



SOUTH ASIA
SOCIAL NORMS & AGENCY
LEARNING COLLABORATIVE

Sharpening Measurement of Gender Norms

Safeguards to Improve Research Validity



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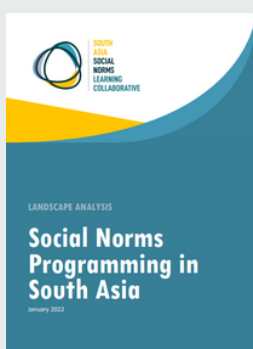
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LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS FOCUSSED ON



- WASH
- Health
- Nutrition
- Gender

This document has detailed some of the efforts in South Asia to improve the four themes through the lens of social norms programming



Scan to learn more about SA-SNALC

The South Asia Social Norms & Agency Learning Collaborative (SA-SNALC)

is a platform of institutions and individuals who are researchers, practitioners, and enthusiasts working in the domain of social norms & agency.

OUR WORK

Events

Our events including webinars and workshops amplify evidence, learning and experiences.

Critical Conversations

Academics, practitioners, grassroots experts share their insight & best practices on social norms programming & research

Case Studies

Documented evidences that inform norm shifting interventions at the grassroots in the South Asia region.

Knowledge Products

Technical pieces, blogs, newsletters, etc that play a pivotal role in steering the conversations on social norms

Working together to co-create and amplify learnings from social norms programming and research

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What are social norms?

Social norms have been conceptualised as a set of **informal rules that govern a behaviour**, and not the behaviour itself.

According to Morris et al (2015),

These rules are often informal, **unspoken** and **unwritten**: people typically absorb, accept, and follow them without critical thought.

They govern which behaviours are considered acceptable in different social groups.

In recent literature, norms have been considered as crucial and important factors that influence people's choices of behavior (UNICEF, 2021).

GENDER NORMS

'Gender norms' are a subset of social norms that have been widely studied across contexts. They "**express the expected behavior of people of a particular gender, and often age, in a given social context.**" (Marcus, 2018; Cialdini et al., 1991). It is important to note that not all behaviour is directly influenced by social norms.

Why Measuring Norms?

Both collective and perceived norms (IRH, 2019), shape individual behaviour, particularly in relation to societal expectations of **gender identity and gender-specific actions**.

Understanding these social norms is crucial, as they significantly impact the development of gender roles that reflect the values and traits of a particular culture.

From an early age, individuals learn and internalize these roles within their specific cultural context. This learning process results in normative behaviors that align with perceived gender norms, influencing actions and choices as an adult.

Collective Norms

Actual prevalence of behaviour in reference group

Perceived Norms

Individual's beliefs about prevalence of behaviour and related societal expectations

“

Exposure to childhood violence has a more devastating effect on building women’s understanding of gender norms. Also, there is high concordance in current experience of spousal violence against women and spousal violence faced by their mothers.

(Mukherjee, 2015)

Gender norms and gender-related inequalities are powerful determinants of health and wellbeing, distinct from those caused by biological differences based on sex

(Gupta et al., 2019)

Gender norms around masculinity commonly confer power and status to boys and young men, which might in part explain why norms around masculinity are difficult to shift. Paradoxically, these dominant masculinities carry risks for poor mental health.

(Rice et al., 2021)

It is imperative to understand the role of social norms in shaping behaviors that either condone or justify harmful practices, such as violence against women and girls.

NORMATIVE X NON-NORMATIVE FACTORS

The Social Ecology Theory posits that social norms are among several factors, including power inequalities, that contribute to such atrocities at the individual, family, and community levels. Heise (1998, 2011) further elaborates that these norms interact with other elements like poverty levels, unequal power relations, gender regimes, and market forces.

Measuring and analysing these social and gender norms with sensitivity to context and conceptual accuracy is essential for addressing and ultimately ending violence against women.

By understanding the underlying cultural and societal influences, effective strategies can be developed to challenge and change harmful norms, thereby reducing gender-based violence and promoting equity.

Measuring Gender Norms

An individual's normative beliefs are critical determinants for explaining how behaviors and practices persist (UNICEF, 2020). Several large-scale surveys such as the DHS, World Value Survey, IMAGES, and NFHS have generated cross cultural data sets about men's and women's attitude as they relate to gender roles, justifying violence against women and girls. Few measures however directly measure gender norms.

GENDER EQUITABLE MEN (GEM) SCALE

A measure of **support for inequitable and equitable gender norms within sexual and intimate relationships**. It is designed for use with men to evaluate interventions that target gender-related attitudes and related risk and prevention behaviors (Pulerwitz and Barker, 2008). This consists of statements which score into indices (equitable and inequitable norms) to understand the state of mind of respondents. The GEM scale has now been adopted and adapted in many countries **to measure both perceived norms & men and women's attitude towards justifying gender discrimination and violence against women and girls in rural and urban contexts**.

Validity Threats to Measurement

1

RESEARCHERS' BIAS IN THE ABSENCE OF STANDARDIZED ADMINISTRATION

During data collection, **administering GEM scale is a big challenge among investigators who don't know how to ask or 'READ' the statement.** In one of our surveys conducted for benchmark indicators under the prevention of VAWG (Violence Against Women and Girls) program, we have noticed that person who was reading the statements on gender norms was not able to do so unbiasedly. The reason was the researcher's own bias and inability to understand the 'gender neutral' way of asking question.

SEPARATION BETWEEN DEVELOPERS AND USERS OF MEASUREMENT TOOL

2

At the impact evaluation stage, the researcher who designed the tools may not be present. Different researchers involved in the project may have different attitudes towards gender and its role in influencing behaviour. These **individual biases can systematically influence the results** of a study if not addressed preemptively.

3

CONCEPTUAL DIFFERENTIATION BETWEEN NORM AND OUTCOME LEVEL CHANGE

In many interventions, the baseline or endline evaluations are designed based on questions and statement regarding social norms. On the other hand, some studies also use behaviour (e.g., reduction in violence) as an indicator of norm change during monitoring and evaluation. However, in many situations the **norm change may not fruitfully transform to behavior change** as there are other social construct and structural issues – posing a challenge to evaluation of norm shifting interventions.

SOCIALLY DESIRABLE RESPONSES

4

Sometimes, participants get a high than expected score on gender equitable norms during impact evaluation. The reason for this is mostly due to increase in knowledge after attending training on Gender (where people actually understand how gender discrimination plays important role in society). **This might influence them to give a desirable response irrespective of whether an actual shift in norms has occurred.**

Safeguards to Improve Validity

While it is not possible to eliminate bias completely, we can take steps to improve the quality of measurement and evaluation of gender norms, including:

- **Training users of measurement instruments**
 - to increase awareness and address researcher's bias in a study
 - to promote standardized administration of the tool
- **Employing separate instruments** for measuring norm and behaviour change
- **Avoiding convenience sampling** to improve generalizability and validity of the study
- **Incentivizing response accuracy** might encourage participants to report actual normative beliefs instead of socially desirable responses
- **Using Mixed methods** and data **triangulation** to qualify results from qualitative studies

Transparency in data collection and standardization can contribute to **improving trustworthiness** of researchers and data collectors who are involved in the evaluations -

ultimately promoting gender equity.

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