

Television Is Useful in Promoting Safe Sexual Practices to Student Populations: A Mixed-Methods Questionnaire Exploring the Impact of Channel Four's 'It's a Sin (2021)'

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Abstract : Background: Public Health England recognises unprotected sex and consequent transmission of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) as significant problems within student populations. Government surveys show that 50% of sexually-active young adults engage in unprotected sex with new partners, with 10% never using condoms. The recent Channel Four mini-series 'It's a Sin' dramatises the 1980s AIDS epidemic and has been praised for its educational value and for promoting safe sexual practices to its viewers. This mixed-methods questionnaire study aims to investigate whether the series can change attitudes towards safe sex in student populations, can promote the use of condoms in student populations, and whether television, in general, is a useful tool for promoting health education. Methods: A questionnaire, created on Microsoft Forms, was distributed to students at the University of Birmingham via Facebook groups between September 2021 and May 2022. To consent, participants had to be aged 18 or over, a student at the university, have seen the entire series of 'It's a Sin', and read the study information. Data was confidentially stored within the University's secured OneDrive in accordance with the study's approved ethics application. Quantitative questions measured participants' attitudes and behaviours using Likert scales. Qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis. Quantitative Results: 78 students completed the questionnaire. 43 participants (55%) felt that the series 'It's a Sin' promoted safe sex. 74 participants (96%) and 31 participants (39%) said they were 'very likely' or 'likely' to use condoms with a casual partner during penetrative sex and oral sex respectively. 27 participants (35%) felt that watching 'It's a Sin' made them more likely to use condoms; of these 27 participants, all were 'very likely' or 'likely' to use condoms during penetrative sex, and 9 were 'very likely' or 'likely' to during oral sex. 49 participants (63%) and 53 participants (68%) felt that television is a good way to provide health education and to promote healthy behaviours respectively. Qualitative Results: 56 participants (72%) gave reasons why the series had been associated with an increased uptake in HIV testing. Three themes emerged: increased education and attention, decreased stigmatisation, and relatability of characters on screen. Conclusions: This study suggests that the series 'It's a Sin' can influence attitudes towards and the uptake of safe sexual practices. It would be useful for further research - using larger, randomised samples - to explore impacts upon populations lesser-educated about sexual health, who potentially have more to gain from watching series such as 'It's a Sin'.

Keywords : GUM, It's a sin, media, sexual health, students, television, tv

Conference Title : ICACPHMM 2022 : International Conference on Advances in Communication and Public Health and Mass Media

Conference Location : London, United Kingdom

Conference Dates : September 22-23, 2022