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THE PROMISE OF EDUTAINMENT TO PREVENT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN

SUMMARY

Our review found emerging evidence of protective effects of edutainment on diverse forms of violence against women and children… With increased backtracking on women's rights and harmful practices in some settings, edutainment has the potential to reach broad segments of the population to role- model positive, non-violent behaviour when those in power do not.

—Peterman (2025)

Defined as creative art forms (films, TV and radio shows, social media, video games, music videos, graphic novels, animation, theatre, virtual reality) that integrate educational material into an entertaining storyline, edutainment is an increasingly popular way to influence behaviour change at scale. Its power lies in the development of characters and narratives that can engage viewers alongside their friends, family, and social circles. Edutainment can often be shared or broadcast at scale and may therefore be more cost-effective than traditional group-based or community interventions. However, rigorous research on its effectiveness in addressing violence against women and children is still emerging.

Prevention Collaborative conducted a detailed evidence review that identified 21 rigorous evaluations demonstrating the effectiveness of edutainment on anti-violence attitudes and norms and violent behaviours in low- and middle-income country settings.[1] All 21 studies measured attitudes and norms, with 15 (71 percent) showing that edutainment led to shifts towards anti-violence attitudes and norms. Meanwhile, 11 studies measured behaviours, with seven (64 percent) showing that edutainment reduced experiences of violence. To better understand the state of broader edutainment programmes with themes on interpersonal violence, we also commissioned a rapid review of programming that had not been as rigorously evaluated, in order to solidify practice-based lessons (available upon request).

This brief summarises the findings from the evidence review according to the form of violence addressed – violence against women (VAW); child, early and forced marriage; female genital mutilation (FGM); or violence against children (VAC) – and draws implications from both reviews that are applicable for programme designers, practitioners, and researchers.

SCOPE OF THE EVIDENCE REVIEW

For the review, we searched for rigorous quantitative evaluations of edutainment programmes using experimental or quasi-experimental methods through online databases and by consulting experts. We also reviewed qualitative studies to provide additional context and to understand mechanisms of change.

The majority of studies took place in sub-Saharan Africa (12 studies: Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia) and South Asia (six studies: Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan), with fewer studies in Southeast Asia (one study: Vietnam), Latin and South America (one study: Mexico), and Middle East and North Africa (one study: Egypt).

Most studies evaluated TV series, films, or other video-based content (15 studies, 71 percent) and radio or audio content (seven studies, 33 percent). Between two and five studies each focused on participatory theatre, social media (including Facebook and Instagram), chatbots, video games, online learning, or combinations of other diverse forms of multimedia, including music, posters, and puppet shows. Nine studies (43 percent) included interventions that used more than one type of media.

Figure 1. Geographical distribution of the studies included in the review.
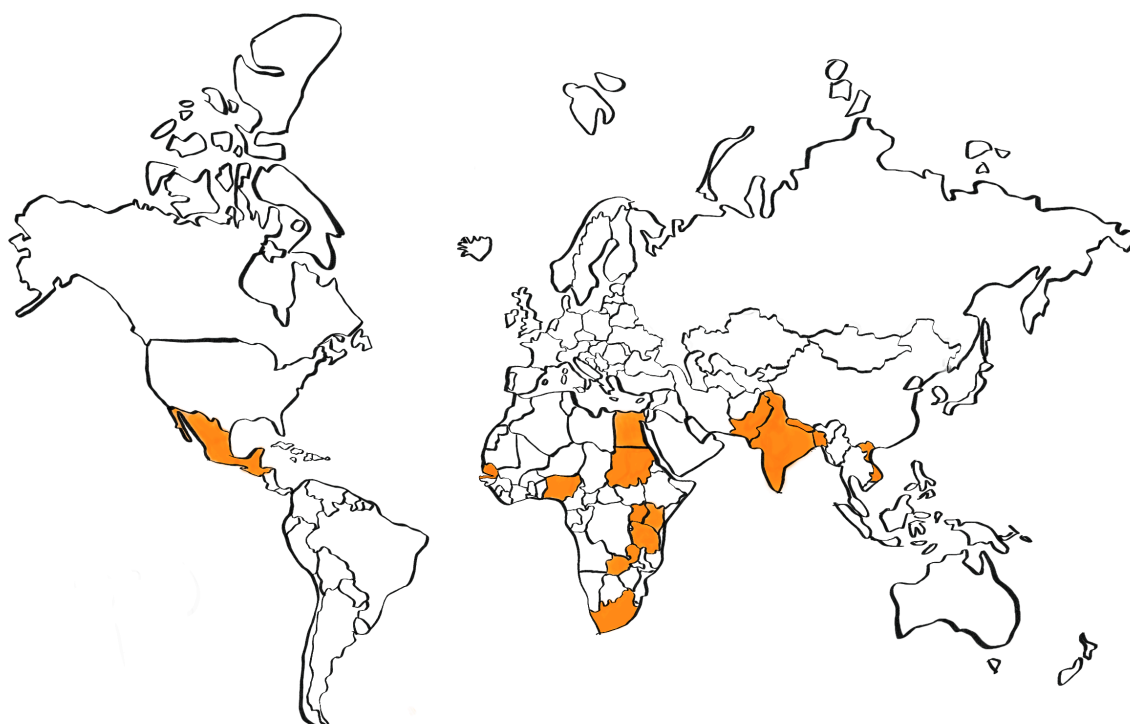
RESULTS

Figure 2 summarises the overall results across studies, categorising them into cases where **protective effects** were found on violence, where **null results** were observed, and where **mixed or adverse effects** were identified. All 21 studies measured attitudes and norms, with 15 (71 percent) showing that edutainment led to shifts towards anti-violence attitudes and norms. Eleven studies measured behaviours, with seven studies (64 percent) demonstrating that edutainment reduced experiences of violence.

The largest number of studies focused on violence against women; however, the findings were relatively weak compared to other forms of violence, with 57-69 percent showing protective impacts across outcomes. The findings were stronger for studies on child, early, and forced marriage (63- 75 percent showed protective effects) and FGM (75-100 percent), though these findings were based on a limited number of studies. Only one study was found for violence against children, showing no effects.

A small number of studies identified adverse impacts; however, these were largely attributed to increased reporting or disclosure, rather than actual increases in violence. Across multiple studies and forms of violence, impacts varied by intervention component, follow- up period, or target group.

1 IMPACTS ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Of the studies measuring violence against women (VAW) outcomes, 57 percent (four of seven studies) showed protective effects on behaviours, while 69 percent (9 of 13 studies) promoted anti-violence attitudes and norms.

Studies demonstrating protective effects on **behaviours** addressed diverse target groups and used a variety of media:

▶ Eight months after exposure to three short videos showing stories of VAW survivors, women in rural Uganda reported reductions in experiences of VAW and in the frequency of violence.[2]

▶ Ten years or more after exposure to *Jana Sanskriti* participatory theatre – interactive plots focusing on VAW – women in India reported decreases in intimate partner violence (IPV).[3]

▶ After exposure to *ChattyCuz* – an interactive WhatsApp chatbot 'gamified' to provide motivational, symbolic rewards and encourage users to collect 'squad members' – young women in South Africa reported a reduction in IPV.[4]

▶ Up to a year after participating in three hours of *Global Consent* – a web-based training intervention including a serial drama – young men in Vietnam reported a reduction in sexually violent behaviour.[5]

Among the intervention evaluations that measured VAW **attitudes and/or norms**, many studies found variable effects depending on the intervention component, delivery, follow-up

period, or target group(s). For example, in Nigeria, attitudes justifying IPV reduced among young men exposed to *MTV's Shuga* series, which included a subplot on IPV, but not among young women.[6]

Meanwhile, three studies reported either no or mixed impacts on behaviour, and four studies (including several that reported impacts on behaviours) showed little or no impact on VAW attitudes and norms. We note that adverse effects, found in three studies, were attributed by the authors as reflecting increased reporting, underpinned by changes in norms or concepts of what constitutes 'violence', rather than actual increases in violence.

2 IMPACTS ON CHILD, EARLY, AND FORCED MARRIAGE

Of the eight studies examining measures of child, early, or forced marriage, four measured impacts on **behaviours**, with three (75 percent) showing protective effects and one showing no effect.

▶ A 10-minute video screening of a street theatre performance in rural Pakistan, followed by two facilitated discussions (immediately after the screening and after three months), showed the largest and most consistent impacts, varying by target group:[7]

   ▶ Large reductions in child marriage using household-level metrics when men and adolescent boys were targeted, as well as when men and boys were jointly targeted alongside women and adolescent girls. However, no impacts were observed in households where only women and girls were targeted).

   ▶ Significant reductions across all study designs from village-level marriage statistics, indicating potential spillover effects to households not directly targeted by the intervention.

▶ In rural Nigeria, aspirational videos and an m-Learning app decreased the likelihood of a child in targeted households being married and becoming a parent, at 12–17-month follow-up.[8]

▶ India's *Breakthrough* package (TV, radio, theatre, and community mobilisation), evaluated after 5.5 years, reduced child marriage in several study arms.[9]

Among the eight studies measuring **attitudes and/or norms**, five (63 percent) reported decreases in attitudes or norms justifying child, early, or forced marriage, with effects varying by intervention component and follow-up period. For example:

▶ In Tanzania, *Tamapendo* (a two-hour radio drama broadcast at the village level) increased men's and women's attitudes and norms rejecting forced marriage after two weeks. While impacts on norms diminished over 15 months, attitudes rejecting forced marriage remained significant.[10]

▶ In Nigeria, the aforementioned combination of aspirational videos and phone-based m-Learning games reduced acceptance of early marriage; however, the aspirational videos alone did not show the same impact.[8]

The two studies showing overall no effects (*Icchedana* TV series in Bangladesh[11] and *Pangani FM*[12] radio in Tanzania) faced take-up challenges, which may explain the inability to identify impacts. The only adverse effect – an increase in support for early marriage – emerged in one study arm of the Breakthrough mass media package in rural India, though the study authors provided no explanation for this outcome.[9]

③ IMPACTS ON FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

Of the four studies examining measures of FGM, only one (*C'est la vie!*, a West African TV series screened via film clubs) measured an FGM behaviour outcome. Findings showed an increase in daughters of participants remaining uncut nine months after the intervention ended. However, the addition of post-screening discussion groups and workshops achieved no additional impacts on FGM outcomes.[13]

Among the four studies measuring FGM attitudes and/or norms, three (75 percent) reported at least one decrease in attitudes or norms justifying FGM. For example:

▶ In rural Sudan, exposure to the *Sufara Saleema* campaign — featuring community dialogues and abandonment pledges designed to create new positive norms for uncut girls —resulted in decreases in norms condoning FGM.[14]

▶ Also in rural Sudan, 90-minute films with varying subplots on FGM (focusing on individual values around FGM, the marriageability of cut girls, or a combination of both) improved attitudes towards uncut girls among both men and women. However, only the combined subplot achieved impacts that lasted beyond a week after viewing.[15]

④ IMPACTS ON VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

Only one study examined violence against children (VAC) outcomes. The *Pangani FM* community radio intervention in Tanzania found no impacts on VAC attitudes or behaviours, possibly linked to the low exposure of populations taking part in the study.[13]

Figure 2. Summary of study-level effectiveness of edutainment by violence and outcome type (n=21 studies)
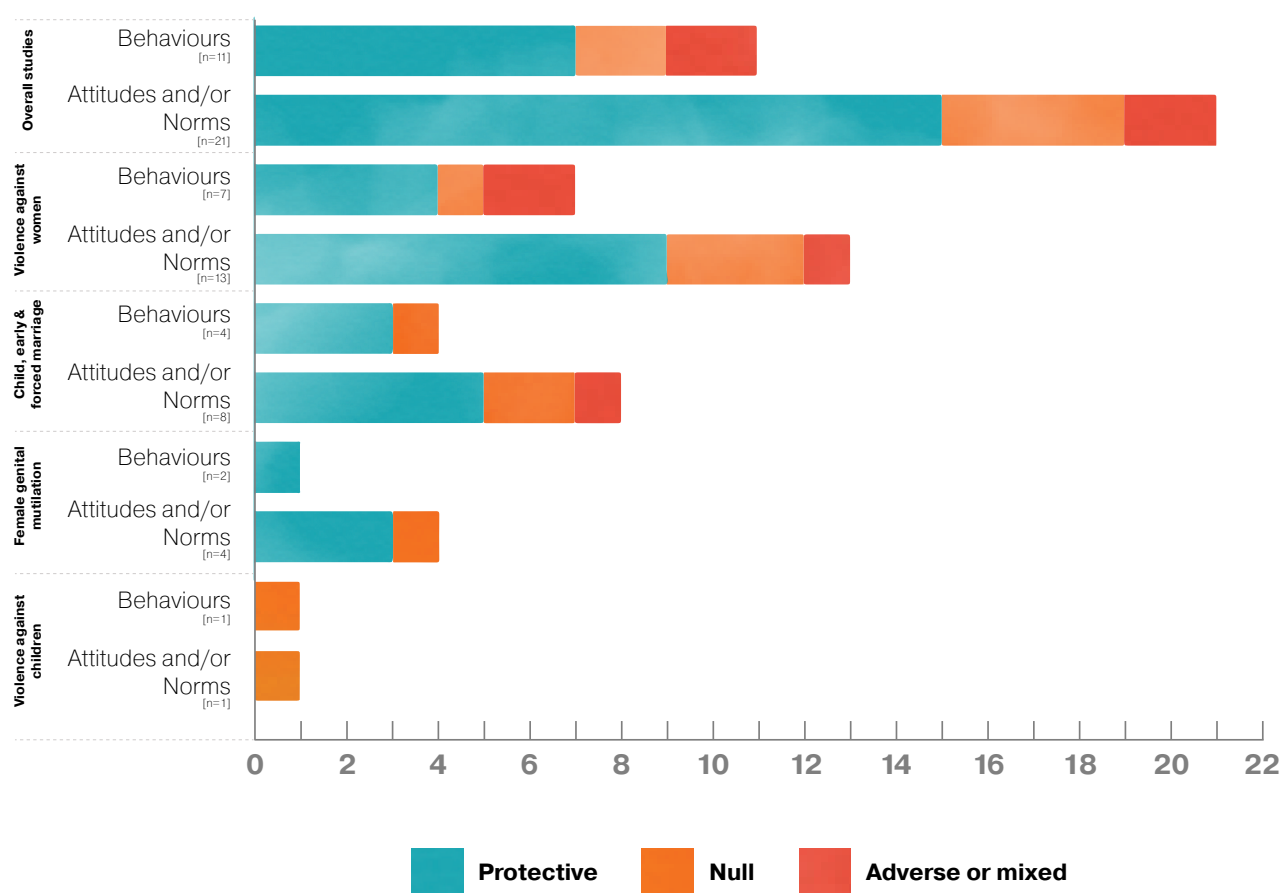
Adapted from Peterman (2025)

MECHANISMS

How does edutainment work? Studies indicate four main mechanisms underlying the impacts of the reviewed programmes:

1. **Information Channel.** Edutainment may expose participants to new information or increase awareness about violence, conveying knowledge about its adverse health, social, and legal consequences. For example, in various studies, participants gained knowledge about the harmful health consequences of FGM, the illegality of sexual violence, the benefits of delaying marriage, and ways to access social and legal services for VAW.

2. **Individual Persuasion Channel.** Edutainment can introduce role models who demonstrate new or alternative behaviours that participants had not previously understood or appreciated. For example, in the MTV Shuga evaluation in Nigeria, young men and women who remembered and emotionally engaged with fictional characters were less likely to justify IPV by the end of the study.[6]

3. **Norm Diffusion.** Edutainment may lead to the spread and adoption of new norms if participants believe or are aware that others in their social circles, networks, or communities are also changing their stance on the same beliefs. For example, an audio soap opera in Mexico led to increased anti-VAW attitudes and norms when the content was screened in groups but did not show the same impact when individuals listened to a CD on their own.[16]

4. **Service Linkages.** A pathway may exist between edutainment and accessing services. For example, a TV series and video intervention in Egypt, implemented during COVID-19, with explicit instructions and linkages to services increased women's willingness to contact a support organisation or use online resources.[17]

Synergies likely exist across these mechanisms of change, with additional pathways depending on the type of media and complementary programming. Qualitative evidence confirms the importance of network diffusion of messages, community-based implementation models, and social pressure to adopt new behaviours. In addition, qualitative evidence engages with the concept of agency and the willingness to take action against violence as a bystander. For example, *Soul City* in South Africa spurred community activism, including marches, protests, and bystander behaviours to address VAW.[18] A web-based curriculum in Vietnam targeting male university students increased bystander action, despite not changing attitudes.[5, 19] Further qualitative research is needed to better delineate and develop these mechanisms of change.

Evidence suggests the promise of repeated and guided messaging to groups of individuals, including (potential) male perpetrators, who share and conform to the same social norms. Messages and storylines are likely to be more effective if developed and adapted for specific audiences, given the central role of culture and gender norms in shaping violence across contexts.

—Peterman (2025)

IMPLICATIONS

Edutainment is a promising strategy for scaling violence prevention efforts, particularly given increases in use of mobile phones and internet connectivity around the world. If effective, edutainment is likely to be highly cost-effective due to its ability to reach large audiences at a low cost (after production).

Our understanding of edutainment for violence prevention is rapidly growing —nearly all the publications in this review were released within the preceding five years. As the evidence-base grows, these initial implications and lessons for practice and research are expected to change over time.

Storylines and Messaging Grounded in Local Realities

As with all programmes, edutainment should be based on culturally relevant and locally grounded formative research and testing to ensure a clear understanding of the issue and to ensure content is engaging and convincing. Thematic experts and relevant organisations working with target audiences should be involved in the design, development, and testing of the content. This best practice requires trade-offs with the objectives of scalability, requiring balancing between developing relevant and locally grounded content while appealing to broader audiences.

Conceptual Clarity and Evidence on Mechanisms

Messaging and content should be developed with a clear conceptual understanding of *how* edutainment interventions are likely to work to shift attitudes, norms, and behaviours related to violence. A clear theory of the pathways of change in the design process, along with opportunities to test these pathways through rigorous evaluation, would strengthen future programmes.

Promising Design and Implementation Elements

Several promising features of edutainment interventions warrant further exploration and testing across different contexts, including through longer-term evaluation:

- Compelling and memorable characters and emotionally engaging storylines
- Content and activities specifically designed to engage men and boys
- Intensifying diffusion and potential impact by saturating social networks and publicly sharing messaging
- Multi-component interventions, such as combining community mobilisation, call-in radio shows, and online conversations
- Linking edutainment to specific services or social-change movements to create ripple effects beyond the core edutainment content

Attention to Ethics

The ethical aspects of intervention development require further attention. This includes monitoring potential backlash, preventing adverse effects, and ensuring programme content does not re-traumatise survivors or reinforce harmful norms.

Research Gaps

There is a significant lack of rigorous research on edutainment programmes aimed at preventing violence against children (VAC) in homes, schools, and public spaces. Given the high prevalence of VAC and how normative it is in much of the world, this is a major gap in knowledge.

In addition, research methodological challenges remain, including: addressing **take-up challenges**, including the intensity and sustainability of programmes over time, increasing consistency and strengthening measurement of violence outcomes, and addressing social desirability in measurement of key outcomes and mechanisms of impact.

NEXT STEPS

To explicitly test theory, future studies should vary the design and delivery of edutainment programmes to reduce VAW and VAC. Rigorous quantitative and qualitative studies are needed to fill evidence gaps, particularly on VAC and FGM. Open questions include:

▶ How intensive or sustained do content and messaging need to be to have lasting impacts?
▶ Who should be targeted and (or) engaged to maximise behaviour change? Which platforms and media formats are most effective?
▶ How do social norm networks or multiplier effects change or sustain impacts over time?
▶ What complementary programming can boost impacts, and how?
▶ How cost-effective are edutainment strategies compared to alternative behaviour-change models?

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