Listeners’ Responses

About 10 people called the *Apwe Plezi* hot line each week. Some offered advice to the characters (e.g., suggesting that one character put her child up for adoption); others gave compelling testimony about how they had suffered similar fates to those of the characters, including beatings and rape by their partner. One unidentified caller said: “He has been beating me, abusing me and harassing me. I went to the police, they say they coming, but they haven’t done that….It has been about 10 months since he has been beating me….I don’t know what to do….Call me.”

In response to callers’ apparent need for counseling, SLPPA established a counseling telephone line in October 1996. The counseling telephone line received 6–10 calls per day, for a total of 1,200 calls as of August 1997. These calls can have been stimulated only by the radio soap opera, since it was the only place the telephone line was advertised, and they represent about 2% of the total adult population of St. Lucia (assuming they include no repeat callers).

Discussion

Exposure to *Apwe Plezi* was high, and the program developed a loyal audience of regular listeners of about 12% of the adult population of St. Lucia. Similar entertainment-education radio programs have had listenerships of 23% in Tanzania and 6% in Uttar Pradesh, India. Exposure levels are likely the result of a mixed effect of access to radio and competition with other media programs, including television programs. Listenership to *Apwe Plezi* was probably reduced somewhat by two sources of competition: a very popular television soap opera, *The Young and the Restless*, that aired at the same time as *Apwe Plezi* during part of each year; and a very popular FM commercial radio station, Helen 100, which began broadcasting after 1995. Because a program’s effects are proportional to its audience size, producers of entertainment-education programs must be very careful to select media, channels and time slots that will maximize exposure to the intended audience.

Comments made during focus groups illustrate that the appeal of the radio program lay in both its local nature and its educational content:

“I think it is local, and that is what I liked the most. It really is St. Lucian. When you look at programs both on TV and radio, they are all foreign. I think it was good to have a local program that spoke the language that we know.” —35-year-old woman

“I would continue to listen to *Apwe Plezi* because it really bringing the messages out in a good way. I know that is what they doing, you know...they using the soap opera to send messages. Only one thing I want is for them to let Tony [a negative character] suffer more.” —37-year-old woman

We speculate that the nonprescriptive nature of the entertainment-education strategy increases its acceptability among diverse audiences.

The radio program is likely to have the strongest influence on those individuals who listen most regularly, less influence on those who listen infrequently and even less on those who are not directly exposed to the program. Our self-report data support this relationship: Regular listeners indicated that they learned more, changed their attitude more and changed their behavior more than casual listeners. This relationship is also supported by our survey data: For those variables that show a relationship among listenership categories, the response is generally larger for regular listeners than for nonlisteners.

An upper bound on the magnitude of expected effects among the general population is imposed by the size of the audience, especially for regular listeners. For example, in a controlled field study of an entertainment-education radio soap opera in Tanzania, the magnitude of change in several dependent variables was correlated with the magnitude of the audience in different geographic areas, and a population-level increase of 10 percentage points in the current use of a family planning method by married women in the treatment area was associated with a listenership to the soap opera of 53% in the treatment area.

Further, it must be assumed that some portion of the audience will know about, agree with or practice the intended behaviors prior to the intervention, and therefore will not be persuaded by the program. A program is most likely to influence regular listeners who do not already agree with or practice the promoted educational themes. In the pretest sample, 53% of adult women who were in a sexual union were practicing family planning. In the posttest, 16% of women were regular listeners. If one assumes that 53% of *Apwe Plezi*’s regular female listeners were already practicing family planning before the program began broadcasting, and if one assumes that all nonusers who listened regularly to *Apwe Plezi* adopted family planning between the pretest and posttest.

![Figure 2. Number of births to all women and teenager women in St. Lucia, 1990–1999](image)