



Opinions of the Healthcare Providers Regarding a Medically Oriented Sri Lankan Teledrama

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analyzed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: A considerable portion of the ethics related to the medical curriculum is taught to the students by a department of forensic medicine. Medical professionals generally depict good ethical behavior while any deviations from the ethical practices negatively affect the intended health care. Ethical behaviour in the professional setting cannot be compromised by healthcare providers as it is a cornerstone of providing the best possible health care. "Television reality" is a term that needs to be explored by medical professionals once the health care sector is being portrayed in it.

Objectives: The primary goal of this study was to investigate how medical professionals perceive their respective characters when they are portrayed through the eyes of others via a teledrama. Other goals included determining how different strata of health professionals felt about the teledrama that was aired, what they thought about health professionals' ethical behaviour, and whether health professionals liked how they were portrayed in the drama.

Methods: The study was a descriptive cross-sectional study completed at a tertiary care hospital. The questionnaire was pretested and designed to be a self-administered questionnaire comprised of multiple-choice questions. The participants were allowed to watch an episode of the teledrama before being asked to complete a questionnaire. The findings were analyzed using the SPSS version 23. A p -value ≤ 0.05 was considered as significant.

Results: 401 people took part in total (doctors: nurses: other = 109:197:95). The male-to-female

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ratio was 1:3 (males, n = 113 (28.2%) and females n=288 (71.8%). Only 6.7% (n=27) of participants thought the teledrama was beneficial to society, while the majority thought the opposite. Approximately two-thirds of the participants (n= 268) expressed dissatisfaction with the drama. According to 56.1% (n=225) of the participants, the producer intended to humiliate the medical profession. 34.7 % of participants (n=139) thought the teledrama should be banned.

Conclusion: It is one of the prime duties of health professionals to safeguard the medical profession. At the same time the freedom of the producers of teledramas should equally be respected. Anyhow the overall findings were consistent with the fact that a clear majority of participants are hesitant to continue watching such programmes because they negatively portray professionals and the health profession. As a result, before approving the telecast, a scrutinizing mechanism should be established through a responsible body of the Ministry of Health, Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Teledrama; health profession; television show; opinions; healthcare providers; medical ethics.

1. INTRODUCTION

Television is unquestionably, an important part of modern Sri Lankan culture. It serves as one of the most effective means of preparing the public's mindset regarding what to believe and how to react [1,2]. As a result, such messages broadcasted on television could have both positive and negative consequences. The medical community as a whole has upheld ethical standards. In Sri Lanka, they are still kept at a satisfactory level [3]. It is impossible to create doctor-centered TV shows that are completely accurate in terms of medical details, but they should be as close to reality as possible. Professional accuracy and ethical practice should be closely aligned with entertainment value.

According to the cultivation theory, one tends to believe as a truth what they are exposed or inculcated through media for regular basis. As a result attitudes and the behaviours of such people may be shaped accordingly [4].

As per a short introduction about this particular teledrama it depicts various inefficiencies of the doctors, personal weaknesses, marital disputes, extra-marital affairs, the assistance obtained from attendants, according to the author's personal opinion, to cover up deficiencies, violations of medical ethics, being emotional with patients, and so on, in order to provide the spectators with amusement, laughter, and entertainment. As a result the research was aimed to collect information on how medical professionals perceive about the profession, whether the respective health personal liked how they were portrayed, the opinion on how they feel about the social impact of this drama and also to find the significance of certain findings against

the demographic data. The specific objectives included determining whether the health professionals would approve such a teledrama to be broadcasted, whether any detrimental and harmful message had been conveyed, and whether professional respect could be jeopardized for the sake of creating entertainment.

If a teledrama delivers only deficiencies of health care personals from beginning to the end, the author believes that it is her responsibility to perform a preliminary research regarding the perception of doctors, nurses and other staff members themselves on how others have portrayed in health characters in that teledrama. Because ethical behaviour and related teachings are performed primarily by forensic pathologists in Sri Lanka as part of the medical undergraduate curriculum, the author wished to conduct the research on such topics. So far, no medical research on such topics has been conducted in Sri Lanka. Through this research, it is expected to create a dialogue among the stakeholders to see strengths and weaknesses of the medical teledrama concerned and also to have a positive impact on upcoming medical teledramas.

2. METHODS

This study is based on a television drama that aired on a well-known television network in Sri Lanka. The teledrama was based on a private hospital and the attitudes of its employees towards patients and one another. The approval of the Ethics Review Committee where the research was carried out was obtained before the study.

The staff members were divided into three groups: doctors, nurses, and others, including

attendants and labourers. Those who could not read or write Sinhala and those who had not agreed to participate in the study were excluded. Prior to beginning the main study, a pilot study was carried out to understand the logistical issues and to identify any deficiencies in the questionnaire. The vague or ambiguous terms used in the questionnaire that were not sensible to the participants were revised and modified.

Those who watched the teledrama and those who did not watch it were both included in the study's population. One episode of the teledrama, on which the author wanted to conduct the research, was screened for the consented staff members without interfering routine activities. The episode to be screened was chosen at random from YouTube with no modifications [5]. The questionnaire was divided into four sections in order to collect information relevant to the specific objectives (demographic data, attitudes, practices, and knowledge about the teledrama and related issues). After watching the teledrama, questionnaires were distributed, and enough time was given to complete them. A

descriptive cross-sectional study yielded a sample size of 384 (Anyhow as a precautionary measure, an additional quota of 5% was collected for the minimum sample size of 384). Because no previous studies could be found to fix the prevalence, it was assumed to be 50%. The standard normal distribution was chosen as 1.96 in order to cover 95% of the population. Because the study did not include the entire population, the margin of error (d) was used. As a result, (d) was set to 0.05. (5 %). $N = Z^2 (p q) / d^2$. After determining the number of available doctors, nurses, and other staff members, proportions were calculated to determine how many doctors, nurses, and other staff members would be chosen. The following are the frequencies of the various occupations. The ratio of doctors to nurses to other staff members was nearly 1:2:0.7. (n=109: 199: 93). IBM SPSS Statistics 23 was used to analyse the data. Categorical data were compared using Pearson's χ^2 test. A *p* value of $\leq .05$ was considered statistically significant. All *p* values were two-sided.

3. RESULTS

Table	Results	Frequency	Percentage
1	How the medical professionals perceived the teledrama		
	Not given much thought	63	15.7
	Useful to life	27	6.7
	Entertaining, but does not represent reality	136	33.9
	Sends out inappropriate messages to society	175	43.6
	Total	401	100.0
2	The level of entertainment among the participants		
	1 (minimum)	213	53.1
	2	71	17.7
	3 (moderate)	84	20.9
	4	6	1.5
	5 onwards (maximum)	27	6.7
	Total	401	100
3	The motive of the producer		
	Humiliate the profession	225	56.1
	Constructive criticism	141	35.2
	Only to entertain	35	8.7
	Total	401	100.0
4	The opinion about continuity of the teledrama		
	Approve the continuation	13	3.2
	Possibly damaging, but acceptable with changes	175	43.6
	Banning is suitable	213	53.1
	Total	401	100.0
5	Acceptability and appropriateness of the behaviors shown in the teledrama		
	Acceptable	126	31.4
	Unacceptable	275	68.5
	Total	400	99.8
	Total	401	100.0
6	Societal response towards the medical profession if the drama		

Table	Results	Frequency	Percentage
	was kept telecasting		
	1- no effect	11	2.7
	2	6	1.5
	3	8	2.0
	4	10	2.5
	5 - moderate effect	102	25.4
	6	9	2.2
	7	22	5.5
	8	27	6.7
	9	37	9.2
	10 - huge effect	169	42.1
	Total	401	100.0
7	The ethical behaviour of health professionals with patients and with one another		
	Lessened	221	55.1
	Increased	15	3.7
	Not changed	39	9.7
	No idea	126	31.4
	Total	401	100.0
8	The opinions of health professionals regarding the behaviour depicted in the drama		
	Agree	3	.7
	No idea	76	19.0
	Disagree	136	33.9
	Strongly disagree	186	46.4
	Total	401	100.0

Table 1. How the medical professionals perceived the teledrama

Only 6.7% (27) of participants thought the teledrama portrayed a useful message to society. 33.9% of participants (n=136) thought it was good for entertainment, but they also thought that health professionals were not portrayed realistically. 15.7% (n=63) of participants had not considered the consequences of the drama. 43.6% of participants (n= 175) thought the drama sent an unsuitable message to society (Table 1).

Table 2. The level of entertainment among the participants

The amount of time the participants were entertained by the drama was calculated using a scoring system ranging from 1 to 10 in ascending order. Approximately two-thirds of the participants stated that they did not enjoy the drama, and only 27 people stated that they enjoyed it the most, accounting for 6.7 % of the total (Table 2).

Table 3. The motive of the producer in making this type of teledrama?

The producer’s plausible intention of telecasting such a medical teledrama was researched among the three categories. More than half of the participants (56.1% or 225) thought the

producer planned to humiliate the profession. However, 8.7% of the staff, or 35 people, stated that the sole purpose was to entertain the viewers, with no other goals in mind. According to 35.2% (n=141) of participants, only constructive criticism was used by the producer rather than sarcasm or humiliation (Table 3).

Table 4. Whether they wished to see similar teledramas in the future (The opinion about continuity of the teledrama)

Three options were considered: banning, continuing the teledrama, and continuing the teledrama but with minor changes. It was appropriate to be banned, according to 53.1 % of participants (n=213). Only 3.2 % of participants (n=13) indicated a desire to continue. To be telecasted but with minor changes was recommended by 43.6 % of participants (n=175) (Table 4).

Table 5. Acceptability and appropriateness of the behaviors shown in the teledrama

Under two headings, the questionnaire inquired about the acceptability of the behaviours depicted in the drama. The first was that “because all of the health professionals were humans, the behaviours depicted in the teledrama are acceptable,” and 31.4 % (n=126) of the participants agreed on it. The following

possibility was that the televised behaviour was unacceptable and unethical. That was the opinion of 68.5% of the participants (n=275) (Table 5).

Table 6. What would be the societal response if this teledrama or any similar one is continuously broadcasted? (Societal response towards the medical profession if keep telecasting)

Ten stages/degrees of gravity of the negative effect were given as a row in ascending order from no effect to maximum effect. The participants were asked to rate the negative impact of this teledrama or similar ones on a scale of 1 to 10 if they continued to be broadcasted for an extended period of time. The overwhelming majority of respondents stated that it would have significant negative consequences (Table 6).

Table 7. Comparison of ethical behavior of the present health professionals with those of the past (The attitude of health professionals with patients and with one another)

Table 7 depicts a comparison of ethical behaviour in the present and the past.

The majority of participants, 55.1 % (n=221), believed that ethical practice was deteriorating when compared to the ethical standards of health care professionals in the past (at least 20 years ago). Only 3.7% of participants (n=15) stated that their ethical behaviour had improved over time.

Table 9. The attitude of health professionals regarding the continuation of the teledrama

Opinion	Occupation			Significance
	Doctor	Nurse	Other	
It's fine, and it won't have a negative impact on the profession	2 (1.8%)	4 (2.0%)	34 (36.6%)	X ² = 118.037, df =6, P value = 0.000
It should not be broadcasted because it has a negative impact.	42 (38.5%)	91 (45.8%)	6 (6.5%)	
It is acceptable in telecasting with some positive changes.	64 (58.8%)	98 (49.2%)	52 (55.8%)	
Other	1 (0.9%)	6 (3.0%)	1 (1.1%)	

Table 10. The association in between the type of occupation and continuation of the teledrama

Opinion	Occupation			Significance
	Doctor	Nurse	Other	
Agree	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (3.2%)	X ² = 24.788, df =6, P value = 0.000
No idea	28 (25.7%)	26 (13.1%)	22 (23.7%)	
Disagree	27 (24.8%)	73 (36.6%)	36 (38.7%)	
Strongly disagree	54 (49.5%)	100 (50.3%)	32 (34.4%)	

Table 8. The behaviour of the health professionals portrayed in the teledrama (The opinion of health professionals regarding the behaviour depicted in the drama)

The behaviours depicted in the drama were approved by only a 0.7 % of the participants (n=3), while the majority (46.3%, n=186) strongly disagreed. A significant proportion of the participants, 18.9 % (n=76), stated that they had no clear idea about the levels of behaviour depicted in the drama (Table 8).

Only two of the 40 participants who stated that there is no harm in broadcasting such TV shows were doctors. This category included 4 nurses and 34 other employees (Table 9).

Table 10. Association between the occupation type and continuation of the teledrama

Only 3 participants had agreed on such a behavior, and they were from other staff members. The clear majority of people did not agree with the behaviour depicted in the teledrama (Table 10).

4. DISCUSSION

At the outset of the discussion, the scarcity of published literature that to be compared should be emphasized by the author. Anyhow according to a study done in New Zealand, it was pointed

out that comics and curiosity have been identified as a researching tool that can be utilized in the health sector. This teledrama was also full of comics, so there is no doubt about the power of such a teledrama [6]. The level of entertainment of the teledrama was anyhow not that satisfactory and 53.1% of the participants had mentioned that they had minimally enjoyed it (Table 2). This could have been due to the unrealistic aspects that had been put forward in the teledrama. According to the study, the main idea of the producer was to humiliate the profession, and that was the idea of 56.1%. Two hundred and seventy-five participants ($n=68.5\%$) of the sample had mentioned that the teledrama was unacceptable (Table 5). According to a published online article it was mentioned as "Medical TV shows that made doctors cringe", because of the unrealistic nature of the content [7,8]. An inappropriate message had been telecasted according to 43.6% ($n=175$) of the participants of this study. Only 27 participants (6.7%) had indicated that the teledrama was useful for the life. For a 33.9%, the teledrama had provided an entertainment but they had also believed that the reality is far from what was screened (Table 1).

The opinion on whether to continue teledrama or not were inquired. Only a 3.2% of the study sample ($n=13$) had indicated that it was suitable to continue. Banning of the teledrama was the opinion of 213 individuals (53.1%) (Table 4). The ethical behaviour of health professionals with patients and one another were one of the interesting aspects that was researched under this study. The ethical behaviour had been lessened among doctors according to 55.1% of the participants ($n=221$). Fifteen individuals were in the opinion that the ethical practices were improved and 39 individuals were under the impression that the ethical behaviour was same as the past (Table 7). So according to this study, most were under the impression that the ethical practices are not up to a standard level in present health professionals.

The relationship between the type of occupation and how health professionals had perceived about the teledrama was analyzed and there was a significant association, $X^2(6)=118.037=0.000$. Doctors and nurses had indicated that broadcasting would create a negative impact and in turn had indicted their dissatisfaction. It was a significant finding (Table 9). The occupation type was analyzed against the televised behaviour resulting in a significant association, $X^2(6)$

$=24.788=0.00$ (Table 10). Doctors and nurses had strongly disagreed about the televised behaviour when compared to the other staff members. With the above study findings, it is worthwhile to consider the history of the medically related television shows and in Sri Lanka it is fascinating, though it is not extensive. One such series of episodes in history is "Weda Hamine" [9]. The story behind the teledrama "Isiwara Asapuwa" was of a doctor who devoted to treat was eventually shot dead due to misunderstandings among the villagers. Such dramas never portrayed a negative light on the noble image of the profession.

Instead, in the international arena, medical teledramas are not limited in their narratives. According to the literature, people are no longer watching medical dramas to learn about medicine or health; instead, the motivation has shifted to entertainment [10]. In the past, popular job entities that were telecasted were related to police and criminal investigations in TV shows. However, with time, medical teledramas have also gained popularity with huge success despite having a relatively short history of around 50 years [11]. Medical-themed teledramas with multiple episodes and seasons are common around the world. The most well-known are based on realistic medical challenges and practical problems that doctors face on a daily basis in emergency hospital practice. Joyce Jordan MD., General Hospital (1963-present), The Doctors, Tuck (2003-2010), Scrubs (2001), St. Elsewhere (1982-1988), Mash (1972-1983), and House are just a few examples (2004-2012). Most such dramas instill a sense of respect and honour about the profession in the audience [12]. Medically oriented teledramas based on unprofessional behavior of doctors and prima facie violations of medical ethics to create cheap and easy amusement for the spectators are quite rare in the international arena. [13]. Communication of health messages, what to do in certain medical conditions, professional knowledge, how hard they work in emergencies, and medical inventions include just a few of the topics discussed in the international arena. For example, "I'm not a doctor, but I play one on TV" is an early medical drama that aired in the mid-1980s and explained the importance of having health insurance. Such teledramas gained popularity among global audiences; they are worth watching because they enlighten one's intellectual aspects while providing entertainment. The most notable fact is that in the majority of situations, some level of

professional dignity was maintained through professionalism.

The theories that have evolved around how media content shapes society or an individual are numerous. The purpose of this paper is not to discuss theories such as macro-level media effects, micro-level media effects, and cultivation theory [14,15]. Many studies have shown that television portrayals of medical professionals influence the public's perception of them. It is also clear that the trend of broadcasting negative facts about the medical profession is increasing [11–15].

A few theories that had been put forward in relation to media and its effects on society are to be considered in this context. The cultivation theory explains that “people who are regularly exposed to media for long periods of time are more likely to perceive the world's social realities as they are presented by the media affecting their attitudes and behaviours” [16]. According to the magic bullet theory messages delivered by media is directly fired into the audience head without their knowledge, through the media “gun” [17]. Hypodermic needle model also suggests a rather similar idea with the assumption of direct passage of messages provided through media, straight into a passive audience's body.

In health-related issues, as well as in the portrayal of professionals, the information to be broadcasted should be accurate. The teledrama under discussion is not attempting to convey any message about how professionals are capable of diagnosing efficiently, how difficult and stressful their jobs are, and how they sacrifice their personal lives for the benefit of the sick, and so on. Instead, it attempts to generate cheap humour and amusement by fabricating unrealistic and fabricated situations and scenarios about medical practice that are far from reality.

Sri Lankan children who watched a teledrama with unethical characters, will believe that such behaviour is the accepted norm in the medical profession [16]. If he or she becomes a member of the medical profession in the future, they will be confronted with dilemmas involving standard principles of medical ethics. According to one study, junior doctors who watch medical dramas are more likely to be inspired and influenced by the content of such dramas [18]. Without valid reason, the non-medical audience may suspect that all health staff members are obsessive in

sexual relationships with patients or among themselves. Medical television dramas continue to be in high demand both nationally and internationally. If one intends to produce such a drama for the local market, it is recommended that he/she should research some of the more well-known international dramas and their success secrets. The successful teledramas have reached out to multiple generations, providing entertainment and education while instilling a sense of respect for the health care system. The author personally communicated with the participants in this study, who agreed on acceptable standards for telecasting teledramas. They believed that dramas containing ironic criticism were popular. They mentioned that ironic criticism is easier to convey a message than literal criticism because the former is less aggressive. Medical teledramas are thought to be a powerful and effective medium for disseminating knowledge while also providing entertainment [19,20]. Academics who teach ethics in medical schools are obligated to investigate ethical issues and conduct research on such issues to positively impact the health sector.

This study had only a few inherent limitations. The research was limited to a single tertiary care hospital. It would have been preferable if the study had been conducted in at least a few other locations across the country. The author's recommendations include the need to protect the integrity of the health profession by not allowing trespassing on ethical boundaries and the dignity of the profession in order to fulfill cheap and commercialized agendas. There should be a scrutinizing mechanism through the Ministry of Health/Sri Lanka Medical Council (SLMC) or a separately appointed board of health professionals to look into the contents of teledramas, commercials, advertisements, or movies geared towards the medical profession before they are released to the general public. No published literature as per the stipulated objectives was found to be cited is also a limitation encountered during this study.

5. CONCLUSION

The participants in the study agreed that the teledrama which was aired was not real. The entertainment provided was also unconvincing. The majority believed that the teledrama had humiliated the profession and if similar teledramas were broadcasted, it would have a negative impact on health professionals.

Because of its wide accessibility as a mean of entertainment, television is by far one of the cheapest and most far-reaching media in today's world. Even the most remote villages have adequate signaling coverage to keep the people entertained. Compared to today's teledramas, which do not consider the tarnishing effect on the profession's image, previous teledramas related to the medical profession portrayed health professionals in a very positive light. As a result, it has become necessary for such dramas to be reviewed by a medically qualified authority before they are released. The duty and responsibility of safeguarding the image, integrity, and dignity of any profession primarily rests with its members, particularly forensic specialists and academics who primarily teach ethical behavior.

DISCLAIMER

The company name used for this research is commonly and predominantly selected in our area of research and country. There is absolutely no conflict of interest between the authors and company because we do not intend to use this company as an avenue for any litigation but for the advancement of knowledge. Also, the research was not funded by the company rather it was funded by personal efforts of the authors.

CONSENT

As per international standard or university standard, respondents' written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

ETHICAL APPROVAL

The study was a descriptive cross-sectional study completed at a tertiary care hospital with the approval of the Ethics Review Committee of the respective hospital.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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