

TV Affects Behavior

Targeted Programming Undermines Families

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Core Finding

“Progressive” television programming undermines family formation, promotes divorce, and discourages marriage.¹ It does this causally.

Description

This research overview describes a “natural experiment” showing the *effect* of television programming (a detrimental effect):² Targeted programming *significantly negatively* affects whether a population forms intact, stable families.

Footnotes throughout describe how the declarative statements made are known to be fact. The overview concludes with discussion points.

The overview summarizes the empirical analysis by La Ferrara, Chong, and Duryea (in two parts).^{3,4} Their analysis concerns the *arrival* of television signal into different Brazilian communities (both rural and urban).

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¹Footnote 5 and the sentence it modifies describe the programming.

²See Henry Potrykus, *Causal Determination for Social Policy*, available at marri.us/causality, techreport (MARRI, 2013), for an elaboration on what is meant here by cause and effect and how these are determined for public policy actions.

³Eliana La Ferrara, Alberto Chong, and Suzanne Duryea, “Soap Operas and Fertility: Evidence from Brazil,” *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 4, no. 4 (2012): 1–31.

⁴Alberto Chong and Eliana La Ferrara, *Television and Divorce: Evidence from Brazilian Novelas*, techreport (Inter-American Development Bank, 2009).

Events Analyzed

A massive physical expansion (roll-out) of the Brazilian television network *Rede Globo* took place starting in the 1960s and continuing into the 1990s. The expansion saw the dissemination of certain television programs, particularly so-called “*novelas*,” into areas that previously had little access to programming. These “soap operas” depicted *smaller, more autonomous family modalities*.⁵

This roll-out occurred in a controlled, pseudo-random fashion: Different Brazilian census areas, so-called Minimally Comparable Areas, received programming signal at different dates.

Looking at this pseudo-random pattern, 1) the date of introduction of *novelas* can be tracked, 2) subsequent change (if any) in fertility, marriage, and divorce patterns can be measured, and 3) this change (lower fertility, more divorce) can be attributed *causally* to the roll-out of the programming itself.⁶

The findings of this statistical compilation activity follow.

Empirical Findings

- TV *does* significantly affect behavior, negatively.⁷ Detrimental programming is not simply watched by those who would have engaged in negative behaviors anyway:
 - The *Rede Globo* roll-out did not target groups especially likely to enjoy *novelas*. (Those orchestrating the roll-out did not seek groups with an *a priori* penchant for smaller families or autonomous living standards which involve divorce and marital infidelity.)⁸

⁵La Ferrera et al. undertake a statistical analysis of the types of women depicted in the *novelas*, and their behaviors (e.g. infidelity). Additionally, La Ferrera et al. compare this “natural experiment” to another roll-out of Brazilian TV. That roll-out, of the network SBT, occurred over the same time period and in much the same fashion. The SBT expansion did not contain programming targeting this type of Brazilian family life. (SBT programming was largely foreign content.) It saw no effect on fertility.

⁶Footnote 8 describes how the roll-out of this programming is pseudo-random. The roll-out thus is a natural experiment which allows causality to be inferred: See the reference of Footnote 2.

⁷The effect is seen with precision, above other, “random” changes in the family formation behavior seen in the Minimal Comparable Areas.

⁸By looking at the groups about to receive programming one year *before* they receive signal, La Ferrera et al. show that there is *no* identifiable tendency for the groups towards lower fertility. This is a placebo test on the population of interest. Additionally, La

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- “Progressive” television undermines family formation, promotes divorce, and discourages marriage. It does this causally.⁹
 - TV undermines a nation’s economy, national entitlement systems (pensions), and the employability of a nation’s men.¹⁰
 - TV works against the stated policy goals and interests of national governments, empirically.
 - Culture and where it originates matter, quantitatively. Some culture has massive negative effects on society.
 - Negative behaviors adopted by man undermine society – economically and fiscally. This undermining of society is quantitatively verifiable and empirically deduced.¹¹
 - A usual objection, that ‘values’ are only the concern of some special interest group, is false. The decline of families across the Minimum Comparable Areas shows values determine behavior: Mothers received a transmission and began behaving according the suggestions of the transmission.

Ferrera et al. test empirically whether those deciding this roll-out may have looked for certain socio-economic factors in area populations before deciding whether a population was to be next to receive programming signal. These factors might correlate both with viewing preference and family preference. This empirical test comes up negative.

⁹Regarding divorce, on an Area- and year-weighted basis, the *effect* of TV is to increase the level of divorce by something approaching 10 percent. In a country of a few hundred million this creates millions of broken families.

¹⁰The proof of this is immediate because young intact enduring marriage grants benefits to society through all these paths. For readable expositions of these facts, see:

Henry Potrykus and Patrick Fagan, *Decline in Economic Growth: Human Capital & Population Change*, available at marri.us/human-capital, techreport (MARRI, 2011);

Henry Potrykus and Patrick Fagan, *The Divorce Revolution Perpetually Reduces U.S. Economic Growth*, available at marri.us/productivity-divorce, techreport (MARRI, 2012);

Henry Potrykus and Patrick Fagan, *Non-Marriage Reduces U.S. Labor Participation: The Abandonment of Marriage Puts America at Risk of a Depression*, available at marri.us/labor-slump, techreport (MARRI, 2012);

And see the forthcoming paper on entitlements: <http://marri.us/entitlements/>.

¹¹See Footnote 10.