

# COMMUNICATION Impact!

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HEALTH COMMUNICATION PARTNERSHIP



The cast of *Tsha Tsha*, a serial drama about HIV/AIDS that reaches 1.8 million South Africans each week at a cost of just \$0.55 per person.



### To learn more contact:

Patrick Coleman  
South Africa Country Representative  
patrick@jhuccp.co.za  
or

Larry Kincaid, PhD  
Sr. Advisor, Research and Evaluation  
lkincaid@jhuccp.org

Health Communication Partnership  
based at Johns Hopkins University  
Bloomberg School of Public Health  
Center for Communication Programs  
111 Market Place, Suite 310  
Baltimore, Maryland 21202, USA  
Tel: (410) 659-6300  
Fax: (410) 659-6266  
Website: <http://www.jhuccp.org>  
E-mail: [orders@jhuccp.org](mailto:orders@jhuccp.org)

## South African HIV/AIDS Serial Drama Helps Decrease Stigma and Improve Prevention Behaviors among Youth

A powerful television serial drama about young adults living in a rural South African town impacted by HIV/AIDS has led to improved attitudes about HIV/AIDS, stigma, living openly and positively with HIV, and faithfulness among its viewers. *Tsha Tsha* is a gritty Nguni language drama (with English subtitles) set in the Eastern Cape that focuses on the lives of several young people exploring love, sex, and relationships in a world affected by the realities of the AIDS pandemic.

The South African Broadcasting Corporation Limited, Education Division (SABC), Curious Pictures, the Centre for AIDS Development Research and Evaluation (CADRE), and the Health Communication Partnership (HCP) collaborated to develop this entertainment-education drama series, which premiered in April 2003. By depicting the challenges facing young South Africans, the series aims to enhance its young adult viewers' capacity to reflect on their own problems, engage in developing solutions, and become active agents in shaping their future.

The U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) supports the research, development, and production of *Tsha Tsha* through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), which supports HCP. SABC-Education produces, markets, and broadcasts the series, and contributes nearly half its total cost. HCP provides technical assistance in all aspects of the show's design, scripts, production, research and evaluation, and funds all elements of production. HCP —

which is based at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health's Center for Communication Programs (CCP) — also works with SABC-Education, CADRE and other South African partner organizations to set up community viewing clubs for the series.

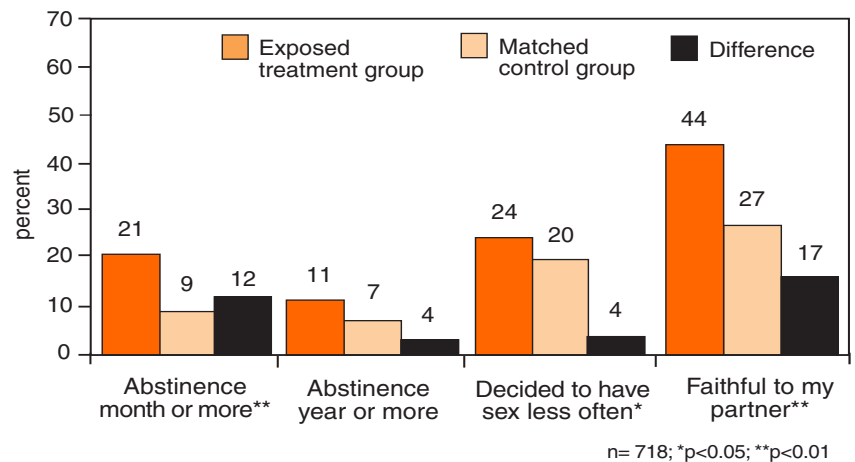
CADRE partners with HCP on the research component and coordinates an effort among a diverse group of NGOs and civil society organizations to spark a dialogue on HIV/AIDS themes emanating from each week's broadcast.

### Ballroom Dance Backdrop

Ballroom dancing provides a thread of continuity in the series as the young people's lives unfold and also brings the characters together. At the same time, it illustrates creative relationships between people that are not beset by the complexities of life outside of the codes of dance. The ballroom dancing club serves as a metaphoric background for exploring relationships and intimacy.

Based on national audience rating data provided by SABC, *Tsha Tsha* reaches an average of 1.8 million viewers each week, for an estimated cost of \$.55 per person reached. *Tsha Tsha* is now in its fourth season, and the partners have produced 26 24-minute episodes to air on Friday nights during prime time. To broaden its reach even more, *Tsha Tsha's* weekly themes are modified into radio dramas called "Body, Mind, and Soul," which reach 6 million listeners through 60 community radio

Figure 1:  
Reported sexual behavior after 26 episodes



stations. The stations offer listeners the opportunity to discuss the themes on the air afterwards. SABC Radio also holds a live “drive time” talk show for 30 minutes the day after *Tsha Tsha* is broadcast.

The show takes place in Lubusi, a fictional rural town based on the actual town of Peddie. A team of researchers and production crew visited Peddie prior to the first season to become familiar with the issues important to the young people living there. The team also conducted numerous focus groups with people representing a broad range of community interests. Participants were invited to share stories important in their own lives and the life of the community. Studying the culture of ballroom dancing was also part of the formative research, which helped shaped the process of constructing characters and developing the story.

### Impact Results

CADRE and HCP researchers evaluated audience responses to the first 26 episodes based on data collected between April 2003 and May 2004. The quantitative component of the study involved a three-wave panel study. Researchers used systematic and random sampling methods in metropolitan, small town, and rural areas to identify respondents for the panel study. The respondent panel comprised a base of 960 respondents aged 16-26, and research was conducted in waves after episodes four, 13, and 26, respectively. To estimate the overall impact of 26 episodes of the drama, only the data from the first and third waves were used in the statistical analysis.

Researchers used propensity score matching — a relatively new statistical procedure — to analyze the responses to the series by creating a matched control group to compare against a group that watched the drama. This fulfilled one of the aims of the research — to develop more precise research

tools for evaluating the effects of mass-media education programs. This method effectively overcomes the problem of confounding variables that influence exposure being associated with outcome variables — an issue that has been one of the most vexing challenges in establishing equivalent exposed and unexposed groups for evaluation of mass media interventions.

Recall of the drama content served to measure exposure. The percent of respondents that recalled the program increased from 57.6% after 13 episodes to 67.6% after 26 episodes. Viewers and non-viewers differed significantly on the following variables after controlling for the effects of propensity to view the series.

- Compared to the statistically created control group, viewers were more likely to have positive attitudes about HIV issues addressed in *Tsha Tsha*, including stigma towards people living with HIV/AIDS.
- Viewers were more likely to practice HIV preventive behaviors, such as abstaining from sex, being faithful to one partner, having sex less often, using a condom to prevent HIV, or using a condom at last sex. (Figure 1 and 2)
- Viewers were more likely to undergo Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT) to determine their HIV status. (Figure 2)

The qualitative data reflected a high level of visual literacy among viewers and an interest in engaging with the series and its characters. Viewers saw the series as realistic, captivating, entertaining, and educational. They considered the rural setting novel. The setting appealed to rural and urban residents alike. Knowledge and general awareness about HIV/AIDS increased, and various self-reported shifts in HIV attitudes, beliefs, practices, and behaviors occurred.

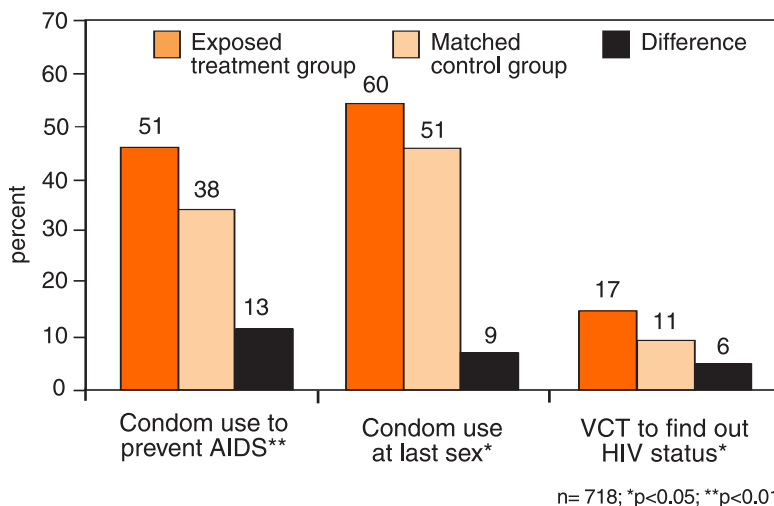
Viewers reported an increased sense of responsibility for the well-being of others that enhanced tolerance and empathy for people living with HIV/AIDS. The characters demonstrated what it is like to live openly with HIV and the problems and challenges involved in sharing one’s status with others. By showing strong, positive images of young people confronting their HIV-positive status, *Tsha Tsha* realistically portrayed a broad range of personal and community issues.

Viewers indicated that *Tsha Tsha* provided positive role models for women, as well as positive examples of male-female interaction. They perceived it as creating awareness around parent-child communication issues. A number of participants noted that they discussed the series during and after broadcast, but said Friday night was not ideal because it limited opportunities for discussion at school or work the following day.

### Conclusion

*Tsha Tsha* is more than a television drama. It provides solid thought-provoking educational concepts in a context South Africans find realistic and entertaining. Instead of providing simple answers, *Tsha Tsha* engages viewers in an ongoing dialogue about making healthy decisions in a world where AIDS is a day-to-day reality. In addition to being broadcast nationally, the series airs in South African schools, correctional institutions, churches, and communities to stimulate conversations about the complexities of living with HIV and AIDS in a country hard hit by the virus.

Figure 2: Behavioral responses to condom use and VCT after 26 episodes



### COMMUNICATION Impact!

Summarizes key research and programmatic findings from the Health Communication Partnership (HCP) and other bilateral agreements.



HEALTH COMMUNICATION PARTNERSHIP

Based at the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health/ Center for Communication Programs, HCP partners include the Academy for Educational Development, Save the Children, the International AIDS Alliance, and Tulane University’s School Public Health and Tropical Medicine.



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HCP is supported by the US Agency for International Development

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