

**SOCIAL AND GENDER NORMS TIP SHEETS**

# Changing Norms to Address Gender-based Violence and Harmful Practices

**Glossary**

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This glossary includes definitions used in Tip Sheets developed for the UNFPA Asia-Pacific Regional Office, and in UNFPA's forthcoming global **Toolkit: Transforming Gender and Social Norms around Family Planning, Maternal Health, Gender-based Violence and Harmful Practices**.<sup>1</sup>

## Attitudes

What I think. My personal opinions.

## Backlash/resistance

Resistance or negative reactions to efforts aimed at changing norms or practices, often manifesting as attempts to reinforce the norm or practice or punish those who deviate from it.

## Behaviours/practices

What I do. Behaviours are individual or collective actions. Practices are routine-repeated-behaviours or actions.

## Beliefs

Personal opinions, assumptions or convictions that the individual holds to be true, whether or not this is factually accurate.

## Compliance

Adherence to the social norm, where individuals do what they think most people do or expect them to do. Individuals may comply because of outcome expectations (perceived sanctions or rewards).

## Conditional preference

A socially motivated choice individuals make to act in line with what they think most others in their reference group do (descriptive norms) and expect of them (injunctive norms).

## Descriptive norms

What I think most others in my reference group do. What is considered typical or common. Sometimes called empirical expectations.

## Diffusion

How a new norm or practice (or an innovation) spreads within and between group/s of people, community/s or social network/s.

## Direct norms

When a practice is itself a social and/or gender norm and directly determines people's behaviour. Social expectations are one of the main reasons people practice the behaviour. I conform to the practice because I think most others do (descriptive norm) and they expect me to as well (injunctive norm). Also see "Conditional preference" above.

## Focus group discussions (FGDs)

Structured group interviews used for exploring collective understanding of norms and the social processes that maintain or challenge them.

<sup>1</sup> Also see: Institute for Reproductive Health. (2021). [Social Norms Lexicon](#). Washington DC, Georgetown University.

<b>Formative research</b>	Formative research is exploratory research, usually conducted at the community level, to understand the drivers of harmful practices or behaviours and inform programme design. It helps identify whether a practice is a social or gender norm, uncover related factors and dynamics, and analyse gender and power relations. Typically qualitative, it provides insights that guide intervention design, monitoring and measurement.
<b>Gender norms</b>	Social norms defining acceptable and appropriate actions for women and men as well as girls and boys in a given community, group or society.
<b>Indirect norms</b>	Norms <sup>2</sup> that help keep a practice in place as part of a wider system of social expectations. These include closely related norms—such as proximal norms, which strongly influence behaviour and create a favourable environment for it, and deeply rooted “meta-norms” that contribute to and uphold gender inequality.
<b>Injunctive norms</b>	What I think most others in my reference group approve of and expect me to do/what I should do according to other people. What is considered appropriate and “normal.” Sometimes called normative expectations.
<b>Intersectionality</b>	Multiple and intersecting forms of inequality and discrimination (including based on gender, race, class, disability, sexuality and/or gender identity), influencing how norms are experienced by different individuals and groups.
<b>Key informant interviews (KIIs)</b>	In-depth interviews with individuals used to understand community norms and social dynamics.
<b>Mixed-methods approaches</b>	Research that combines quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of norms and their strength and prevalence.
<b>Norm change</b>	The process by which social norms or gender norms evolve, shift and transform over time. This can occur as a result of structural forces, cultural shifts or deliberate intervention.
<b>Norm measurement</b>	The systematic collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data to understand the nature, strength and prevalence of social and gender norms within a specific population or context.
<b>Outcome expectations</b>	Beliefs or expectations about how other people will respond if I do or do not comply with the norm (expected rewards or sanctions).
<b>Personal normative beliefs</b>	What I think I should do, and what I think others should do as well. Prudential normative beliefs: What I think is in my own and others’ best interests. In this context, ‘prudential’ refers to beliefs concerned with protecting the wellbeing of oneself, others or the wider community. Non-prudential normative beliefs: What I think is the right thing to do, based on ethical or moral convictions and values.
<b>Pluralistic ignorance</b>	Most people comply with the norm because they incorrectly assume most others in their reference group also conform or expect them to do so, when in fact most people privately disagree or do not conform. This creates a false consensus where people conform to norms they don’t personally endorse because they incorrectly assume others support them.
<b>Positive deviants</b>	When individuals in a community act in ways that significantly differ from prevailing social norms but achieve more positive outcomes, despite the risk of sanctions for challenging social expectations.

2 Throughout the Tip Sheets, “norms” is used as shorthand for social and gender norms, per the definitions here.

<b>Practices</b>	See “Behaviours” above.
<b>Proximal norms</b>	Closely related indirect norms that strongly influence behaviour and create a favourable environment for a practice.
<b>Proxy indicator</b>	An indirect measure to approximate a phenomenon, e.g. the prevalence of a behaviour, when the phenomenon itself cannot be observed or quantified directly.
<b>Quasi-experimental designs</b>	Research approaches that evaluate intervention effects without random assignment, often used when randomized controlled trials are not feasible.
<b>Randomized controlled trials (RCTs)</b>	The “gold standard” in research methodology for studying causal relationships. Experimental design tests the effectiveness of interventions by comparing outcomes between randomly-assigned treatment and control groups.
<b>Reference group</b>	The specific community or group of people whose opinions, expectations and behaviours influence an individual’s attitudes and actions around a particular practice. Reference groups can differ for specific norms. Reference groups may also be virtual and online communities.
<b>Salience</b>	The extent to which something is important, prominent or pertinent in a specific context, and the extent to which it influences behaviour.
<b>Sanctions</b>	Consequences of non-compliance with the norm. Social pressure or other forms of punishment. A (negative) outcome expectation. Those with the power to impose sanctions have greater (relative) power.
<b>Rewards/benefits</b>	Benefits and rewards of complying with the norm. Social approval or other rewards. A (positive) outcome expectation.
<b>Social and behaviour change (SBC)</b>	The process of strategically influencing and modifying individual and collective behaviours to achieve specific social or public health goals.
<b>Social network analysis</b>	Explores relationships and interactions within social networks to understand how norms spread and are reinforced through social connections.
<b>Social norms</b>	Patterns of behaviour that are motivated by a desire to conform to the shared social expectations of a community or group. The informal “rules of action” shared by communities or groups that define what is considered normal, appropriate and acceptable behaviour. Social norms include beliefs about what most other people do (descriptive norms) and expect/approve of (injunctive norms).
<b>Socioecological model</b>	A framework that explains how human behaviour and related norms are influenced by factors at different levels that interact with one another.
<b>Theory of change</b>	A framework that outlines how and why a particular intervention is expected to lead to specific outcomes, including the drivers and mechanisms that influence how change happens.
<b>Tipping point</b>	The critical threshold (a critical mass) at which a minority practice becomes widespread enough to shift the overall norm and the new practice is widely adopted.
<b>Vignettes</b>	A qualitative research method using fictional short stories or scenarios to explore normative beliefs by asking respondents to evaluate behaviours, social reactions and outcomes of the characters’ behaviours and choices.



