UNIT 5 POSITIVE INFLUENCE OF MEDIA*

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Learning Objectives

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- explain media's role in health communication and increasing health awareness,
- discuss the role of media in health education, and
- elucidate media's role in destigmatization.

5.0 INTRODUCTION

By now, you must be able to comprehend the intricacies of media psychology, the role it plays in the field of psychology, in our lives, and the way it has been studied and researched over the years. Apart from the fact that it was recognized as a proper field of study after a lot of effort, it is also clear that more attention was given to the negative effects it had on human psychology and cognition.

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This is not surprising. We all know that psychology at large was obsessed with investigating negative aspects of human functioning for several decades, before the advent of the Positive Psychology movement. In 1998, **Martin Seligman,** then president of the American Psychological Association, chose positive psychology as the theme during his presidency. This was a monumental step towards the rise in focus on human strengths and virtues, and not just their frailties and weaknesses.

So, how exactly does media fit into positive psychology? Ask yourself this, why do you think psychologists or researchers wanted to study media effects in the first place? Because they were concerned with the impact, it had on human behaviour and cognition. Scholars believed that what people heard, read, and/or saw through the means of media had major influence on them. Such hypotheses were tested and researched upon rigorously. Many studies established how media affects people's thoughts, feelings and actions.

However, as we said earlier, the attention was mainly on the negative effects it had. What would happen if the situation was reversed? What could be the positive effects of media? Logic would suggest, if people were acquiring violence from watching aggressive content, they could also learn altruistic behaviour if they engaged in content that promoted altruism. This provided an interesting point of view that researchers had not considered earlier. Thus arose the field of **Positive Media Psychology**, which deals with the positive cognitive, emotional and behavioural impact of media use. The positive impact of media in health communication, health education, and destigmatization forms the focus of this unit.

5.1 MEDIA'S ROLE IN HEALTH COMMUNICATION

Media plays a dominating role in communicating information. The field of health communication deals with the study and use of communication strategies and approaches through which the public can be informed about different health issues. Mass media is used to publicize useful health information, increase public awareness about the importance of health in development and the negative consequences of unhealthy habits and lifestyle. Health communication also helps in maintaining important health issues on the public agenda. The use of the multiple mass media and other technological innovations to broadcast relevant health information to the public, increases public awareness of individual and collective health aspects and underscore the importance of health in development (WHO, 1996).

Health communication is not restricted to communication between the doctor and the patient; it includes the larger aim of keeping the public aware of various health practices. If there is a health emergency, it is important to communicate the same in a way that everyone can understand and thus, follow necessary precautions. Let us look at some of the health

communication that took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. The baritone voice of Bollywood super star Amitabh Bachchan was used as the caller tune to raise awareness about coronavirus. "*Do gaz doori, mask hai zaruri*" (maintaining distance of 2 feet and using mask is essential) became a popular jingle of the time.

Figure 5.1 Health-care Behaviour during COVID-19

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:WHO_EN_HealthyAtHome-Physical-activity_if_you_are_at_home_during_COVID-19_outbreak.png

The images (Figure 5.2) have been taken from e-book created for young children by Public Health Foundation of India, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India. The e-book, available in five different languages, has been created to empower children with practical information that would equip them to cope with Corona virus pandemic.

Such kind of health communication exists all around us, and was essential especially during a pandemic like, Corona virus when a lot of misinformation was being spread through the social media. According to *USA's Healthy People 2010*, health communication is a way of using effective communication strategies to influence people's behaviour in taking decisions to improve their health conditions. Health communications influence the individual as well as the collective decisions about enhancing health.

Figure 5.2 Images from an e-book on Coping with COID-19 pandemic

Source: https://phfi.org/covid19/covid-resources/

Health communication happens through campaigns that are run with the help of traditional and contemporary modes of communication, which we will discuss shortly. The communication about health can take place at multiple levels as is shown in Figure 5.3. Greater the level at which health communication works, more is its reach and hence greater is the success.

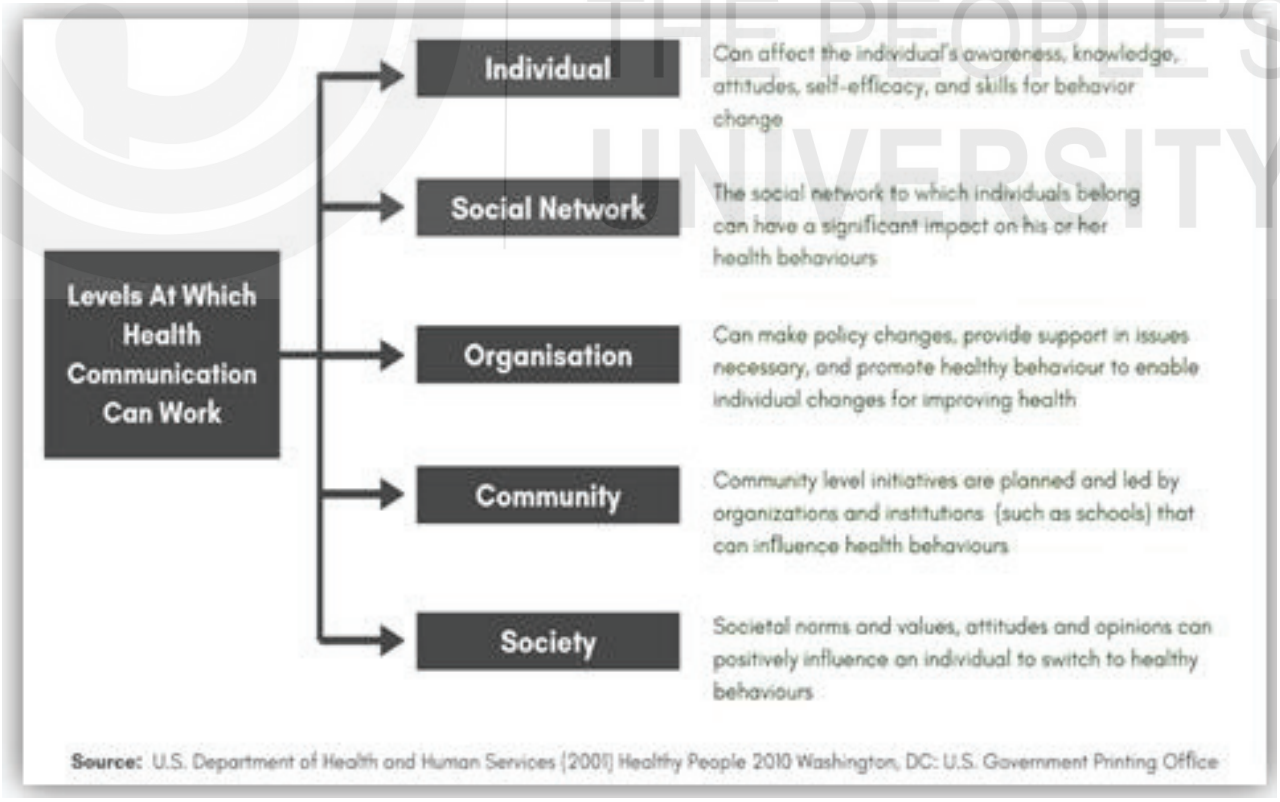

Figure 5.3 Multiple levels of health communication

Health communication makes individuals more aware, and as a result, the community more knowledgeable about various important health-care behaviours.This helps in creating a healthier and more developed society. Effective communication in health communication can:

- **Putting health on public agenda and improve health outcomes**: By influencing, supporting and engaging individuals, communities, healthcare professionals, policymakers, and the public to follow certain behavioural practices, health communication eventually improve health outcomes (for example, India's pulse polio campaign to ensure every child below the age of five takes polio drops, helped in the near eradication of the disease from the country).
- **Reduce the impact of socio-economic, racial, disease specific factors**: Health communications are designed in such a manner that they are accessible to all, irrespective of their socio-economic status, race or other factors (for example, doctors using more simplified language, pamphlets and brochures, using easy to understand language so that people from different backgrounds can understand better).
- **Improve prevention and promotion of healthy behaviours**: Prevention is better than cure, and hence health communication promotes healthy lifestyles and safety behaviours. WHO, for instance, is promoting active lifestyle during the lockdown (Figure 5.1) Other examples include the promotion for the use of various birth control methods, and campaigns run regularly on non-smoking, so people are more cautious of their actions.
- **Helps in demystifying diseases and provide accurate information in the era of infodemic:** Health communication helps simplify knowledge about diseases into clear and 'actionable' messages. We live in an era of infodemic, where there is plenty of information – some right, some wrong mostly being spread through social media (WHO, 2020). This makes making health enhancing decisions difficult for people. Health communication is necessary to mitigate misinformation and myths.

5.1.1 Why is Health Communication important?

According to CRICO Strategies National CBS Report (2015), ineffective communication has been a cause for 1,744 deaths and over $1.7 billion in malpractices in a period of five years. This alone is enough to stress on the importance of having better health communication practices in place. The purpose of health communication is, not just preventing certain diseases, but also promoting behaviours that are more health conscious. Groups that are marginalized in society like sex workers, or people with low or no literacy, stigmatized groups, like those suffering from HIV/AIDS or mental illnesses etc. are reached through health communication. Increased numbers of health professionals are focussing on health communication as a speciality. They are learning from various other fields such as psychology, communication

theories, and from marketing studies in order to attain better and more effective communication skills.

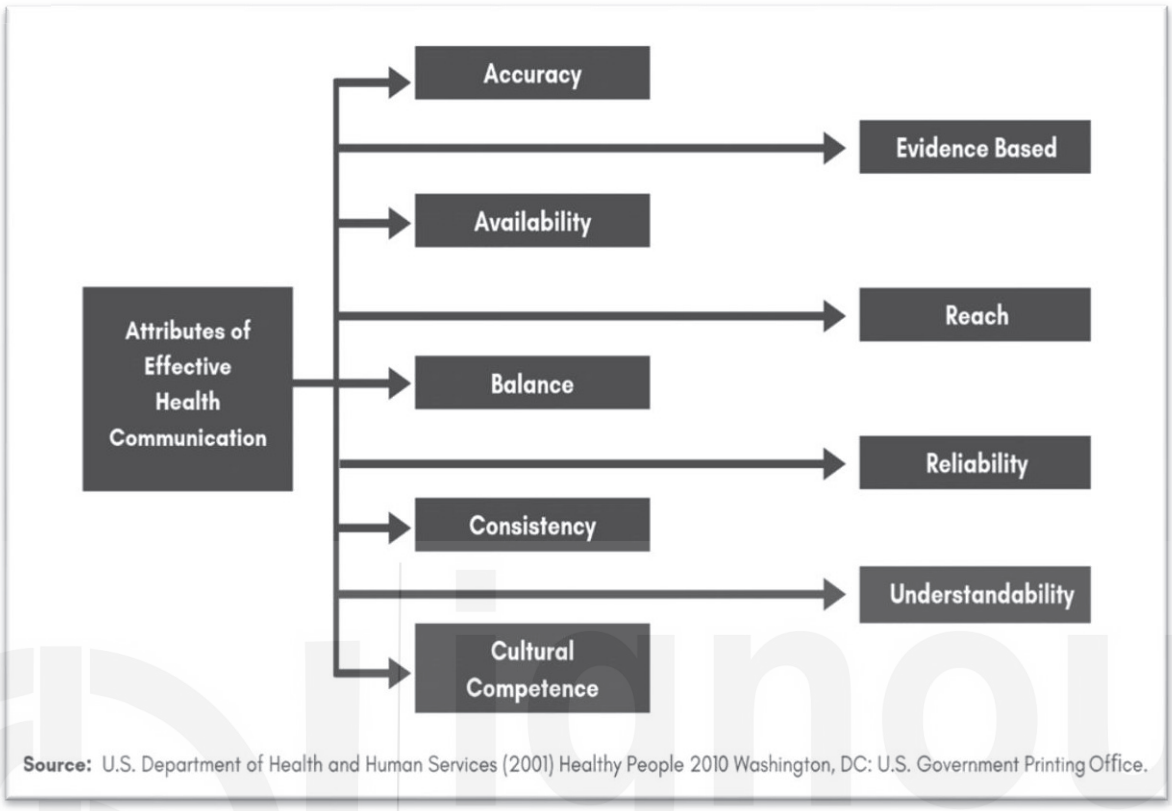

Figure 5.4 Attributes of Effective Health Communication

Effective health communication needs to be:

- accurate (the message should be valid and factually correct)
- accessible to the targeted audience
- balanced (with both benefits and risks of potential actions being presented)
- consistent (content should be consistent with information from other sources)
- culturally appropriate (that is it should take into consideration ethnic, racial and linguistic diversity)
- evidence based (content of communication is scientific and based on research)
- Wide reach (so that the message is available to the largest possible number of targeted population)
- Reliable (the source of the health communication content is credible)
- Understandable and repeated (the content is repeatedly delivered or available, like the COVID-19 ring tone)

5.1.2 Approaches to Health Communication

Communication is a process of sharing information. However, without the means to share that data, it will remain more or less a secret. If a person comes up with a certain idea, s/he shares it with people with the help of proper communication channels. Similarly, when it comes to health communication, we require certain medium to allow health related information to reach as many people as possible. According to Thomas (2006), there are some traditional and some contemporary approaches through which health communication takes place. The shift from an emphasis on communicating with the "masses'' to one on communication with specific segments of the market has led to new and different approaches to communication. Traditional approaches to health communication include distribution of print materials (brochures, self-help guides, health education material etc.), health fair, information and referrals (through e-mails, telephone etc.), public service announcements, non-paid types of promotions on radio, television, newspapers, press releases, featured stories on different media etc. Contemporary approaches to health communication are influenced by the technological innovations in the field of communication. These include direct-to-customer marketing, electronic information distribution, e-marketing, and social media marketing.

Use of multiple communication channels, like radio, television, newspaper, flyers, brochures, internet and social media tools (i.e., Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube) can allow health messages to be communicated to people. Health communication strategies aim to change people's knowledge, attitudes, and/or behaviours, that includes increase risk perception, reinforcing positive behaviours, influence social norms, increase availability of support and needed services and empower individuals to change or improve their health conditions. It includes many areas including edutainment or enter-education (education through entertainment), health journalism, interpersonal communication, media advocacy, organizational communication, risk communication (communication based on fear appeals), social communication and social marketing. It can take many forms from mass and multi-media communications to traditional and culture-specific communication such as story-telling, puppet shows and street-plays. Soap operas and movies are also often used to disseminate health information.

Let us discuss the various channels of dissemination of health communication briefly.

1) **Entertainment Media:** How often have you seen a movie or a television series and wished to be a part of it? How often did you see a character similar to you on the movie screen, because of which, you felt more confident in your own skin? Or simply, how often do you watch Harry Potter or Narnia and wish you had a wand or a magic closet? Movies, television series, fictional characters, they can invoke emotions in us that normally might not come out as easily. We have read in previous units

how media can influence us, and how it is becoming a very regular part of everyone's lives. Thus, when it comes to communicating about health, entertainment media has been extremely useful.

To give an example let us go back to the year 2007 when '*Taare Zameen Par*', a Bollywood film was released, that highlighted a child's dyslexia. The movie was a critical as well as a box office success, and was one that carried a strong message. The movie revolves around a child who was suffering from a learning disorder known as ***dyslexia***, which made studying academics in a normal fashion hard for him to fathom. His parents, unaware and ignorant of their child's disability, send him to a boarding school thinking it would help him. It was not until an unconventional teacher appears that things start to get better for the child. The movie was praised by not just critics but also by the general audience and scholars (Rao and Krishna, 2008).

Education-entertainment programs incorporate health-promoting messages and storylines in entertainment programs. Entertainment media can undoubtedly promote health communication and healthy lifestyle in a very effective way. We will further discuss this effect in detail in the case study at the end of this unit.

Digital Marketing: With the invention of internet, the world became an infinitely smaller place to reside in. People from different parts of the world were able to connect with each other, their cultures, their education, etc. Considering the dependence of people on the internet, it is only wise to use such mediums to connect with people to promote healthy behaviours. Traditional media such as television and radio has become less popular means for obtaining health information. Rather, internet and social media are increasingly being used for the same. Most consumers of online health information access user-generated health information as it provides tailored information for the users, that suits them personally. Health communication using social media has shifted from being unidirectional (as in mass media campaigns which were top-down communication) to multidirectional where consumers generate (bottom-up communication), seek as well as share (horizontal communication) information. Given this change, the field of health communication and thus health education also had to undergo a change.

Diverse digital marketing strategies exist to promote health communication. There exist a number of websites providing people with relevant and helpful information. There are chat-bots, which allow people to have short conversations regarding health, social media accounts that people follow to get updates about how they can keep themselves healthy and social media influencers who help run campaigns that promote health communication, thereby endorsing and encouraging people to adapt to healthy behaviours.

Social Media Marketing: Shares health messages through online social media platforms, which include social networks like Facebook, information-disseminating platforms like YouTube, and microblogging services like Twitter. The advantage of social media health campaign is its enormity, breadth of reach, and immediacy of social media platforms apart from being cost-effective. Social media campaigns are more effective in successfully converting health-related knowledge and information into web-based discussions. Studies on effectiveness of social media campaigns report positive behavioural changes being elicited. Social media platforms were used during the COVID-19 pandemic to spread information about the pandemic and reducing fear and anxiety among the public. Healthcare institutions are increasingly using social media as a channel to communicate with their customers.

An Indian social media campaign on Youtube by Mahindra Rise in association with Cancer Patients Aid Association, titled, "Sehat Ka Batua" creatively used the habit of women putting their purse (*batua*) inside their blouses as a reminder for personally examining their breasts to protect them from breast cancer. You can watch this campaign here https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zu_55piVrJU (A Unique CSR Initiative of Mahindra, for Self-Diagnosis of Breast Cancer in India).

2) **Advertising:** Another major strategy in health communication is advertising. Huge investments are made on traditional public health advertisements annually to promote preventive health behaviours. According to Schevitz (2010), educational campaign is essentially a selling campaign, the article we offer for sale being health. The central idea of commercial advertisements as well as health advertisements is to change behaviours of the target audience. Therefore, the underlying principles of product advertising (commercial advertising) and advertising for health promotion are the same. These principles and steps have been elaborated in Unit 7.

3) **Interpersonal Communication:** This is the most important form of communication as it involves the interaction between the health care provider and the patient itself. A person is most likely to take his/her doctor's word of mouth very easily, considering they place a lot of their trust in them. This is another reason why while educating heath care professionals, emphasis is now made also, on how they communicate the information. It ought to be in a manner the patients are able to grasp and follow.

The role of media is paramount as it is not just there to disseminate data and information, but also to influence people into following the advices. Thus, it is important to, not just spread the message to as many people as possible, but to have enough value in the message so that people are compelled to abide by them. We would later see how the *Pulse Polio*

campaign by Mr Amitabh Bachchan was extremely successful in drawing people to the polio booth.

Behaviour in humans is not a one-time change. Rather, it is a continuous process, which requires regular maintenance. For instance, if you are trying to convince someone to start exercising, it is very likely that they will not agree in one go. You might have to talk to them about exercising and its benefits, why they should engage in it, etc. on a continual basis. It is only after a certain point, will they agree to start with the recommended habit.

The process is similar in health behaviour change. **Communicators must repeatedly engage with the audience in an effective way so that they end up taking up the mentioned advice.** Health communication falls under the umbrella term of health education. Let us discuss the latter, how it is different from the former, and how media has contributed in its advancement.

Print media ads (i.e. Newspapers, Magazines, leaflets, brochures etc.) play an important role in informing and educating the people about important events related to their daily life. Sharma (2005) further suggests that newspapers are among the most important sources of health related around the world. The print media provide detailed information on almost every topic related to health. By informing the important things about the health-related issues, media help bringing the behavioural changes among the people. These changes may be related to change in the previous unhealthy habits, or wrong beliefs, or may be related to preoccupied attitudes or aimed at reinforcing the existing beliefs of habits.

Check Your Progress 1

Answer true or false:

1) The larger aim of health communication is to keep the public aware of various health practices.
2) Entertainment media is not a channel for spreading health communication
3) In infodemic, there is very less information.
4) For effective health communication, it is not necessary that the information is culturally appropriate.
5) Social network is one of the levels at which health communication can work.

5.2 MEDIA'S ROLE IN HEALTH EDUCATION

Health education has the primary aim of informing people about health. According to the World Health Organisation, "health education is any combination of learning experiences designed to help individuals and

communities improve their health, by increasing their knowledge or influencing their attitudes" (WHO, 1998). The WHO definition lays emphasison a) dissemination of health-related information, b) inspiring and motivating the population for, c) taking necessary action, d) to improve health and e) maintain healthy behaviour / lifestyle.

Health education is a social science that is a hybrid field drawing from the biological, environmental, psychological, physical and medical sciences. It is a core public health discipline. Its aim is to promote health and prevent disease, disability and premature death through education-driven voluntary behaviour change activities. These change activities target the knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviour of the individual, group, institutions or community as a whole. The **purpose** of health education is to positively influence the health behaviour of individuals and communities as well as the living and working conditions that influence their health.

Box 5.1Reflect!

After knowing both their definitions, can you differentiate between health education and health communication?

Reading in one go, one might think twice to notice the distinctions between health communication and health education, due to the similarities they share. However, the reason why they share certain qualities is that health communication is a part of health education. Nevertheless, health education is not just about imbibing healthy behaviour or quality. It is concerned with motivating, building skills and confidence (self-efficacy) in people so they are motivated to switch to healthier behaviours.

There are different **health education strategies that operate at three different levels**. At these levels, the methods for imparting ideas and information to develop knowledge, attitude and skills are also varied. The individual methods include direct face-to-face communication like home visits. Such communication is interactive and permits a two-way flow of information. Thus, the client (a layperson or a patient) can ask questions and get clarifications from a health educator (a nurse or a health care worker for example). Because of limited resources (of time, availability of health educators, cost etc.), health education cannot always be done individually. Health education can be imparted to small groups. Group methods include demonstrations, role-play, street-play, panel discussion, group discussion, seminar, lecture, workshop, etc. These methods are comparatively less interactive. However, they allow for feedback. The group is usually homogenous in nature, for example all patients of osteoporosis or newly married adults on the use of contraceptives. Mass method is the method of mass media. To reach maximum number of people who are diverse and

geographically dispersed, mass methods are used. It does not allow for two-way communication. These methods comprise exhibitions, lectures and health promotion campaigns on mass media including radio, TV, newspaper, magazines, bill-boards etc.

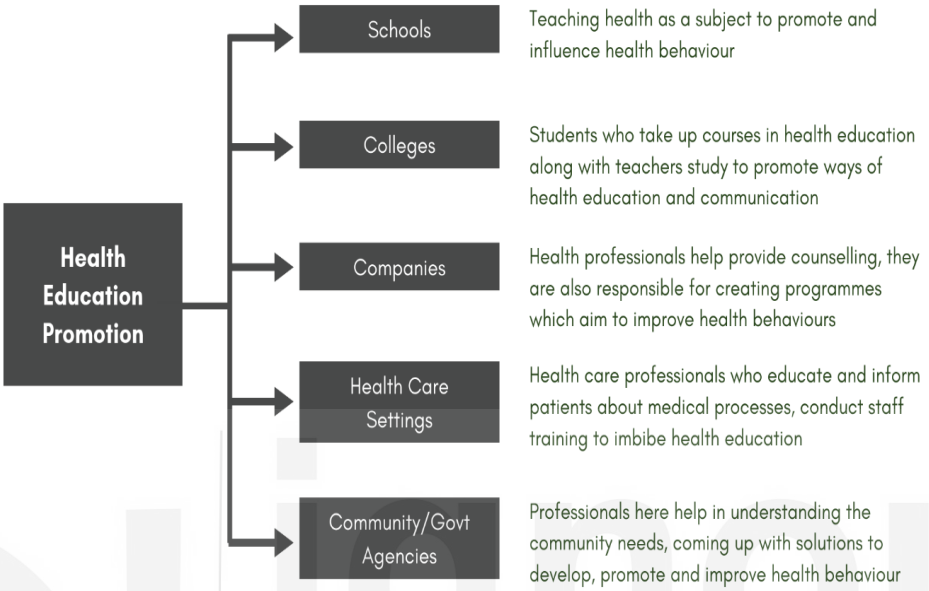

Figure 5.5 Health Education Programme

5.2.1 Health Education and the Mass Media

Health education aims at helping individuals and communities to have improved control over their health, by increasing their knowledge and influencing their attitude towards health. But the aim of health education is not limited to just the cerebral level. It aims at motivating people to take appropriate actions to improve their health. People need to know about the variety of factors that affect health, including social, economic and environmental conditions, apart from the individual risk factors and the facilities and utilities of the health care system.

Gupta & Sharma (2015) suggest that mass media impart necessary health information in our daily life, enabling common people to take appropriate decision about the different aspects of their lives especially about health. Evidences suggest that mass media play a central role in informing and education people about important events / changes happening around the world. Especially because media connect the audience to the world beyond their immediate reach. In other words, media bring the world closer to the audience and increase their reach and access. Mass media is one such institution which has the ability and potential to influence every individual's life in a big way. We see that media has ability to influence, our behaviour, our culture and even it can affect our thinking and attitudes towards different issues in our daily life (Gupta, 2006).

Use of social media can enhance communication strategies for health education and provides new opportunities for public health. Health educators and professionals are now relying on social media tools for being visible and viable. More research needs to be conducted on use social media technologies by health educators and its impact.

Box 5.2 Health Education and Health

Health education: It is a part of the discipline of **Public health.** It involves:

- conducting research and assessments
- planning mass media and health communications campaigns
- implementing mass media and health communications campaigns to help change attitudes and behaviors, and imparting knowledge and teaching skills to achieve health
- evaluation of these programs for continuous program improvement.
- health advocacy (for healthy lifestyles, policies, and environments)
- providing training to individuals, health advisors, other professionals, and policymakers

(Auld, Radius, Galer-Unti, Hinman, Gotsch, & Mail, 2011)

Health communication: It is a part of the **discipline of communication studies**, in which communicating promotional health information (like public health campaigns, health education, doctor and patient interaction) is examined and practiced. The focus is on different communication strategies that can be utilized to inform and influence choice and behaviour of the targeted population. It is majorly dissemination of health information (like ways to enhance health or avoid risk to health) and is a **part of health education**. It improves health literacy of people, which is one of the goals of health education.

Health promotion: Health promotion is defined as the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve one's health (Health Promotion Glossary, 1998). As part of the public health movement around the world in the 1980s, World Health Organization initiated a number of programmes towards achieving "Health for All".

Media have wide reach and access to influence millions of audiences, and geographically scattered, the reasons why media are so intensively used in health education programmes. Through the right mix of message and media, desired behavioural change amongst the target audience can be obtained. Thus, media plays an extremely important role of **change agent.** It influences the knowledge, attitude, beliefs, choices and eventually behaviour of people about health and healthy behaviours.

5.2.2 Why is Health Education important?

In absence of healthy individuals, a community, let alone a country, cannot thrive. When the health of the citizens of a country deteriorates, so does the economy. To put things into perspective, let us look at the following example from history.

During 1347 to 1351 CE, the black plague had spread all across Europe, killing 30 to 60% of Europe's population. Around 75 to 200 million individuals met their death due to this plague, and the consequences of the same were, with little surprise, enormous (Dunham, 2008). A sense of fear was generated among everyone alive. More and more people started staying in the safety of their homes rather than deciding to go to work. This eventually turned into an economic crisis at the top of a health crisis. The government, since was not very helpful, was now threatened by the public, which further made it a state of uncertainty and instability. There were religious repercussions to this as well, but that is irrelevant in this context. What ***is*** relevant, however, is how a health crisis can make things extremely difficult, if not managed properly at the right time.

In today's time, things have obviously changed for the better. Medical technology has advanced beyond imagination since the 1300s. However, diseases and health deterioration are not something humans can get rid of, it comes with being a mortal being. Nevertheless, that does not mean people cannot take precautions to ensure safety about their health. The Corona virus pandemic is an important case in point.

The purpose of health education is to educate people so they choose healthy behaviours. It enhances quality of life of individuals and creates a healthy society.

Box 5.3 Activity

Think about the COVID-19 pandemic and reflect on how health education played a role in curbing the spread of the virus.

5.2.3 Health Education in India

There are about 260 million people living in India who are unable to read and write, according to the 2011 census. Considering the amount of illiteracy, one can imagine the complexity of reaching these people with the idea of health education. Moreover, there are more rural than urban areas in the country.It is a highly diverse country, and traits such as these require proper attention when a plan for health education is generated.

Central Health Education Bureau (Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India) is the apex institution in India for health education

(https://dghs.gov.in/content/1408_3_httpchebnicin.aspx). It has the following five divisions to ensure health education. All these division together help provide valuable information to people related to health. They are responsible for devising a plan that takes into consideration the various intricacies to ensure the effectiveness of the various health education promotion campaigns. The seven divisions are:

- Training division
- Media and Editorial
- Health promotion and education services
- School health education division
- Administrative division

While all these divisions work together to improve and provide health education, let us try to understand the role of media in a little detail. **The media division**, in particular, takes up various activities in order to promote health education. It uses scientific ways of disseminating the latest and correct information to the people about health and prevention of diseases. It ensures exhibitions on several health-related topics, and celebrates days such as World Health Day, World Mental Health Day, No Tobacco Day, and Worlds AIDS Day, to name just a few. Not just this, but the editorial division also brings out periodicals namely *Swasth Hind* (English monthly) *Arogya Sandesh* (Hindi monthly), and *Swasthya Shiksha Samachar* (Hindi quarterly) to disseminate health education information (Sharma, 2005).

The Bureau provides media services to all National Health Programmes and Technical Divisions of the Directorate General of Health Services. It prepares scripts for All India Radio and Doordarshan Kendras on health issues of public health interest.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Differentiate between health education and health communication.

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2) Identify the methods to promote health education programmes.

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5.3 MEDIA'S ROLE IN DESTIGMATIZATION

Box 5.4 Reflect!

Have you ever been treated differently because you behaved in a way, which is not generally accepted norm? (For example, a girl who speaks loudly may be frowned upon by people for not speaking softly. Or a man being called names because of him being effeminate).

"Stigma is a perceived negative attribute that causes someone to devalue or think less of the whole person. It is a preconceived idea or stereotype that causes someone to devalue or think less of the person in question. People tend to distance themselves from individuals in stigmatized groups, to blame individuals in these groups for negative actions and to discriminate against the stigmatized individuals" (Salters-Pedneault, 2020).

In simpler terms, stigma is a certain quality or trait attached to a set of people (perceived to be negative or different) in order to distinguish them from others as compared to more socially accepted forms of behaviours. For example, in India, girls and boys are expected to behave in a specific way, such as men are expected to have masculine characteristics and women, with more feminine characteristics. Thus, when a girl or a boy fails to abide by these 'normal' forms of behaviours, they are stigmatized, and may often face discrimination by the society. Further more, the behaviour society considers to be unusual, becomes the whole identity of that individual. For example, if a man is effeminate, the society may deem him as "*the effeminate man*", thereby ignoring all the other qualities that make him a separate individual.

Other example could be of a person suffering from a mental illness. In India, mental illness is still a taboo and people choose to not talk about it openly, fearing how others might respond. Thus, many a times, families choose not to disclose to the society if they or any of their family member is suffering from any mental illness for the fear of social stigma.

Erving Goffman, one of the most influential sociologists of the 20th century, defines stigma as a phenomenon where an individual is rejected by the society due to a certain quality that is considered strange. The individual's reaction to stigma can be divided into the following three ways:

- **The Stigmatized:** Includes people who have the trait deemed undesirable by the public
- **The Normals:** Includes people who do not bear the stigma
- **The Wise:** Includes people among the normal who accept and are more open to the stigmatized

Gerhard Falk (2001), another sociologist and historian, stated how stigmatization would always remain a part of human civilization with one

group stigmatizing the other. That is because of the concept of 'insiders' and 'outsiders', and people's need to feel belonged to one group. Falk concluded that, "we and all societies will always stigmatize some condition and some behaviour because doing so provides for group solidarity by delineating 'outsiders' from 'insiders'.

Box 5.5 Reflect!

Now that you know what stigmatization means, how would you define destigmatization? What are the ways you think can help in reducing stigma?

5.3.1 What is Destigmatization?

The process of attempting to remove stigma, and to thereby, normalise qualities that are considered unusual through different means is known as destigmatization. In other words, to remove negative associations from what is regarded as shameful by society. Stigma can be reduced by the help of education, which can be in the following terms:

- **Making people aware of the facts** (like, men can be effeminate; females can be masculine, etc.)
- **Empowering the stigmatized groups** (by encouraging people to be more open and accepting of their differences)
- **Choosing to speak more cautiously** (not using degrading languages for pointing out certain differences among people)
- **Focussing on the positive** (by asking the people to pay attention to the diversity and freedom acceptance of differences would bring)
- **Creating a more inclusive society** (a society where there is acceptance and celebration of difference)

Box 5.6 Reflect!

Have you ever had stigmas about someone or a particular group or a concept? How did you overcome it?

There are numerous individuals who grow up stigmatizing because they do not know any better. However, many people get out of this bubble by educating themselves about unfamiliar concepts. This can take place due to a personal experience or due to some other reason. A major contributor to reducing stigma can be with the help of media. Considering its reach and the people who are affected by it, media can play a pivotal role in destigmatization. Let us understand how it can help in further detail.

5.3.2 Role of Media in Stigmatization

In 2015, the hashtag "**#Oscars So White**" was initiated by an activist, and to this day, it continues to hold importance. Eventually, numerous known and

respected actors came forward to join the movement and boycotted the Oscars, an award that is notably the biggest honour an actor can be bestowed upon for their skills. Why was this? Simply due to the lack of black representation and a more diverse set of nominees. How did this hashtag become so popular? It was with the help of social media platforms, where people were quick to respond to the issue with their support.

This scenario lead people to take a second look at, not just the nominees, but movies in general. People began to ask themselves questions such as, are our movies diverse? Are there people from different ethnicity who get representation? The answer is a big and simple ***no***. Hollywood movies have usually revolved around white or male lead characters. Moreover, if there are characters of different ethnicity to be portrayed, they are often played by popular actors instead of those who would actually fit the criteria. In India also, we hardly have actors from the north-east India playing characters from the north-east. The bio-pic 'Mary Kom' is a pertinent example, where the lead Mary Kom was played by the mainstream actress Priyanka Chopra and not an actress from north-east India.

Movies play an important role in people's lives; these fictional stories include characters that become role models to many people. Thus, the lack of diversity in movies can play a direct effect on the society. The representation is not just limited to black actors, but it called for better representation of women, LGBTQ+ community, and individuals belonging to different ethnicities, etc.

How movies portray characters can help people make judgements about them, they can know and read about it to educate themselves further. In the absence of any representation, however, this is unlikely to happen. By portraying black characters as gangsters, Asian characters as highly conservative, etc, these will imbibe and promote the already existing stigmas. This is where media can act more maturely while portraying stigmatized or underrepresented characters. A large part of media has already begun ensuring representing people and other concepts (such as mental health, HIV/AIDS, etc.) to reduce the stigmas.

What do you thing foreigners think of when they think of India? Is it an image of poverty? Over population? A land of snake charmers?

Ask yourself this, is India limited to such characteristics? Not in the slightest. Nevertheless, what people outside of India know of the country is through its portrayal in the movies, TV series, and books. Moreover, it is not a mystery that Indian characters are not often seen on the international screen. When they are, however, they are stigmatized and a stereotypical view of them is highlighted.

It is not just an issue in international media, however, when it comes to Indian cinema, there is hardly any diversity. Female characters are portrayed mainly as love interest to the male lead, LGBTQ+ characters are included for

comical purposes, mental illness is hardly mentioned and can also be seen poked fun at on various television series. In short, there is a long way to go. What is portrayed in the movies, play a direct role in influencing the minds of people who are in continuous touch with media's various forms.

In today's time, when majority of the population engages with media, it is clear there is a need for a positive role that media can play in educating people, and in many cases, it has begun doing that. You will understand how media can promote health education and communication better after going through the case study mentioned in the end of this unit. However, let us go through another topic of importance, destigmatization, in which media can also play a pivotal role.

5.3.3 Media's Role in Destigmatization

Box 5.7 Activity

When you want to know about something, what do you do to know more about it:

a) Go to the library
b) Google the information
c) Watch Documentaries
d) Watch Movies/TV Series based on the topic, if any
e) Read Newspaper cuttings of the information
f) All or a mixture of all the above

Chances are you would take a combination of the actions mentioned above. The point of the above exercise was to make you understand how much media plays a role in each of our lives. There are many concepts and issues that people are not aware of and one movie, media campaign, newspaper article has the power to generate enough stir among the public that they would be compelled to know more about the topic.

For instance, we discussed, how the release of '*Taare Zameen Par'* pushed people, schools to raise awareness on the topic of learning disabilities. Similarly, media can play a pivotal role in influencing and spreading public awareness. It can help in normalising behaviours that are stigmatized by educating people in an effective manner.

For instance, mostly the qualities associated with women in movies are that they are emotional, caring, and those who will keep the house and the family together. While there is no issue in empowering women who run households, it is also important to represent the other section of women in a positive light. In recent years, viewers of Indian film and television have witnessed a shift from portrayals of females as innocent and subordinate in nature, into independent sexual beings. This has already begun with more movies coming that highlight a woman's character as being more than just a love interest.

With movies such as *Kahaani, Queen, Dear Zindagi, Padmaavat etc.* things are surely taking a positive turn.

Thus, media can play a significant role in offering newer narratives in the public domain. They help in reducing the prevalent stereotypes, prejudices and discriminatory practices. They bring discourses of 'deviance' into discourse on 'normalcy' or 'alternative ways of being'. Silent candle-light protests by the public, at India Gate was a virtually unknown concept until the 2005 blockbuster *Rang De Basanti* brought it alive.

Mental illness is a taboo in India, but the circumstances are slowly changing. This is possible because of the increase in the number of people who are willing to talk about the issue in public. India recently also decriminalised suicide as a criminal activity, a step that acknowledged mental health issues as more than a criminal behaviour. Movies like *Hichki*, *Pa*, *Taare Zameen Par* brought new discussions on different psychological disorders.

Popular channels and social media also have a lot to do with imparting awareness on various mental health related issues. It gives people the space to communicate the issues they are going through. What this does is that it makes people conscious of many others suffering from similar situations. It creates a community where people can be of help to one another. Bollywood actor, Deepika Padukone, openly came out about her depression. She talked about her battle with depression while her professional career was booming. She emphasised on the importance of making this issue as public as possible and released a video "Not Ashamed" on the popular channel, YouTube, where she shared her personal struggle while going through that phase.

Deepika Padukone, a popular Bollywood actress, openly talking about her battle with depression in a You Tube Video

If we take an example of representation of LGBTQ+ community, it is evident that there is little representation. Furthermore, when it is, it is often portrayed in a comical role. However, media has been playing a positive role in making people aware by including characters that belong to this community. Thereby, leading to an effort to reduce stigmatization of LGBTQ+ community. More TV series, movies now include characters belonging to the

LGBTQ+ community. These characters are given quality role and importance in the series' plot. One recent example could be of the movie *Kapoor and Sons*, where one of the lead characters in the movie was gay. The character was not poked fun at for his sexuality and it was depicted in a very realistic manner, thereby, putting the existence of the community in front of the public.

Kapoor And Sons' Film Poster
It Showed one of the lead characters as being gay, excluding the stereotypes that come with it

We have continuously read and gone through researches that proved media's influence on public. It, however, is understood that people's behaviours and cognitions are not changed due to exposure to one strong media message. It takes constant effort to imbibe positive messages into the public. Media's reach can fasten this process, and its effectiveness is the reason why it is used to disseminate information.

In the next section, let us look at case studies to understand how media helped in promoting health communication, education and destigmatization for HIV/AIDS campaigns.

Check Your Progress 3

1) Define destigmatization.

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2) Cite some examples where media has played a role to destigmatize people's behaviours.

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5.4 CASE STUDIES: HOW MEDIA CAMPAIGN HELP DISSEMINATE INFORMATION?

Case study 1: Mass Media Campaign on HIV/AIDS (Sood, Shefner-Rogers, & Sengupta, 2007)

HIV/AIDS is a virus that damages one's immune system and makes one more prone to getting sick. It is contagious and can spread from one person to another through sexual intercourse. It cannot be cured but can be prevented. Those who suffer from it can lead a normal life, however they must take precautions so it does not spread further.

It is not easy due to the lack of enough education and awareness about the disease. A lot of misinformation, stigmas, and false opinions are prevalent about AIDS. This can make life harder for those who are suffering from the disease. The fear of stigma can even convince some not to seek help from health care professionals. This is extremely dangerous for the person suffering as well as for others who might get in contact with them.

India saw its first case of AIDS in 1986, and since then it has spread to a large part of the country. It is imperative that people are more aware of this, and actions are taken to ensure it does not spread further. As per the HIV estimates report (2019), Government of India, there are around 23.49 lakh people living with HIV/AIDS (PLHIV) in 2019, and the estimated new HIV infections declining by 37% between 2010 to 2019.

HIV/AIDS is transmitted mainly because of engaging in sex. Sex, itself, is a taboo in India and is not talked about, which explains why the disease spread to such a large number. Even though times may be changing, at least in some metropolitan areas, stigma and discrimination are still a major hindrance to prevention, care, and treatment (UNICEF, 2004).

Entertainment-Education Strategy to combat AIDS in India: Strategy to involve entertainment media was taken in the attempt to influence knowledge and behaviour change towards AIDS in India. The entertainment-education strategy is based on the Social Cognitive Theory by Albert Bandura, which concluded that people's behaviours are influenced by what they observe, and they tend to behave in a manner similar to how their role models act.

The BBC World Service Trust Partnership Campaign: To increase awareness of HIV/AIDS in India, a campaign was launched by the BBC World Service Trust (BBC WST), India's National Aids Control Organisation (NACO), Doordarshan (national television service), and All India Radio. The purpose behind the campaigns was:

- to increase accurate knowledge about the modes of HIV transmission,
- to increase knowledge about the means of preventing HIV infection,
- to promote interpersonal communication about HIV/AIDS, and;

- to promote interpersonal communication about condoms and condom use.

'*Jasoos Vijay'*, a TV series, was the basis of the campaign where the protagonist, Vijay, was HIV positive. It was through his experiences the audience learns about the discrimination people suffering from HIV face, the care and treatment for the virus, the importance of condom use and other means through which it can be prevented.

Jasoos Vijay, a TV series with the aim to spread awareness about HIV/AIDS

Image Source: IMDB

'Haath se Haath Mila' was another reality show that went out in the streets to spread awareness about HIV/AIDS. Each episode consisted of real-life youth dilemmas, comedy skits, popular music segments, and contests that generated public discussion about sexual health issues. In addition to these, nine one-minute television spots, which were repeatedly shown and carried information regarding:

- the myths and misconceptions regarding routes of HIV transmission,
- the mistaken beliefs about people living with HIV/AIDS,
- methods for preventing HIV infection (for example, using condoms), and
- the need for open discussion about sexual norms and practices.

Six one-minute radio spots were also created and were tailored as per the local audience, with special emphasis on male audience members. These spots carried knowledge regarding how HIV infection is transmitted, and how condom usage can help prevent it.

Results of the Media Campaigns: These campaigns did a lot for changing the perspective about HIV. Furthermore, results clearly showed that individuals who were exposed to the campaigns were more likely:

- to be aware of STIs, HIV/AIDS, and condoms,

- to know about the routes of HIV transmission,
- to have fewer misconceptions about HIV transmission, and
- to talk to others about STIs, HIV/AIDS, and condoms than those who were not exposed to the campaign messages.

The case study establishes how much media can contribute in providing people with helpful information. Furthermore, in this situation, it fulfilled the objectives.

Case Study 2: The Bachchan Effect: *Do Boond Zindagi Ke* (Case study on India's Pulse Polio Mission)

In 2002, India witnessed a massive outbreak of Polio. Northern India had a major share of infections from UP and Bihar which comprised more than 95% of total cases. But there was huge resistance in the rural public towards immunization. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and UNICEF had to employ advertising company (then) Ogilvy and Mather to lead the mass communication for the Pulse Polio program in India. Their major challenge was to persuade the rural mothers to visit the vaccination camps and get their child the polio drops.

To overcome the resistance and motivate women to get their child immunized, Mr Amitabh Bachchan was made the brand ambassador for the Polio Eradication Campaign in 2002. Mr Bachchan is very popular in north India and has great respect and credibility. His image of an angry young man (a role that he played in many popular Hindi movies) was capitalized by the advertising agency. In the television ad, he roared *"Dhikkar hai hum par, Polio ke booth par itne kam log?"* His powerful voice echoed on every TV set and radio station in the early 2000s and resulted in mothers getting their children to the polio booths and receive *'Do Boond Zindagi Ke'*.

When these mothers were asked about the reason for coming to the camp that held little or no importance for them initially, their response was that "Amitabh Bachchan has become angry!'Research also established the effectiveness of Amitabh Bachchan media spots. TV ads were slightly more influential than radio ads in drawing people to the polio booths. The use of emotional appeal in the campaign did the magic. Even UNICEF recognized Mr Bachchan's effort as a UNICEF Good will Ambassador (https://www.unicef.org/india/our-partners/celebrities/amitabh-bachchan).

Eradication efforts coupled with effective use of mass media for the 'Pulse Polio' campaign was met with measurable success. India recorded just 66 cases in 2005, down from 135 cases reported in 2004, 225 in 2003, and 1,600 in 2002.

Every Bachchan ad about Polio awareness would end with the actor raising two fingers with the message- 'Pulse Polio Immunization- Two drops of Life'.

Source: https://www.socialsamosa.com/2020/03/brand-saga-pulse-polio-campaign/

The door-to-door communication strategy was coupled with posters, campaigns, exhibitions, interpersonal communication, village seminars, wall paintings, health camps (swasthya mela), folk drama and community meetings which lead to polio eradication from India.

5.5 SUMMARY

Let us review what we have learnt in this unit.

- When media channels started to gain popularity, the positive aspects were well ignored. Its negative effects were soon rigorously studied and declared, not much attention was given to what good it can do to the human society.
- However, with the emergence of positive psychology, media's importance to help people in various ways was paid attention to and given importance. How media helped in prosocial and other positive behaviours started to gain wider acceptance. It is still in the process of becoming a large phenomenon. However, the foundation has been set.
- Media play a significant role in health in health communication, health education , stigmatization and destigmatization social taboos.
- Through the case study, we learnt how different media channels helped raise awareness about HIV/AIDS. Not just that but it was effective in reducing stigmas attached to it, and helped those suffering from it seek help and take further precautions. Another case study demonstrated the

result of effective mass media campaign for polio immunization. Clearly, when a proper strategy is in place, media can provide extreme value to the society and can thus, contribute massively in developing the society further.

5.6 KEYWORDS

Destigmatization The process of attempting to remove stigma and to normalise qualities that are considered unusual through different means

Health Communication Communicating health information, like public health campaigns, health education, doctor and patient interaction, which is examined and practiced

Health Education Aims is to promote health and prevent disease, disability and premature death through education-driven voluntary behaviour change activities

Health Promotion Process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve one's health

Infodemic When there is plenty of information – some right, some wrong – mostly being spread through social media

Positive Media Psychology Sub-field of Psychology that deals with the positive cognitive, emotional and behavioural impact of media use

Stigma A perceived attribute or trait that causes someone to devalue or think less of the whole person

5.7 REVIEW QUESTIONS

1) Discuss the role of mass media in health education.
2) Explain the significance of health education for a developing society.
3) How does mass media campaign help in disseminating information to reduce stigma and bring about behavioural changes? Support your answer with relevant case studies.
4) Elucidate the main attributes for effective health communication.
5) Describe the various channels of disseminating health communication.

5.8 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READING

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Popular social media health-promotion campaigns: https://www.bangthetable.com/blog/public-health-social-media-campaigns/

Health education in India:https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ794068.pdf

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5.9 ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES

- Effective use of social media platforms for promotion of mental health awareness (nih.gov)
- 3 Effective Marketing Campaigns Promoting Mental Health Wellness 3 Effective Marketing Campaigns Pro (digitalmediasolutions.com)
- Social Media as an Educational Tool to Promote Health (uniteforsight.org)
- EMRPUB_2012_EN_1362.pdf (who.int)
- http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/attachements.cfm/att_94034_EN_Effectiveness%20of%20Mass%20Media%20campaigns%20HDA.pdf
- Prof. Melanie A. Wakefield, PhD, Prof. Barbara Loken, PhD, and Prof. Robert C. Hornik, PhD (2010). Use of mass media campaigns to change health behaviour (nih.gov).

Answers to Check Your Progress 1: True or False

(1) True (2) False (3) False (4) False (5) True