

**Soap Opera Viewers and Health Information**  
**1999 Healthstyles Survey**  
**Executive Summary**  
**October, 1999**

Findings

The 1999 Healthstyles Survey reveals that almost half (48%) of the people who report they watch soap operas at least twice a week learned something about diseases and how to prevent them from the daytime drama storylines, and more than one-third (34%) took some action as a result. One in four (25%) told someone about it, 13% suggested someone do something about it, 7% visited a clinic or doctor, and 6% did something to prevent the problem. The findings are based on a national sample of adults 18 and over who watch network television daytime dramas on ABC, NBC and CBS. Almost one-fifth (19%) of the adults surveyed are regular viewers, watching two or more times a week. One-third (33%) watch at least a few times a month.

Analysis of the Healthstyles data was conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to assess if audiences learn about health information from soap operas and what actions they take as a result. 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. Health communication research suggests these groups are less likely to trust, use and have access to traditional sources of health information.

Implications

The Healthstyles findings suggest T.V. 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 watch daytime dramas. When even a small percentage of viewers takes action as the result of a T.V. 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 show risky behavior without the associated health consequences, there is the possibility millions of people can also suffer a negative impact.

About the Healthstyles Survey and Soap Opera Viewing Data

The Healthstyles Survey sample is drawn from the DDB Needham Lifestyles survey which bases its sampling on seven U.S. Census Bureau characteristics, considered by most market research experts to create a sample that best represents the U.S. population. Healthstyles is a proprietary database product developed by Porter Novelli, a full-service social marketing and public relations firm. A total of 2,636 respondents answered questions on a mail survey for the 1999 Healthstyles Survey. The information in this summary is based on analysis of five items:

- Frequency of soap opera viewing
- Sources of information about diseases or how to prevent them
- Kinds of TV programs as sources of information about diseases or how to prevent them
- Action taken after hearing something about a health issue or disease on a soap opera
- Preference for more health storylines on T.V.

**Soap Opera Viewers and Health Information**  
**1999 Healthstyles Survey**  
**Summary of Findings**  
**(Sample Size: 2,636 Respondents)**

Impact of Health Topics in Soap Operas: Action Taken

- **More than one-third (34%) of regular viewers (watch at least twice a week) took one or more actions after hearing something about a health issue or disease on a soap opera in the past year:**
  - S Told someone about it (25%)
  - S Told someone to do something to prevent the health problem (13%)
  - S Visited a clinic or doctor (7%)
  - S Did something to prevent the problem (6%)
  
- **Women who are regular viewers reported the following actions after hearing something about a health issue or disease on a soap opera:**
  - S 29% told someone about it – 38% of Black, 31% of Hispanic, and 26% of white
  - S 15% told someone to do something to prevent the health problem – 29% of Black, 24% of Hispanic, and 10% of white
  - S 7% visited a clinic or doctor – 16% of Black, 13% of Hispanic, and 4% of white
  - S 6% did something to prevent the problem – 17% of Black, 2% of Hispanic, and 4% of white

Television and Daytime Drama As Sources of Learning About Disease and Prevention

- **Regular soap opera viewers report they learned something about diseases or how to prevent them from the following television entertainment shows in the past year:**
  - S Soap operas (48%)
  - S Primetime television shows (41%)
  - S 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 soap operas):**
  - S Television (83%)
  - S Newspapers/magazines (78%)
  - S Family/friends/doctors/nurses/others (71%)
  - S Radio (24%)
  - S Internet (13%)

S Hotlines (1%).

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

S 53% of all women

S 69% of Black women

S 56% of Hispanic women

S 48% of white women

#### Frequency of Daytime Drama Viewing By Audiences

- **One-third (33%) of all respondents 18 years old and over report they watch daytime dramas at least a few times a month:**

- Almost one-fifth (19%) are regular viewers who watch soaps two or more times every week.

- A majority of regular viewers (12% of all respondents) watch soaps four or more times every week.

- **Regular soap opera viewing is reported by:**

S 25% of females and 12% of males

S 31% of Blacks, 25% of Hispanics and 17% of whites

S 25% of ages 18-29, 20% of age 65 and over, and 16% of ages 30-64

S 26% of those with high school or less education, and 15% with college or more

S 29% of those earning under \$20,000, 20% earning \$20-50,000, and 12% earning over \$50,000

#### Preferences for More Health Topics in Daytime Drama

- **38% of regular viewers of soap operas agree they would like to see more health storylines on television. Only 17% disagree and the remaining were neutral.**