

EVALUATION OF SOCIAL MARKETING OF ORAL REHYDRATION THERAPY

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ABSTRACT

Attempts, at social marketing of oral rehydration therapy (ORT) through television, in changing the knowledge and practice of mothers with regard to its use was assessed. One hundred and eighty seven consecutive mothers (38 excluded due to non use of ORT) were administered a preplanned questionnaire to assess their socio-economic profile, educational status, concept of diarrhea and correct use of ORT. Fifty nine mothers who watched these programmes on TV regularly formed the study group. These were compared with 90 mothers who had gained such knowledge from non-television sources. The correct application of knowledge of ORT was significantly better in study group compared with control group. The educational status of mothers had a positive impact on motivation to use ORT at home in the study group. Mass media campaigns through "TV spots" is an effective way of improving knowledge of mothers on ORT in a developing country.

Key words: Oral rehydration therapy, Social marketing, Television spots.

Oral rehydration therapy (ORT), a major technical advance of this century, is responsible for significant reduction of mortality due to diarrheal illnesses amongst children. Efforts to popularise ORT among mothers must involve the dissemination of information regarding its purpose and the procedure relating to its use. To be effective, they must be based upon a better understanding of the interaction between knowledge, skills and beliefs in the community, which are inherent to successful practice of ORT(1).

'Social marketing' attempts to use commercial marketing techniques to promote products desirable from public health viewpoint(2). These short term but highly intensive efforts are essential in developing countries which face constraints of money and manpower. As popularity of television continues to rise in our country, this powerful electronic media serves as an ideal conduit for successful social marketing of ORT.

Government of India (Ministry of Health) with help from UNICEF, has launched a mass media campaign to popularise ORT through television since 1989. Brief spots, using popular TV artistes, are advertised at the "prime time" viewership to impart simple and clear messages regarding ORT. The present study was carried out to assess the effectiveness of these programmes in bringing about a change in knowledge, attitude and practice of mothers in relation to use of ORT.

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Material and Methods

Mothers of 187 consecutive children, attending Diarrhea Treatment Unit of Pediatric Outpatient Department were interviewed with a pre planned questionnaire. A detailed socio-economic profile and educational status of these mothers, who were residents of slums of East Delhi, were obtained. For purpose of this study, mothers, who had completed primary school education (upto 5th standard) were considered educated.

The TV spots specifically emphasise WHO-ORS formula, for oral rehydration therapy. The ORS packets are freely available to the mothers through dispensaries and urban basic services volunteers. Since the purpose of our study was to assess success of TV campaign, the mothers were questioned regarding awareness of oral rehydration solution, source of its information, correct technique of its reconstitution and whether they administer this therapy at home for their children before taking the child to hospital.

Thirty eight mothers amongst 187 who had not heard of ORT at all, were excluded from further study. Fifty nine mothers who watched ORT programmes regularly on television formed the study group. Their knowledge and practices were compared with 90 mothers who had picked up ORT concept from non television sources, *i.e.*, various health personnels such as doctors, paramedical workers, urban basic services volunteers, *etc.* The result were analysed using χ^2 test.

Results

The social profile and educational status of mothers who gave source of ORT information as television were not significantly different from those who had obtained it from health staff (*Table I*). The knowledge of correct reconstitution of oral rehydration solution was significantly better in mothers who learned it from TV spots as compared to mothers who gained this information from health personnel (*Table II*). Television campaign were as

TABLE I—Social Profile of Mothers

Profile	Source of ORT information	
	Television (n = 59)	Health staff (n = 90)
1. Mean age (Years \pm SD)	25.59 \pm 4.69	25.14 \pm 4.21
2. Number of uneducated mothers	32 (54.2)	59 (65.6)
3. Hutment (Jhuggi) dwellers	11 (18.64)	15 (16.66)
4. No toilet facility in house	21 (35.59)	39 (43.33)
5. Episodes of diarrhea in previous 6 months	2.23 \pm 1.72	2.13 \pm 1.75

Figures in parentheses are percentages.

TABLE II—*Mothers' Experience on ORT*

Experience	Source of ORT information	
	Television (n = 59)	Health staff (n = 90)
1. Knows to prepare oral rehydration solution correctly	37* (62.7)	34 (37.7)
2. Uses ORT for diarrhea at home	41 (69.49)	48 (53.33)
3. Continued feeding	52 (88.13)	73 (81.11)

p < 0.01; Figures in parentheses are percentages.

effective as health personnel in motivating the mothers in starting ORT at home. Majority of mothers in both the groups continued to feed the child with breast or dairy milk despite diarrheal illnesses.

Interesting observations were made when this data was analysed with respect to educational status of mothers. Mass media campaigns on television were significantly better than advice by health staff in improving the knowledge and practice of educated mothers regarding ORT. The TV spots were only as effective as advice rendered by health staff in popularising ORT amongst uneducated mothers (Table III).

Discussion

The prime consideration in health education campaigns on ORT are increasing the acceptability, utilisation rates and knowledge of correct reconstitution of ORT with respect to ingredients and volume(3). The current study confirms that "ORT spots" on television do help to achieve the above objectives. The knowledge of correct reconstitution of oral rehydration solution

was significantly better in mothers who learnt this technique from "ORT spots" on television. These audio-visual campaigns by way of "live demonstration" have better impact on target audience. Popular TV artistes associated with these programmes help to capture attention of mothers who then acquire better skills in oral rehydration techniques.

The efficacy of these programmes is comparable to advice rendered by health staff in motivating the mother to start ORT at home in pooled data. However, when this data was split according to educational status of mothers, it was noted that motivation to start ORT at home was significantly higher in study group amongst educated mothers. Studies on mass media ORT campaigns through radio in Bangladesh revealed that educational status of mothers was positively related to ORT use(4). Education brings about desirable changes in attitude and behavior of mothers so that they become more receptive and a "newer knowledge" is easily acceptable to them(5). It fosters a conviction in the efficacy of modern medicine and motivates the mother to start therapy at home. Further television being a

TABLE III—*Mothers Experience on ORT*

Source of ORT information	Educational status of mother				
	Educated		Uneducated		
	Television (n = 27)	Health staff (n = 31)	Television (n = 32)	Health staff (n = 59)	
1. Knows to prepare oral rehydration solution correctly	22 (81.5)	11 (35.5)	p < 0.01	15 (46.9)	23 (39.0)
2. Uses ORT for diarrhea at home	22 (81.5)	13 (41.9)	p < 0.01	19 (59.3)	35 (59.3)

Figures in parentheses are percentages.

captivating medium may attract the attention of educated mothers more compared to health personnel.

One of the main objectives of ORT is that mother should be able to commence this therapy for a child with diarrhea at home using correct technique. The present study recommends continuation of these television spots to popularise ORT. The World Health Organization recommends that for ideal social marketing standardized messages must be relayed by media capable of reaching those affected(6). In developing countries like India, with serious shortage of money and trained manpower, social marketing through television spots is a cheap and effective way to popularise the standardized instructions on ORT tailored to specific requirements of mothers.

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