important audience for accurate, easily understood health messages. When even a small percentage of viewers take action as the result of a TV soap opera, to protect or improve their own health or the health of someone they know, millions of people and their families can benefit. If soap operas fail to convey accurate information, or portray risky behavior without the associated health consequences, there is the possibility millions of people will suffer negative effects.

Based on the survey findings, the following suggestions are noted for writers and producers of daytime dramas:

- Research and consider more health topics that have an impact on high-risk audiences
- Include credible prevention information that is stated clearly and repeated in the storyline to reinforce the message
- Show characters with negative beliefs and poor health practices suffering the consequences of their behavior
- Show realistic challenges and struggles these characters face in making changes, and the positive outcomes that result when they choose more positive beliefs and practices
- Include more storylines about people who have health limitations or impairment but practice healthy behaviors that contribute to their quality of life

## Summary of Findings (Sample Size: 2,636 Respondents)

### Frequency of Daytime Drama Viewing By Audiences

One-third (33%) of all respondents 18 years old and over report they watch **daytime dramas** (like *All My Children* or *The Young and The Restless*) at least a few times a month:

- Almost one-fifth (19%) are *regular viewers* who watch soaps two or more times a week.
- A majority of *regular viewers* (12% of all respondents) watch soaps four or more times a week.

Regular **daytime drama** viewing is reported by:

- 25% of females and 12% of males
- 31% of Blacks, 25% of Hispanics and 17% of whites
- 25% of ages 18–29, 16% of ages 30–64, and 20% of ages 65 and over
- 26% of those with high school or less education, and 15% with college or more
- 29% of those with income under \$20K, 20% between \$20K–\$50K, and 12% earning over \$50K

### Daytime Drama As Sources for Learning About Health

*Regular viewers* report they learned something about a disease or how to prevent it from the following television entertainment shows in the past year:

- **Daytime dramas** (48%)
- Primetime television shows (41%)
- Television talk shows (38%)

The three sources from which *regular viewers* report they most often learned something about diseases or how to prevent them in the past year are:

- Television (88%)
- Newspapers/Magazines (81%)
- Family/Friends/Doctors/Nurses/Others (74%)

These same sources were reported most often by all survey respondents (viewers and *non-viewers* of **daytime dramas**):

- Television (83%)
- Newspapers/magazines (78%)
- Family/friends/doctors/nurses/others (71%)
- Radio (24%)

- Internet (13%)
- Hotlines (1%)

Women who are *regular viewers* and report they learned something about diseases or how to prevent them from **daytime dramas** in the past year are:

- 53% of all women
- 69% of Black women
- 56% of Hispanic women
- 48% of white women

Almost two-fifths (38%) of *regular viewers* of **daytime dramas** agree they would like to see more health storylines on television. Only 17% disagree and the remaining were neutral.

### **Impact of Health Topics in Soap Operas: Action Taken**

More than one-third (34%) of *regular viewers* took one or more actions after hearing something about a health issue or disease on a **daytime dramas** in the past year:

- 25% told someone about it
- 13% told someone to do something to prevent the health problem
- 7% visited a clinic or doctor
- 6% did something to prevent the problem

Women who are *regular viewers* reported the following actions after hearing something about a health issue or disease on a **daytime dramas**:

Table 1. Actions taken by women who are regular viewers of daytime dramas

	All	White	Black	Hispanic
Told someone about the story or health topic	29%	26%	38%	31%
Told someone to do something or did something myself	15%	10%	29%	24%
Visited a clinic, doctor, or nurse	7%	4%	16%	13%
Did something to prevent the problem	7%	4%	17%	2%

*Regular viewers* of **daytime dramas** (i.e. viewers who watch at least twice a week) report more health concerns, more negative beliefs about health practices, and more risk behavior than *non-viewers*; they also report more interest in and less satisfaction with health information.

### **Health Concerns, Beliefs and Behaviors**

*Regular viewers* report more health concerns than *non-viewers*:

- Limited in activities because of impairment or health problems (36% vs. 29%)
- At risk for health problems (35% vs. 30%)
- More than one chronic health problem (26% vs. 19%)
- Health plan restrictions for getting proper medical treatment (23% vs. 20%)
- Low personal assessment of health (21% vs. 14%)

*Regular viewers* report more negative beliefs about frequently recommended health practices than *non-viewers*:

- Eating a diet low in fat is NOT important to their overall health (33% vs. 29%)
- Exercising regularly is NOT important to their overall health (31% vs. 25%)
- Not smoking cigarettes has NO effect on their overall health (18% vs. 13%)

*Regular viewers* report higher rates of risk behavior than *non-viewers*:

- Tendency to be slightly overweight or very overweight (72% vs. 67%)
- Daily cigarette smoking (29% vs. 24%)

### **Health Status**

*Regular viewers* report higher rates of health problems than *non-viewers*:

- High blood pressure (29% vs. 24%)
- Asthma (12% vs. 6%)
- Diabetes (13% vs. 9%)
- Stomach ulcers (8% vs. 5%)
- Depression (17% vs. 12%)
- Arthritis (32% vs. 22%)
- Migraine headaches (25% vs. 11%)

### **Health Information Seeking and Satisfaction**

*Regular viewers* seek out and attend to health information more than *non-viewers*:

- Bring something up with their doctor that (they read or heard) is relevant to their health (63% vs. 52%)
- Ask their doctor about something they heard or read in the media (43% vs. 38%)
- Make a point to read and watch stories about health (46% vs. 38%)
- Really enjoy learning about health issues (54% vs. 41%)
- Need to know about health issues so they can keep themselves and their families healthy (78% vs. 64%)
- Call a 1-800 number or hotline for health information (19% vs. 13%)
- Find out more about a health problem for someone else (57% vs. 48%)

*Regular viewers* are less satisfied with health information they receive than *non-viewers*:

- Have difficulty understanding a lot of the health information they read (24% vs. 20%)
- Never seem to find good answers to their health questions and concerns (18% vs. 13%)

## References

Pollard, W.E. and Beck, V. (2000). Audience analysis research for developing entertainment-education outreach: daytime dramas audiences and health information. Paper presented at the American Public Health Association 128<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting and Exposition, Boston, Massachusetts.

Pollard, W.E., Williams, I.J., and Beck, V. (2001, January). Soap operas, syndicated market research data bases, and public health: Statistical analysis of audience data for health communication planning. Poster presented at 8<sup>th</sup> Biennial CDC and ATSDR Symposium on Statistical Methods, Atlanta, GA.