

Headline **AIDS project changes attitudes to disease**
Date **23 Jul 2010**
MediaTitle **New Sarawak Tribute**
Section **Supplement**
Journalist **N/A**
Frequency **Daily**
Circ / Read **46,471 / 164,773**

Language **English**
Page No **L-T12**
Article Size **206 cm²**
Color **Full Color**
ADValue **868**
PRValue **2,603**



AIDS project changes attitudes to disease

MTV drama programmes about HIV and AIDS shown to young people in some of the highest-risk countries in Africa and the Caribbean had a dramatic affect on attitudes to the disease, a study released showed.

A UN-backed project by the MTV music channel used television dramas designed for young people to convey messages about the risks of HIV infection from having unsafe sex, multiple partners and injecting drugs and also to give information about testing, treatment and overcoming stigma.

Researchers from the United States who studied the effect of

the programmes on audiences in Kenya, Zambia and Trinidad and Tobago found they altered young people's thinking about HIV and AIDS.

MTV now plans to take the project to more countries in an effort to change attitudes.

"The results have shown a really positive change in terms of attitudes, knowledge and the sense among young people that they understand the risks and can take action to address them," said Susan Kasedde, a specialist in HIV prevention among adolescents at Unicef, the UN children's fund that backed the project.

The music channel launched a campaign called 'MTV Staying Alive' in 1998, and has produced films, competitions and celebrity tie-ins to educate young people about the risks of HIV and AIDS and encourage them to talk about it.

Sub-Saharan Africa remains the region most heavily affected HIV, accounting for 67 percent of the 33.4 million people living with the virus worldwide.

A study published last week found that young people in Africa were leading a "revolution" in HIV prevention and driving down rates of the disease by having safer sex

and fewer sexual partners.

Bill Roedy, chief executive of MTV Networks International, told Reuters he hoped this programme would help increase the trend towards less risky sexual behaviour in young people.

Part of the MTV project was a TV series called Shuga, which first aired in Kenya in November 2009. Filmed in Nairobi, it was described as a hard-hitting drama series about "the reckless sex lives and loves of young Kenyans and their partners."

MTV asked scientists from Johns Hopkins University in the United States to analyse the impact of the programmes.

Their study found they were watched by a very high proportion of the target audience of people aged 16 to 24 - 64 percent in Nairobi - and young people said they understood and thought about its messages.

More than 80 percent of those who saw Shuga believed it changed their thinking about multiple concurrent partners, HIV testing and the stigma associated with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) that causes AIDS.

"These results make us determined and completely committed to continuing our campaigns globally," Roedy said. - Reuters

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MTV music channel logo.