Fighting COVID-19 and GBV in partnership with innovation units in Bangladesh
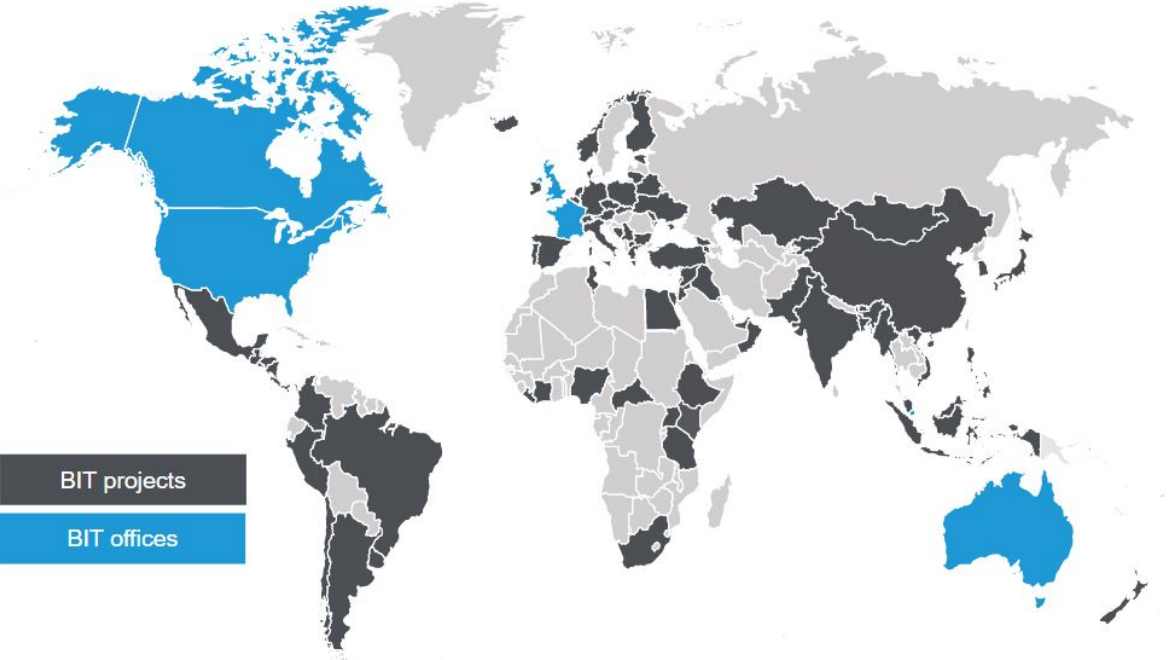
Dilhan Perera, Senior Research Advisor

January 2022
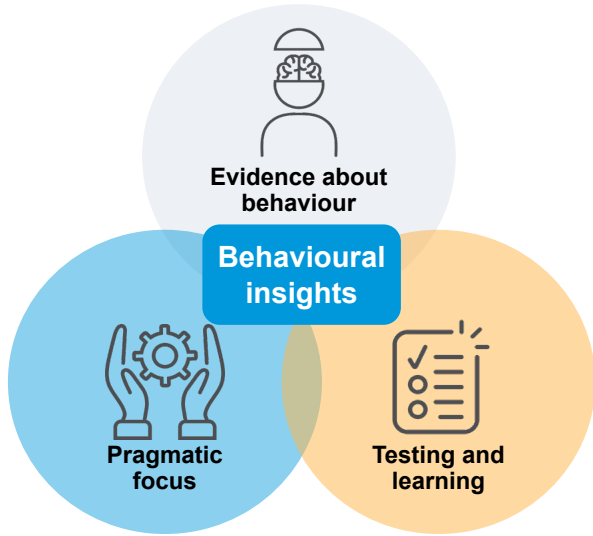
THE
BEHAVIOURAL
INSIGHTS
TEAM

A bit about BIT (the Behavioural Insights Team)

BIT projects
BIT offices

Evidence about behaviour

Behavioural insights

Pragmatic focus

Testing and learning

Building BI capacity in governments with funding from the Global Innovation Fund

- **Our vision:** To spread our BI project methodology around the world to make public policies and services more effective and human-centric.

- **What we did:** In 5 years we worked with 12 partners to launch 20 behavioural insights projects in Bangladesh, Guatemala and Indonesia.

- **The approach:** Running projects jointly, so partners could learn-by-doing. We also ran workshops and additional targeted training.

**Long-term ambition:
For our partners to continue applying BI without our assistance**

Our BI project methodology: TESTS

TARGET   EXPLORE   SOLUTION   TRIAL   SCALE

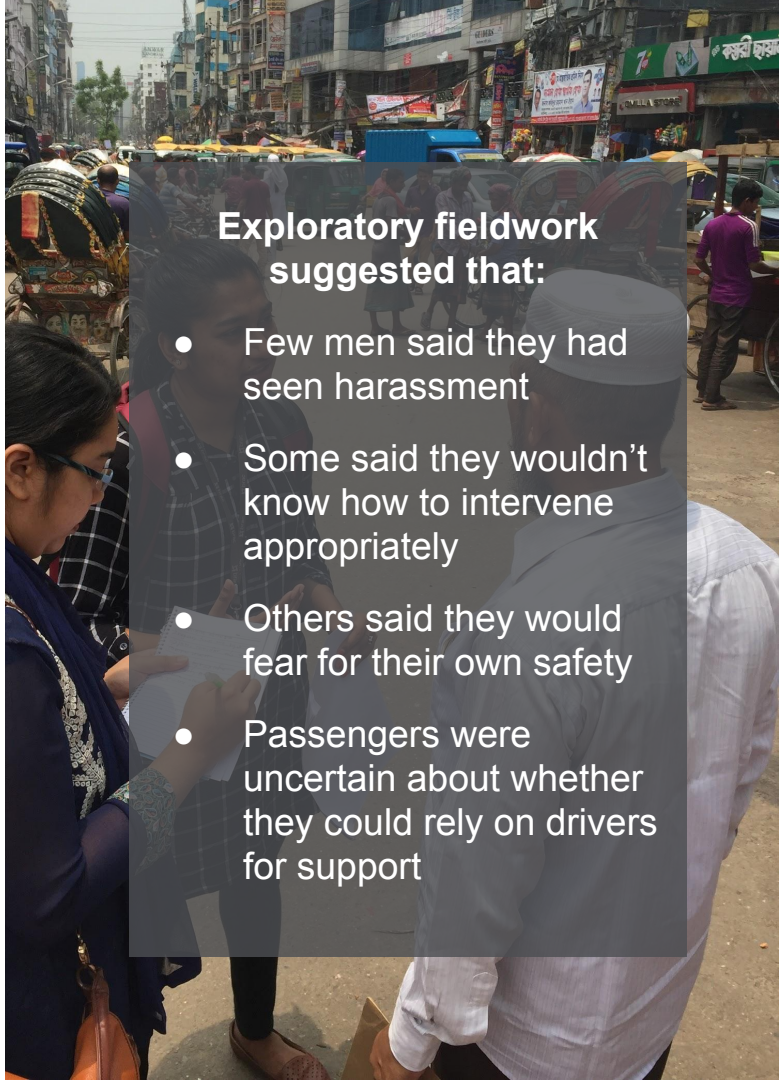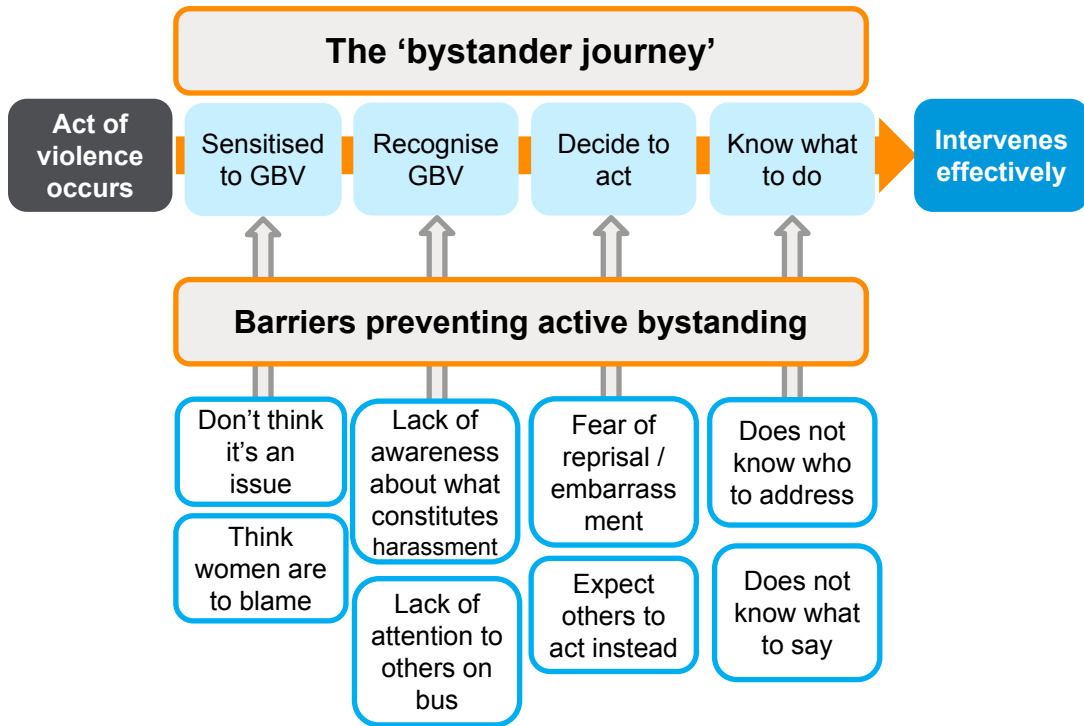# Women often do not feel safe using public transport

According to a 2018 study by BRAC University:

- **94%** of women travelling on public transport in Bangladesh have experienced sexual harassment while commuting

- **81%** said they kept silent during the experience

> When we interviewed passengers at bus stops, many reported that they would intervene if they witnessed someone being harassed, but very few had actually done so

Understanding barriers to active bystanding

The 'bystander journey'

| Act of violence occurs | Sensitised to GBV | Recognise GBV | Decide to act | Know what to do | Intervenes effectively |

Barriers preventing active bystanding

- Don't think it's an issue
- Think women are to blame
- Lack of awareness about what constitutes harassment
- Lack of attention to others on bus
- Fear of reprisal / embarrassment
- Expect others to act instead
- Does not know who to address
- Does not know what to say

Exploratory fieldwork suggested that:

- Few men said they had seen harassment

- Some said they wouldn't know how to intervene appropriately

- Others said they would fear for their own safety

- Passengers were uncertain about whether they could rely on drivers for support

The solution: bright yellow posters placed inside buses

Attractive: bright, high-contrast design to attract attention in crowded environment

Social: asks people to join forces rather than being passive bystanders

1. Support the victim

2. Ask perpetrator to move

3. Engage conductor & call police if necessary

Timely: bystanders would see the poster at the time any harassment takes place, rather than beforehand

Easy: provides three simple steps to intervene safely and effectively

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Measuring harassment and evaluating impact of posters was challenging

~60 public buses in Dhaka

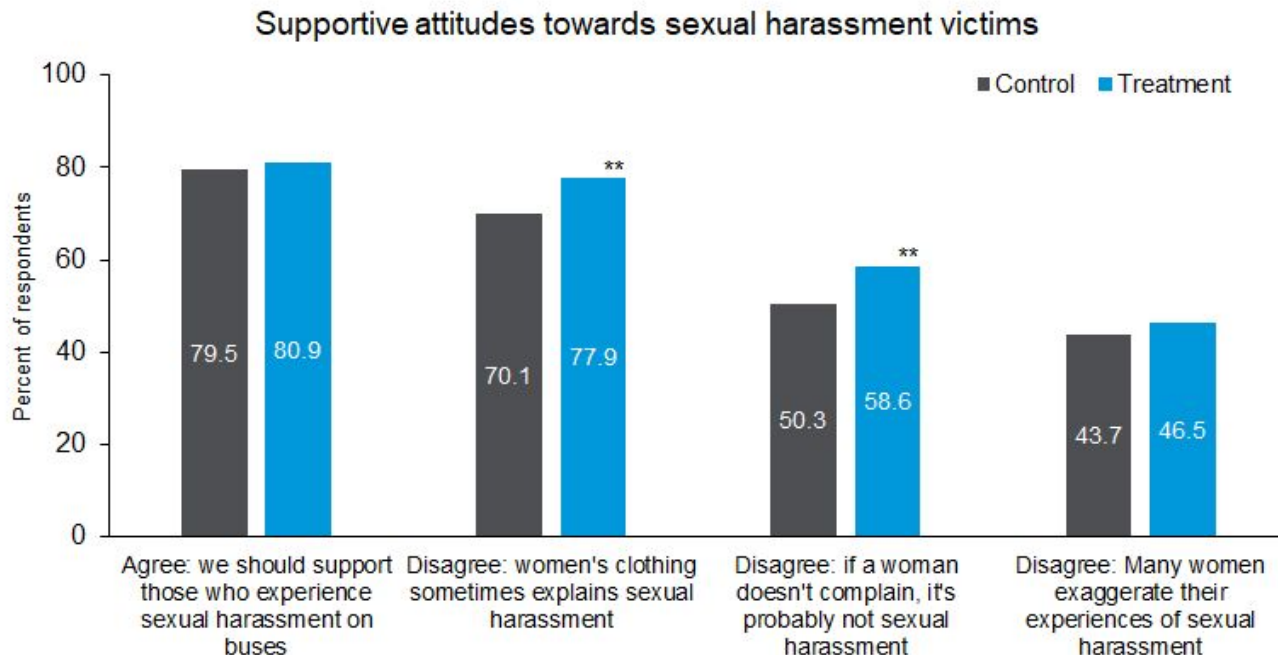Pre-intervention period

Introduce posters

Post-intervention period

Measure outcomes: Systematic observations
Passenger surveys

Week 1   **Week 2**

We found a change in passenger attitudes…

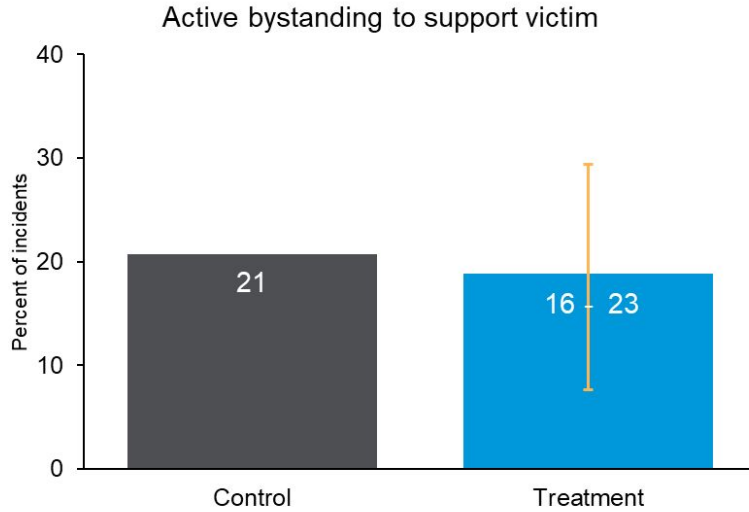Supportive attitudes towards sexual harassment victims
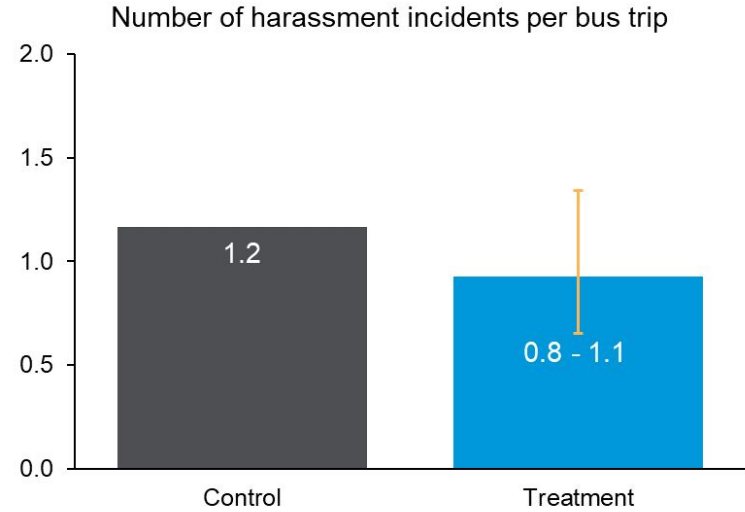
Secondary analysis; N = 2,708
Error bars span the range of 95% confidence intervals across several alternative models. Treatment bars and significance stars are for the the point estimate from the preferred model.
** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05, + p < 0.1

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… but no clear impact on bystander behaviour

Active bystanding to support victim

Percent of incidents

- Control: 21
- Treatment: 16 – 23

Primary analysis, linear regression; N = 943
The treatment bar is labelled with the range of point estimates across models, while the bar height is determined by the median effect across models that control for enumerator experience effects. Error bars span the range of 95% confidence intervals across models.

Number of harassment incidents per bus trip

- Control: 1.2
- Treatment: 0.8 – 1.1

Secondary analysis, negative binominal regression; N = 774
Error bars span the range of 95% confidence intervals from several alternative models. The treatment bar is labelled with the range of point estimates across models, while the bar height is determined by the median effect across models that control for enumerator experience effects

This approach should continue to be tested given scalability and potential benefits

The project demonstrated that:

- **It can be easier to change attitudes than behaviour:** Well-designed posters can have positive effects on passenger attitudes, but a change in attitudes might not be enough to change bystander behaviour.

- **We may need to address additional barriers to active bystanding:** To encourage more bystander intervention in similar contexts, we might need to address additional barriers, including uncertainty about what constitutes sexual harassment and how other bystanders would react

- **Rigorous research in this area is feasible, and worth doing!**

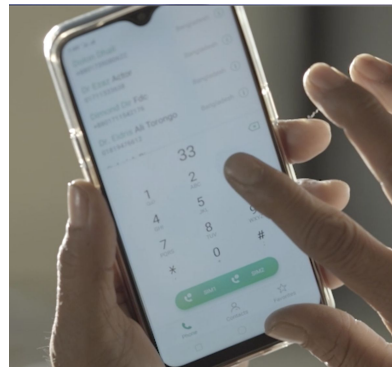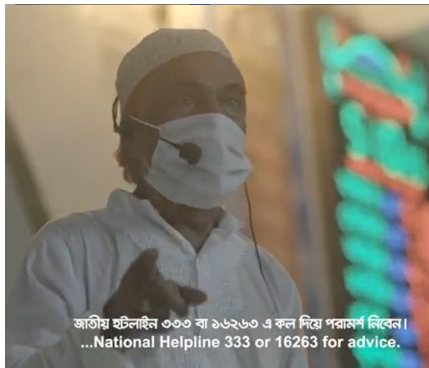# Tackling social stigma during COVID-19

Our work with A2i, Government of Bangladesh

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The challenge: Addressing stigma during COVID-19

- a2i identified social stigma as a byproduct of COVID-19 that had potentially severe consequences for those suspected of having the disease

- Potential targets included reducing stigmatising beliefs and discouraging stigmatising behaviour

- **'Explore' work:** Rapid literature review and exploratory interviews with doctors

- Following explore work, we decided to focus on **failure to seek medical care due to fear of stigma**

- a2i had the foresight of repurposing a national government helpline ('333') to provide telemedicine during the pandemic

<div align="center">

**→ Target behaviour: calling 333 to discreetly seek medical care
after developing COVID-19 symptoms**

</div>

The solution: a2i, Zanala and BIT develop an edutainment video to encourage the use of the helpline

You both do not go around without a mask!

জাতীয় হটলাইন ৩৩৩ বা ১৬২৬৩ এ কল দিয়ে পরামর্শ নিবেন।
...National Helpline 333 or 16263 for advice.

The video incorporated several BI principles:

It was relatively short (just over 6 minutes) but still developed a storyline

A clear call to action ('call 333'), which was introduced early and repeated several times
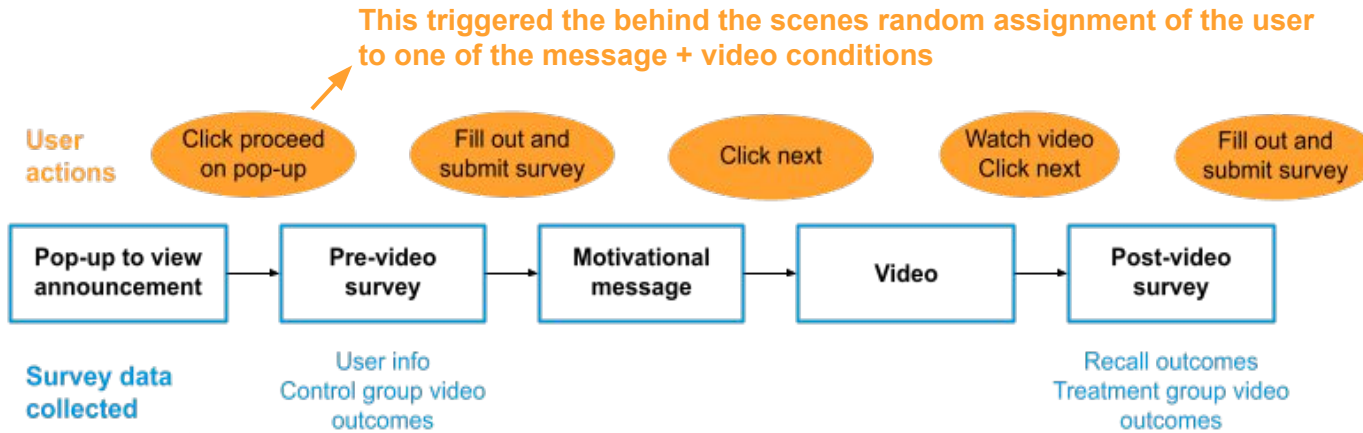
A respected messenger - in this case an Imam

A demonstration of how to call the helpline and what happens afterwards

Modelling of how to interact safely with symptomatic individuals
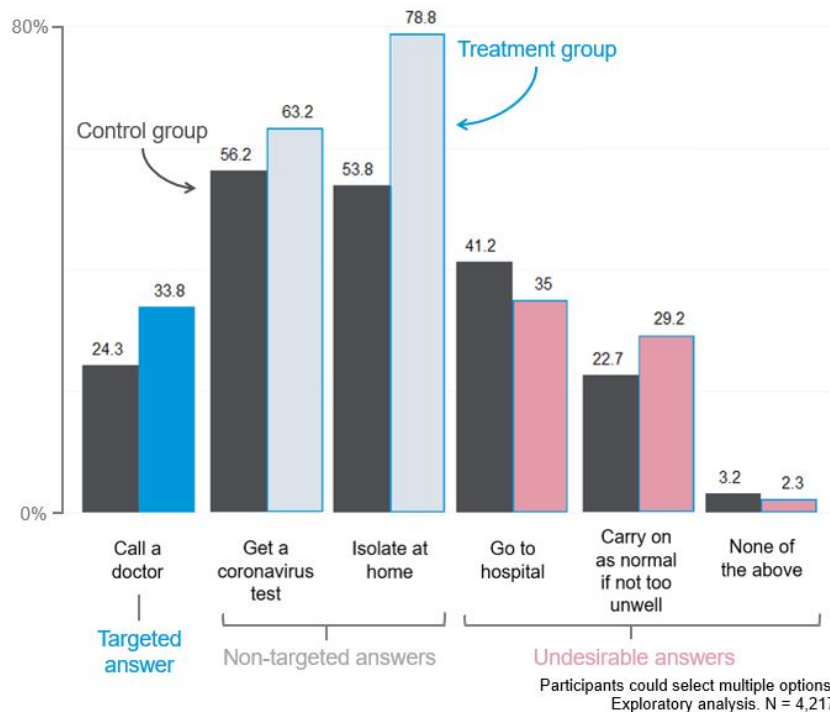
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Testing the video: Running an online RCT

We worked with a2i's educational innovation team to set up an experiment on **Muktopaath**, Bangladesh's national e-learning platform
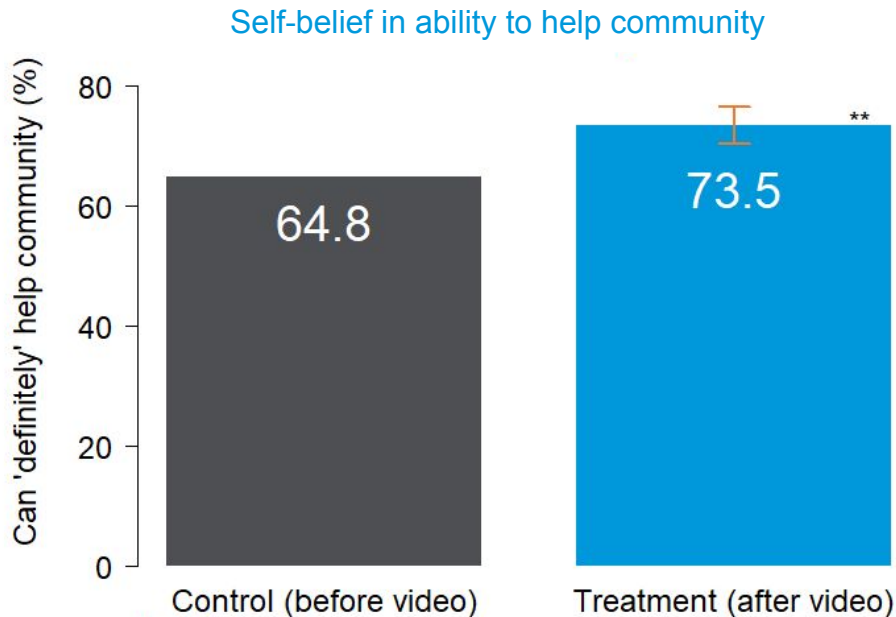
Those who had just been shown the video were more likely to advise 'calling a doctor' and 'isolating at home'

What is the most important advice you would provide to someone with Covid symptoms?

The video seemed to substantially improve participants' self-belief in their ability to help their community fight Covid

Self-belief in ability to help community

Can 'definitely' help community (%)

Control (before video): 64.8
Treatment (after video): 73.5 **

N=5,891
** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1, adjusted for multiple comparisons
secondary analysis

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We suggested using edutainment videos more widely and conducting additional testing

Recommendation 1

Distribute the video more widely...

...if the content remains appropriate for the current state of the pandemic

Recommendation 2

Consider producing more edutainment videos...

...to address other behavioural elements of the Covid response

Recommendation 3

Conduct additional testing...
...to better understand how to increase viewership and make edutainment videos more effective

THE BEHAVIOURAL INSIGHTS TEAM

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