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USAID'S COLLECTIVE ACTION TO REDUCE GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (CARE-GBV)

HOW TO IDENTIFY AND ADVANCE EQUITABLE SOCIAL NORMS

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How to identify and advance equitable social norms

Overview

The goal of CARE-GBV is to strengthen USAID's collective response to gender-based violence (GBV) in development programming globally. This brief introduces the definition of social norms, including gender norms, and how they relate to GBV, as well as various tools to identify and address social norms. The information provided here will support USAID Mission staff and implementing partners working to promote gender equity and norms that foster healthy relationships. By identifying context-specific social norms, program implementers can promote equitable norms in their program activities.

Making the link between attitudes, behaviors, and norms

Norms are not the same as attitudes and behaviors, nor do they always align. The primary difference is that attitudes and behaviors are *individual* beliefs and actions that a person has or does, which may or may not be informed by social factors. Norms are *collective* beliefs about what is typical and appropriate. A woman may have a personal attitude that partners should share household responsibilities, but the norm in her community is that it is acceptable for women to take on most of the household work and childcare.

Key Points

- Social norms are collective beliefs about what is typical or appropriate. They can promote equitable or harmful behaviors or practices.

- Social norms are among the multilevel factors that underpin specific behaviors and practices.

- Gender norms are a type of social norm that influence behavior based on expected gender roles and responsibilities.

- One root cause of GBV is the harmful gender norm that women and men are unequal.

What are social and gender norms?

When we walk into the market or a clinic, we most likely wait in a line to receive a service. There may not be a sign telling us to wait in line, but we might see others in line and believe that others expect us to follow this norm.

Social norms are the unwritten rules that most people follow. Social norms are embedded in communities, systems, and structures. A **gender norm** is a type of social norm. Among the characteristics of gender norms is the strong role of power in maintaining norms that normalize inequality between women and men.

Table 1. Key definitions

Reference groups	The people and networks who influence a person's behavior *"My family members expect girls my age to go to school."*
Social norms	Unwritten rules that guide our everyday behavior *"When purchasing something at the market, people in my community expect shoppers to stand in a line."*
Descriptive norms	Perceptions about what is typical in a community (also known as empirical expectations) *"It is common for women in my village to care for children and elders."*
Injunctive norms	A shared belief about what is appropriate in a community (also known as normative expectations) *"My community expects women to care for children and elders."*
Sanctions	Anticipated or actual (positive or negative) reaction of the reference group (to a behavior) *"I will be judged by my friends if I do not get my daughter married before she reaches puberty."*
Gender norms	Social norms that describe how people of a particular gender should or typically behave *"Women should be responsible for taking care of the children."*
Risk factors	Factors that increase the likelihood of experiencing or perpetrating violence Men who have experienced violence in childhood are more likely to perpetrate violence.
Protective factors	Factors that decrease the likelihood of experiencing or perpetrating violence A minimum level of education can help protect women from experiencing violence in some contexts.

Making the link between social norms and GBV

While there are multiple contributing factors that drive GBV, one root cause is gender-based unequal access to power. Social norms play important roles in determining these inequalities. This imbalance of power is expressed by the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women as

"a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to the domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women."[1] GBV—including child, early, and forced marriage (CEFM); and female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C)—is normalized through patriarchal gender norms, behaviors, and practices that perpetuate the notion that men have more power than women or

gender-nonconforming individuals. Social norms and violence reinforce one another—that is, inequitable norms can lead to violence, and violence can perpetuate inequitable norms.
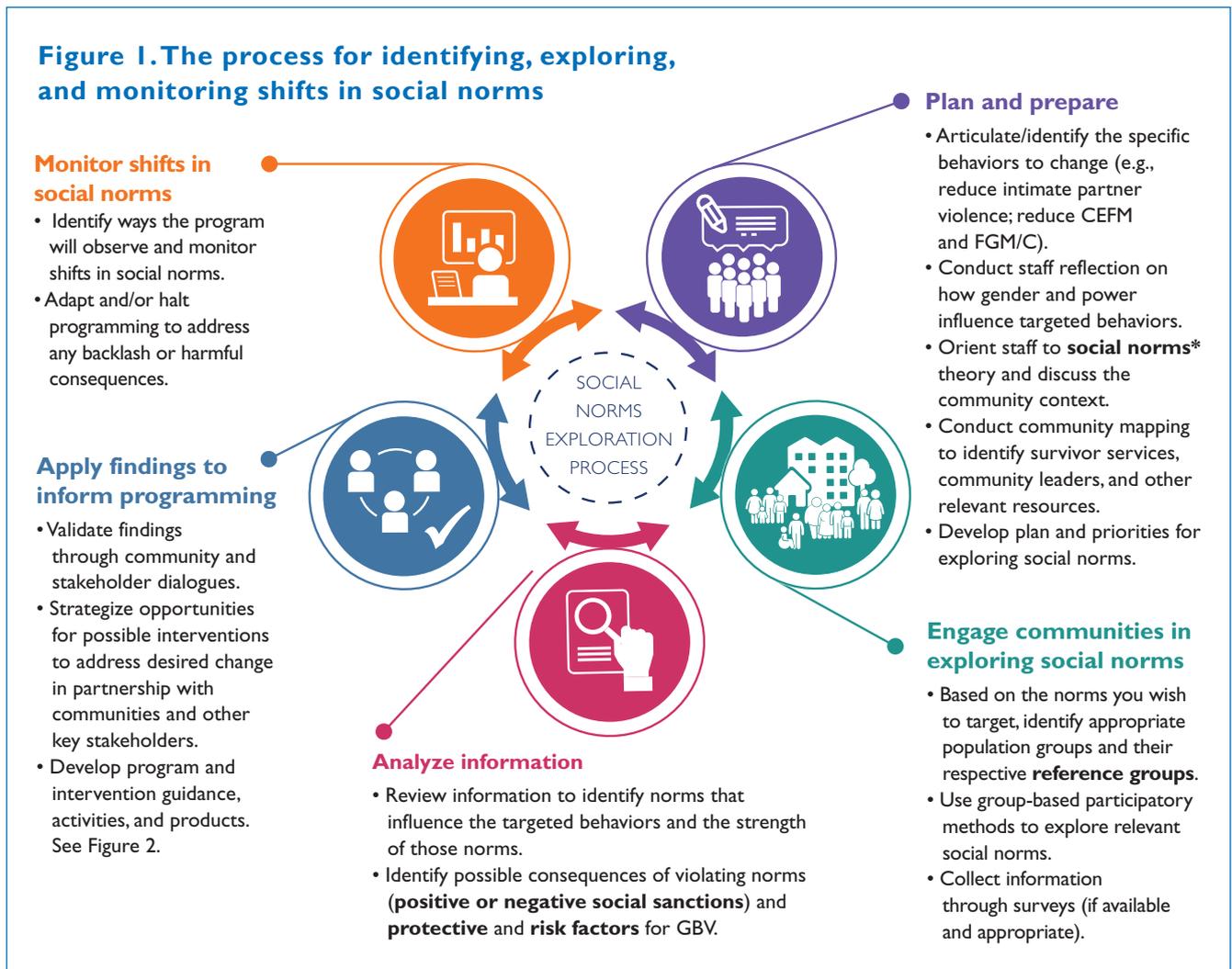
Additional norms that promote GBV include those that produce and maintain hierarchical power (such as those that privilege individuals based on race, age, disability, and language) and those that discourage survivors or advocates from taking an action toward ending violence (for example, norms that identify violence as a private matter). These social norms are maintained through attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, practices, and structures by men and those who wield power at multiple levels of society.

When social norms begin to shift toward balanced power dynamics and gender equity, communities can transform into violence-free environments. Shifting harmful social and gender norms can contribute to creating safer, equitable communities.

Identifying, exploring, and monitoring shifts in social norms

Several tools have been developed to help program implementers identify, explore, and monitor shifts in social norms. This exploration is best conducted before an activity begins to understand the norms that uphold or prevent GBV. Findings can be used to inform strategies to shift norms, develop indicators for monitoring and evaluation, and provide a deeper understanding of current contextual conditions.

Figure 1 describes steps and processes for identifying and exploring social norms, applying findings to inform programming, and monitoring shifts in norms. The path to shift social norms requires an iterative and adaptive process. Exploring social norms may result in adjusting program activities to improve outcomes. For guidance and resources on exploring norms, and on designing and implementing programs to shift norms, see the worksheet on page 7.
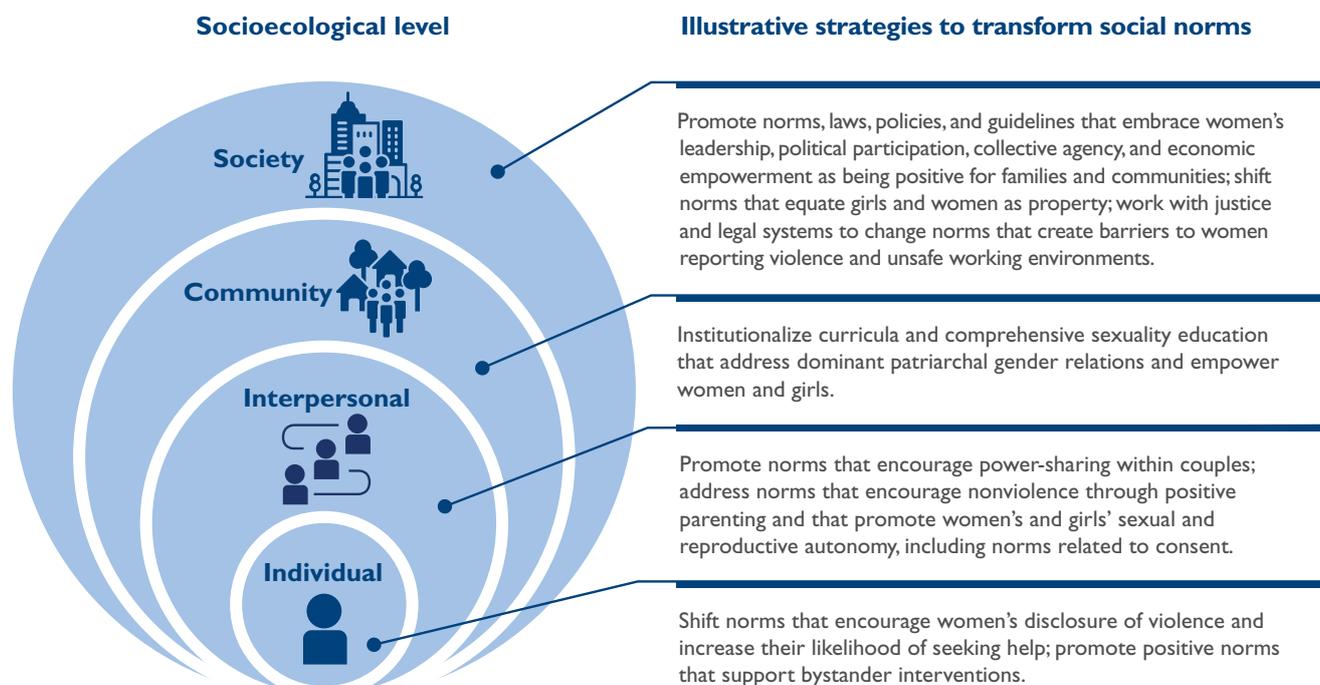
Figure 1. The process for identifying, exploring, and monitoring shifts in social norms

SOCIAL NORMS EXPLORATION PROCESS

Monitor shifts in social norms
- Identify ways the program will observe and monitor shifts in social norms.
- Adapt and/or halt programming to address any backlash or harmful consequences.

Apply findings to inform programming
- Validate findings through community and stakeholder dialogues.
- Strategize opportunities for possible interventions to address desired change in partnership with communities and other key stakeholders.
- Develop program and intervention guidance, activities, and products. See Figure 2.

Analyze information
- Review information to identify norms that influence the targeted behaviors and the strength of those norms.
- Identify possible consequences of violating norms (**positive or negative social sanctions**) and **protective** and **risk factors** for GBV.

Plan and prepare
- Articulate/identify the specific behaviors to change (e.g., reduce intimate partner violence; reduce CEFM and FGM/C).
- Conduct staff reflection on how gender and power influence targeted behaviors.
- Orient staff to **social norms*** theory and discuss the community context.
- Conduct community mapping to identify survivor services, community leaders, and other relevant resources.
- Develop plan and priorities for exploring social norms.

Engage communities in exploring social norms
- Based on the norms you wish to target, identify appropriate population groups and their respective **reference groups**.
- Use group-based participatory methods to explore relevant social norms.
- Collect information through surveys (if available and appropriate).

*Bolded terms are defined in Table 1.

Advancing equitable norms

The socioecological model provides a conceptual framework for examining the interaction of factors contributing to GBV across the individual, interpersonal, community, and societal levels. Factors at each of these levels influence girls', women's, and gender nonconforming peoples' disproportionate risk of violence and the levels of violence. However, this risk can be overcome by engaging individuals and communities across these multiple levels using the activities and strategies in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Illustrative strategies for transforming social norms across the socioecological model[2]

Socioecological level	Illustrative strategies to transform social norms
Society	Promote norms, laws, policies, and guidelines that embrace women's leadership, political participation, collective agency, and economic empowerment as being positive for families and communities; shift norms that equate girls and women as property; work with justice and legal systems to change norms that create barriers to women reporting violence and unsafe working environments.
Community	Institutionalize curricula and comprehensive sexuality education that address dominant patriarchal gender relations and empower women and girls.
Interpersonal	Promote norms that encourage power-sharing within couples; address norms that encourage nonviolence through positive parenting and that promote women's and girls' sexual and reproductive autonomy, including norms related to consent.
Individual	Shift norms that encourage women's disclosure of violence and increase their likelihood of seeking help; promote positive norms that support bystander interventions.

An evaluation conducted by Advancing Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms (ALIGN) identified examples of positive shifts in social norms. For example, between 2000 and 2018 the proportion of women who considered being hit by their husbands to be acceptable decreased in 41 out of 46 countries. A similar pattern emerged among men; of the 35 countries with data, the share of men reporting that a husband is justified in hitting his wife decreased in 28 countries.[2] Effective approaches engage community members (including reference groups) that support positive social norms and include safety plans to address any potential backlash such as discrimination, harassment, and violence.

Approaches that advance equitable social norms need to be sensitive to the local context and be based on an exploration of existing social norms so that they take into consideration the local drivers and context of GBV. In addition, approaches should apply evidence- and practice-based knowledge that has contributed to shifting norms. Programs addressing social norms should follow several principles: plan interventions that focus on multiple drivers of GBV; women, men, and gender nonconforming people, and where relevant, families; apply gender and social empowerment theories; use group-based popular education; have user-friendly manuals and materials; integrate support for survivors; consider the optimal length and intensity of an activity; engage respected members of the community who have gender-equitable attitudes as facilitators; and where possible, engage facilitators who reflect the age and gender of participants.[3] Programs also need to involve staff in critical reflection of their own biases and institutionalize self-care measures for staff.

Case study: An intervention to change school-based and community social norms in Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, many children have grown up in an environment where they are exposed to multiple forms of violence at home and in schools. Findings from a baseline analysis conducted by Help the Afghan Children (HTAC), included children's experience of peer violence at school, corporal punishment at home and school, and observations of family violence. To address the social norms underpinning this violence perpetuated against women and children and as part of the What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls Global Programme, HTAC incorporated activities to shift social norms that focused on conflict resolution, peace building, and training on women's rights. These activities included messaging, critical reflection, and dialogue to engage individuals and their reference groups to discuss, challenge, and redefine norms to prevent GBV. Evaluation findings indicated that conducting peace education with children in schools, coupled with community activities, led to a significant reduction of various forms of violence including peer violence, corporal punishment of children at school and home, and domestic violence against women.[4]

Worksheet

This worksheet is designed to help program implementers identify, explore, and monitor shifts in social norms. The first column provides a checklist of considerations for each step of the norms-shifting process, adapted from *What Works*[3] interventions and practice-based knowledge for GBV programming, as well as resources related to that step. The second column provides room for reflections and notes. Although the worksheet appears to follow a linear process, advancing social norms is iterative and adaptive.

Steps for identifying and exploring social norms

Plan and prepare	
☐ Has the team identified the social norms related to gender and violence that the activity is targeting for change? ☐ Is the team composed of people with diverse backgrounds and identities? ☐ Is the team trained in ethical data collection and management of GBV data? ☐ Are there ongoing opportunities for staff—support; wellness; and ongoing learning on gender, power, and violence? ☐ Is the team prepared to refer survivors of violence to local services? **Sample resources** • Learning Collaborative to Advance Normative Change. *Social norms and AYSRH: Building a bridge from theory to program design.* 2019. • Advancing Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms. *Gender, power and progress: How norms change.* 2020. • GBV Prevention Network. *Get moving!* 2012. • Institute for Reproductive Health, Georgetown University. *Social norms atlas: Understanding global social norms and related concepts.* 2021.	**Notes:**
Engage communities in exploring social norms	

☐ Is there a protocol for confidentiality and obtaining informed consent?
☐ Are diverse stakeholders engaged to address the different social norms targeted for change?
☐ Are activities appropriate and accessible for the target populations?
☐ Are activity materials user-friendly in design?
☐ Are facilitators trained to lead participatory group activities on gender and power?
 	
Sample resources
• Institute for Reproductive Health, Georgetown University. *Social norms exploration tool.* 2019.
  – Identify Reference Groups (pg. 24); Problem Tree Analysis (pg. 15)
• Advancing Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms. *Quantitative measurement of gendered social norms.* 2019.
  – Survey-based instruments (pg. 6); Vignettes (pg. 8)
• CARE. *Applying theory to practice: CARE's journey piloting social norms measures for gender programming.* 2017.
  – Qualitative Methods (pg. 11)
• UNICEF and UNFPA. *Participatory research toolkit for social norms measurement.* 2020
  – Gender boxes (pg. 39); 2x2 Tables for social norms (pg. 56)
	Notes:

Analyze Information

☐ Is there a central, secure location for informed consent documents, case notes, and audio recordings?

☐ Have staff engaged in critical reflection of their own biases that may influence data analysis?

☐ Is diagnosis of norms informed by local experience?

Sample resources

- Institute for Reproductive Health, Georgetown University. *Social norms exploration tool.* 2019.
  - Analyze Findings (pg. 45)
- Advancing Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms. *Quantitative measurement of gendered social norms.* 2019.
- CARE. *Social norms data use tool.* 2020

Notes:

Apply findings to inform programming

☐ Is the proposed program informed by a survivor-centered theory of change?

☐ Is the proposed program rooted in the local context and does it reflect community feedback?

☐ Does the program have realistic objectives, funding, and timelines that can support norms change and not cause harm in communities?

Sample resources

- What Works to Prevent Violence. *Effective design and implementation elements in interventions to prevent violence against women and girls.* 2020.
  - Ten design and implementation elements for effective interventions to prevent violence against women and girls (pg. 33)
- Breakthrough ACTION and the Learning Collaborative to Advance Normative Change. *Getting practical: Integration social norms into social and behavior change programs.* 2021.
- CARE. *Social norms design checklist.* 2020.

Notes:

Monitor shifts in social norms

☐ Are strategies in place to address unintended discrimination, harassment, and violence that result from the program?

☐ Are there community members, including reference groups, that can reinforce and support the development of norms that prevent GBV?

Sample resources

- Glass, Perrin, Marsh, et al. *Communities of Care Programme.* 2019.
  - Social norms and beliefs about GBV scale (pg. 6)
- Learning Collaborative to Advance Normative Change. *Resources for measuring social norms: A practical guide for program implementers.* 2019.
  - Developing indicators for social norms (pg. 34)
- Coalition of Feminists for Social Change (COFEM). *Backlash: What is it and how do we address it safely? Feminist pocketbook tip sheet #9.* 2018.
  - Key strategies for addressing backlash (pg. 3); Practical tips (pg. 4)

Notes:

References

[1] United Nations, Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women. New York: United Nations; 1993 Dec 20. [cited 2021 Feb 25] Available from: https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/ViolenceAgainstWomen.aspx

[2] Harper, C, Marcus, R, George R, D'Angelo, SM, Samman, E. Gender, Power and Progress: How Norms Change. London: ALIGN/ODI; 2020 Dec 9. [cited 2021 Feb 25] 168 p. Available from: https://www.alignplatform.org/gender-power-progress

[3] Jewkes, R, Willan, S, Heise, L, Washington, L, Shai, N, Kerr-Wilson, A, Christofides, N. Effective Design and Implementation Elements in interventions to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls. Pretoria: South African Medical Research Council; 2020 Jan [cited 2021 Feb 25]. 44 p. Available from: https://whatworks.co.za/documents/publications/373-intervention-report19-02-20/file

[4] Corboz J, Siddiq W, Hemat O, Chirwa ED, Jewkes R. What works to prevent violence against children in Afghanistan? Findings of an interrupted time series evaluation of a school-based peace education and community social norms change intervention in Afghanistan. PLoS One. 2019 Aug;14(8):e0220614.

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