



Glossary of terms

September 2015

Knowledge to action:
Understanding
gender norms that affect
adolescent girls

Adolescent girl: A girl aged 10-19 (the definition of adolescence used by the United Nations). This age group is sometimes split into younger adolescents (10-14) and older adolescents (15-19). These definitions are not universally accepted though, with girls at the lower end of the age range considered children in most contexts, and girls at the upper end generally considered women. Factors such as physical maturity often influence whether an adolescent girl is considered a girl or a woman.

Agency: The 'ability to define one's goals and act upon them' (Kabeer, 1999: 438).

Attitude: 'An individual's psychological tendency to evaluate something (a person, symbol, belief, object) with some degree of favour or disfavour' (Heise, 2013: 5).

Behaviour: 'What a person does' (Heise, 2013: 5).

Communications initiatives: Activities explicitly intended to change people's attitudes or behaviour through spreading information, campaigning, persuasion or modelling new norms, attitudes and behaviour. Initiatives may include: media-based programmes (e.g. radio, TV, newspapers); large-scale communication-based activities (e.g. street drama); community-level discussions; non-formal education (e.g. communication of information through life skills programmes); or public ceremonies (for instance, to declare opposition to harmful practices such as female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C)).

Conformity: When a person's beliefs or behaviour fit in with prevailing beliefs or practices. For example, a father may encourage his daughter to marry early as this is what other fathers in their community do.

Descriptive norms: Shared beliefs about what most people actually do, or what is considered normal practice

among a reference group. For example, one descriptive norm might be that domestic violence is widespread in a given country; another might be that most girls do not attend secondary school.

Economic strengthening activities: Programmes and services that aim to develop the economic capacity of individuals or households. These may include cash and in-kind transfers, vocational training, and financial services.

Empowerment: 'The process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire the power to do so' (Kabeer, 1999: 435).

Femininity: A social and political construct of what it means to be female.

Gender: The social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female; relations between males and females. These are socially constructed and learned through socialisation processes. They are context, time-specific and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman, man, girl and boy in a given context (UN Women, 2001).

Gender-based violence: Any form of violence (physical, mental, sexual, or the threat of such acts) directed against a person on the basis of their gender.

Gender egalitarian: A system of thinking which emphasises that males and females are equal and deserve to be treated equally.

Gender ideologies: A set of ideas regarding the appropriate roles, rights and responsibilities of women and men in society, which often provide foundations for 'injunctive norms' (see below) about how men, women, boys and girls should behave. These are often more resistant to change than gender roles. Conservative gender ideologies can co-exist with shifting gender roles.

Gender norms: Informal rules and shared social expectations that distinguish the kind of behaviour expected from a person on the basis of their gender. For example, a common gender norm is that women and girls will and should do the majority of housework.

Gender roles: Roles that reflect a division of responsibility based on a person's gender. People's expectations of how others will act are often based on their perception of gender roles.

Information, education and communication (IEC)

materials: Materials used to communicate messages to large audiences, including educational leaflets and videos, posters, stickers and billboards.

Injunctive norms: Shared beliefs about what people in a particular community should or should not do. These help people decide what is considered acceptable behaviour and what is not. For example, *'people in this community/country will no longer tolerate domestic violence'*.

Masculinity: Socially constructed understanding of what it means to be a man or boy, which can change over time and between places. Common defining features of masculinity include being the family breadwinner, being physically strong and able to procreate.

Positive deviants: People who do not conform to social norms or expectations of behaviour. For example, our research found examples of fathers who had deviated from local norms by encouraging their daughters to attend school.

Pluralistic ignorance: A situation where a norm persists because most people are ignorant about others' true beliefs – for example, many people dislike early marriage but believe that others endorse it. A situation of this kind can also mean that the most memorable or exaggerated behaviour continues to influence the behaviour of a reference group.

Practice: An expected or customary way of carrying out an activity.

Reference group or network: A group of people whose expectations matter to an individual and influence their behaviour. A reference group can vary in size and include real people that a person knows as well as an 'imagined community' (e.g. other mothers, or people of the same ethnic group).

Social expectations: Beliefs about what others expect one to do. This includes a person's beliefs about what other people should do, and their perception of what other people expect them to do.

Social norm: Shared expectations or informal rules among a set of people (a reference group) as to how people should behave.

Sticky norm: A norm that is resistant to change.

Systematic review: A review of evidence on a specific question, using principles of transparency, comprehensive searching, and an assessment of the quality of the methodology used.

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