Women's Integrated Sexual Health (WISH) Programme for Results: independent verification, evidence, and learning

Social norms change video no. 1  
Defining social norms

Worksheet

Definition

Here is the definition of a social norm:

A social norm is pattern of behavior that people conform to because

1. They think most people in their community conform to it – “*What I think others do” (Empirical Expectations),* and…
2. They think most people in their community expect them to conform to it – *“What I think others expect me to do” (Normative Expectations)*

Social norms can be held in place by sanctions and rewards.

**Diagnosing social norms**

This can be summarised in the following diagram, created by Christina Bicchieri from the University of Pennsylvania:



**Your turn to practice**

Let’s practice using this definition to frame a social norm which your programming aims to address. This will help clarify that the barrier you are addressing really is a social norm.

1. Think of a barrier to up-take of modern family planning in your community which you believe to be a social norm (examples might be that men should not get involved in family planning decisions, or that unmarried people should not seek family planning advice).
2. Put yourself in the shoes of a person who believes in this norm, and ask yourself the following questions
   1. *Do I believe that most people in my community do this?*
   2. *Do I believe that most people in my community expect me to do this?*
   3. *What will happen if I don’t do what people expect?*
3. If the answers to a and b are Yes, then your barrier is a social norm; and the answer to c is the sanction for breaching the norm.

**Your answers**

Fill in your answers below, from the perspective of a community member:

Empirical expectations

1. *I believe most people in my community*

Normative expectations

1. *I believe most people in my community expect me to*

Sanctions

1. *If I did not do (write in the norm) , people in the community would (write in the sanction)*

**An example using this definition to frame a social norm**

Here’s an example. Let’s say you are looking at norms encouraging people to have a baby immediately after marrying. Your answer might look like this:

1. *I believe most people in my community have a baby immediately after marrying.*
2. *I believe most people in my community expect me to have a baby immediately after marrying.*
3. *If I do not have a baby immediately after marrying, people in the community will gossip about me and think I am infertile.*

It is useful to define your social norm in this way, to:

* Confirm that it is really is a social norm and describe how the norm affects behaviour;
* Suggest approaches to shift the norm;
* Identify questions you might ask to track changes in the norm.

**Social Norms Glossary**

Here are some terms used to describe social norms and how they work.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Empirical expectations | What I think others do |
| **Normative expectations** | What I think others expect me to do |
| **Sanctions** | Negative consequences for breaching a norm  e.g., Being criticised or not invited to community events |
| **Rewards** | Positive consequences for following a norm  e.g., Social status, respect and admiration |
| **Reference group** | People whose opinions are important to me  e.g., religious leaders, mothers-in-law, or peer group members |

**Further Resources**

*Getting Practical: Integrating Social Norms into Social and Behavior Change Programs*. Breakthrough Action 2021.

A practical guide to programming and measuring social norm change.

*Social Norms Exploration Tool.* Institute for Reproductive Health, Georgetown University, 2020.

A research approach for identifying social norms and assessing their influence on behaviour.

*Participatory research toolkit for social norms measurement.* UNICEF, 2020.

A set of measurement tools which can be integrated into programme activities and routine monitoring.

*Evidence brief on rapid methods for measurement of social norm change*. WISH, 2019.

Review of social norm measurement in WISH and suggestions for how to track social norm change.