



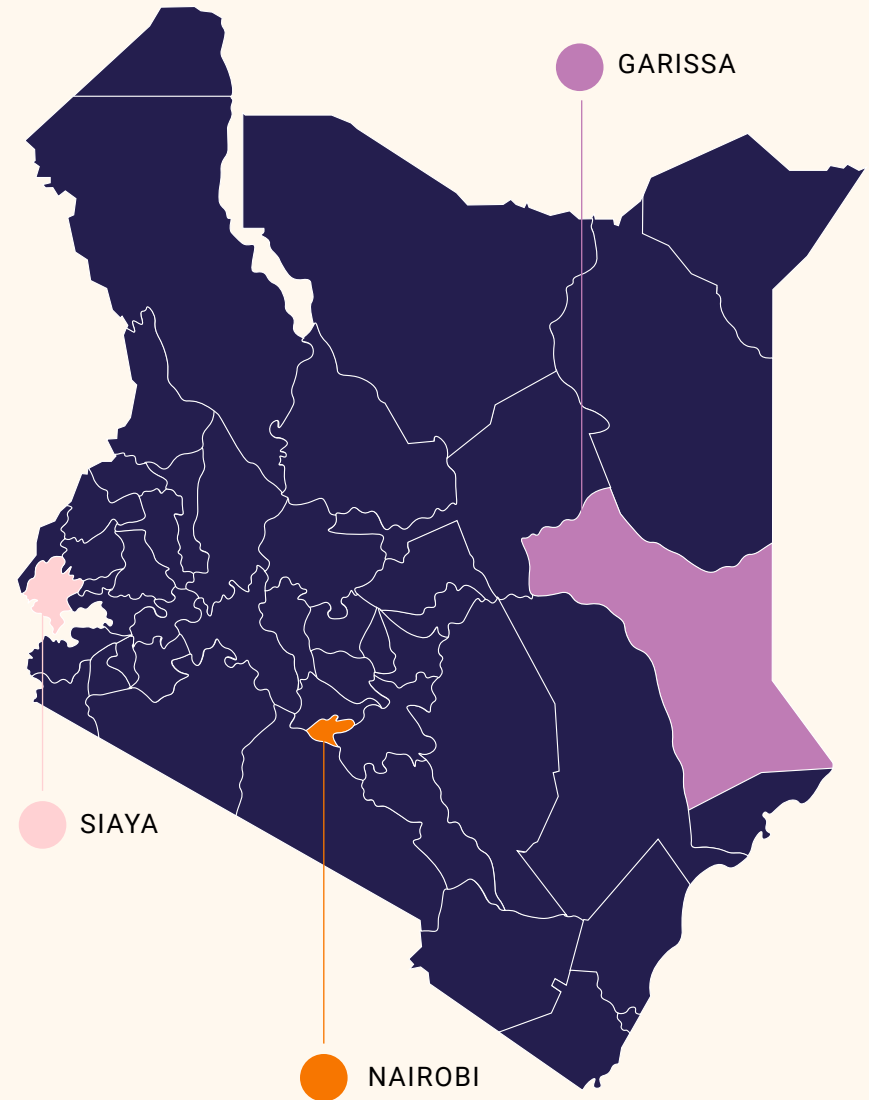
Gender Norms Learning Agenda

Norms Diagnosis: Findings and Media Application in Kenya



The Gates Foundation’s Gender Norms Learning Agenda (GNLA) funded research in three states in Nigeria to identify which social norms influence key gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health, economic empowerment, and child early and forced marriage behaviors of adolescent girls and young women, how these norms influence girls’ behaviors, and who enforces and upholds these norms. CARE’s Gender Justice team, CARE Nigeria, and the Center on Gender Equity and Health at University of California San Diego collected qualitative data with married and unmarried girls, married and unmarried boys, and those who influence the norms that most impact their lives and wellbeing between March and June 2024.

This brief is meant for mass-media focused partners to understand key norms impacting priority behaviors, which additional audiences need to be targeted with media interventions, and where opportunities lie to promote examples of positive norms change.

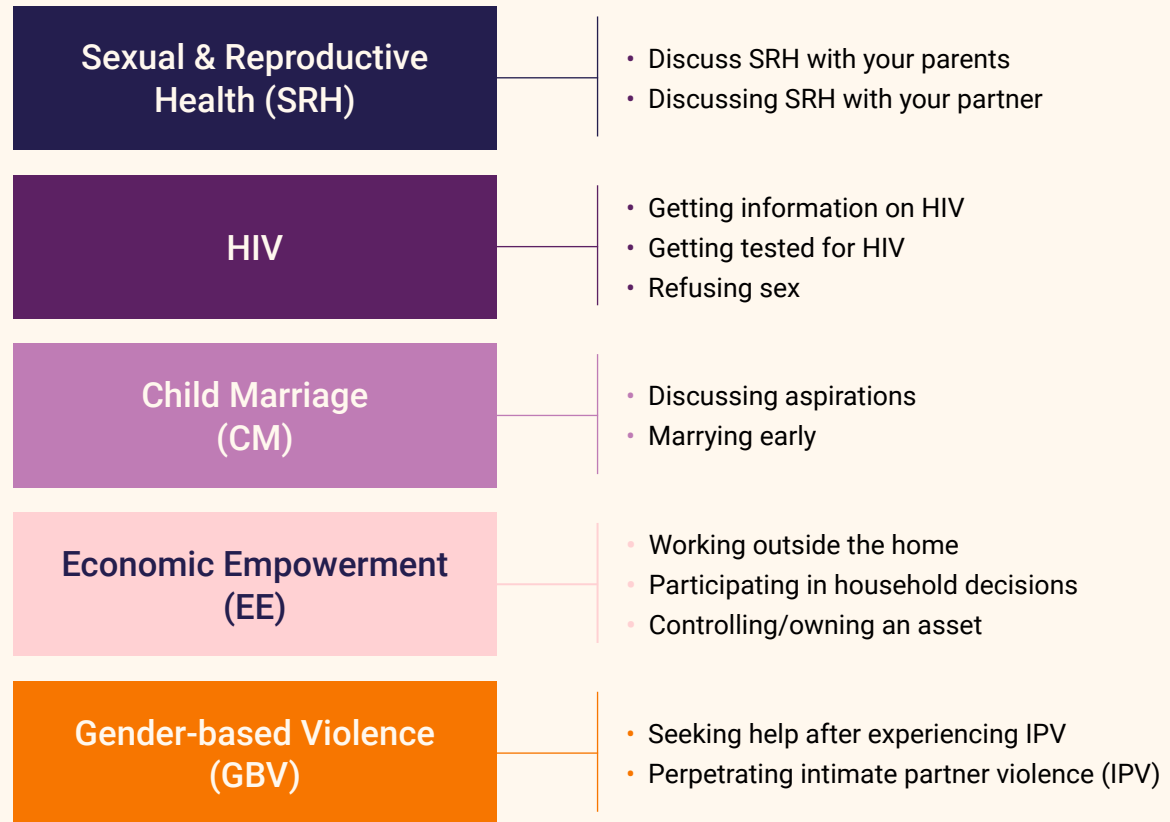




What is a gender norm?

Norms are the unwritten rules of behavior that we learn throughout our lives. People that matter to us—our parents, our religious communities, media, friends and all types of leaders—enforce these rules. These people are called “reference groups”. Gender norms are the expectations we have for how people should act based on sex at birth and what gender we present to the world. For an adolescent girl, gender norms influence how she speaks, what she wears, if and who she is able to date or marry, and more.

Sectors and key behaviors included in the study:



Priority Norms Affecting All Sectors

The following norms impacted every sector explored in the Kenya study and should, therefore, be considered priority topics for implementing partners. While media interventions may not completely shift these strong and deeply-rooted norms during their implementation timeframe, these findings demonstrate why girls may avoid certain behaviors and why reference groups might punish girls for going against the norms.

Adolescent Sexuality

The findings from Kenya demonstrate a deep connection between norms that restrict adolescent sexuality and the barriers adolescent girls face to improving their SRH, protecting themselves against HIV, promoting their economic empowerment, and living a life free from violence. **Promoting or even safeguarding their sexual health can result in serious consequences for girls, and even adolescent boys.**

Sexual & Reproductive Health

NORM

CONSEQUENCE

Unmarried girls do not and should not discuss SRH with their parents.

Unmarried girls and young women are not supposed to discuss issues related to SRH, as they are “taboo”. If girls openly ask about or discuss these topics, community members and their parents assume they are sexually active, which is perceived as reckless behavior that can lead to early pregnancy and bring shame to adolescent girls, their parents, and the community.

Married girls do not and should not discuss SRH with their partner.

Communities do not approve of discussions about sex and SRH amongst partners as open dialogue would (a) challenge men’s role as decision-makers and (b) challenge expectations that girls and young women do not discuss matters related to SRH. This is rooted in religious beliefs and expectations related to early childbearing and family size, which shapes young couples’ desire to have more children and a large family, a highly valued trait in all sites. Married and unmarried couples in all sites who discuss SRH may face consequences such as judgment and violence, resulting in shame for married girls in particular.

Married girls’ hide contraceptive use from their partners.

Unmarried girls and their parents want to avoid the shame of unplanned pregnancy, but married girls are pressured to have children and girls’ husbands are expected to make decisions related to family planning. These pressures lead to the perception that it is typical for women to use contraception secretly.

How does restricting adolescents’ sexuality keep them from practicing healthy behaviors, and what happens when they do not follow this norm?

HIV

NORM	CONSEQUENCE
Unmarried girls should not seek information on or get tested for HIV.	Both girls and boys were assumed to be unfaithful and/or could be labeled as disrespectful if they sought information on HIV or testing for HIV, which lead to rumors about their status and their partner breaking up with them. In Nairobi, girls faced insults, rape, or other types of violence by their partners resulting from the conflict these behaviors bring. For boys, their friends and/or peers would start rumors or insult them.
Girls do not and should not refuse sex due to concerns of HIV.	When girls refuse sex, consequences are particularly harsh: all respondent groups reported that boyfriends would end the relationship if unmarried girls refused sex, and both Nairobi and Siaya respondents reported rape and physical abuse as consequences for girls refusing sex.
	<p>“By the way, that is how girls are today. They are scared of becoming pregnant more than HIV. After having sex, the first thing girls do is run for P2 (emergency pills). Even when they contract HIV, it is not a big deal. You know they think pregnancy is public but HIV is internal. Nowadays they fear pregnancy more than HIV.”</p> <p>MARRIED BOYS, NAIROBI</p>

Child Marriage

NORM	CONSEQUENCE
Premarital sex is unacceptable.	In all sites, married and unmarried girls noted premarital sex or the potential for premarital sex as unacceptable and a reason for early marriage. In Garissa and Nairobi, this type of behavior was seen as a threat to families' honor, even in the case of rape, bringing shame to both the girl and their parents.
	<p>“Some parents fear for their daughters to engage in sexual activity without their knowledge hence encouraging them to marry early.”</p> <p>UNMARRIED GIRLS, GARISSA</p>

Household Roles and Decision-Making

The main gender norms to understand are: **men are decision-makers and breadwinners, and girls and young women are responsible for taking care of the home and children and birthing more children.** These impact all sectors, and sanctions for challenging them include GBV. However, they are particularly impactful for every economic empowerment behavior investigated in this study.

Sexual & Reproductive Health

NORM

It is not acceptable for married girls' to use contraceptives.

CONSEQUENCE

As mentioned above, husbands are expected to make decisions related to family planning, married girls typically hide their own decision to use contraceptives from their husbands, and married girls are under pressure from multiple sides to have children—fulfilling their role in the home. Making the decision alone to use contraceptives, without their husbands knowing, provides a more “peaceful” and “stress-free life” (married girls, Siaya). In Siaya and Garissa, girls expressed their fear of domestic violence from their husbands as a reaction to them proposing family planning or finding out a girl was using contraception without their knowledge.

How do household roles keep girls from practicing healthy behaviors and what happens when they expand their aspirations and behaviors beyond the home?

Gender-based Violence

NORM

It is common for adolescent boys and young men to perpetrate IPV against their wives, particularly when their wives are viewed as disrespectful or aggressive.

CONSEQUENCE

While the findings suggest that norms related to IPV are improving, all respondent groups—particularly girls—mentioned the use of violence to communicate disapproval when girls challenged husbands' role as decision-maker and breadwinner, which acted as a powerful deterrent for girls to go against norms related to household roles.

Economic Empowerment

NORM

Adolescent girls do not work outside the home.

AGYW do not and should not participate in household decision-making or own assets.

“The law doesn't allow [girls to work outside the home]... It's even written in the bible that a woman should stay home under the watch of a man, she should be pampered and only wait for her night share (sex) and wait for delivery after nine months.”

MARRIED BOYS, SIAYA

CONSEQUENCE

Married girls across sites noted that given the opportunity, girls would take a job outside the home to contribute to their family's needs. In this way, girls continue to support the norm that taking care of their family and children is a priority while also pushing back against men's role as breadwinners. Married girls and women gaining economic freedom were assumed to be 'abusing' that power, which put their marriage at risk either through women's increased confidence or by challenging their husband's role in the household.

Girls are more able to participate in decisions and own assets if they follow norms related to their husbands' roles. For instance, it is acceptable for girls to respectfully participate in conversations about household decisions without arguing. In Garissa, if a married girl was widowed or divorced, she could shift into the role of breadwinner and decision-maker.



Reference Groups

The Why and the How of Targeting Adolescents' Supporting Cast

Married Young Womens' Husbands

Married young womens' husbands enforce norms related to contraceptive use, HIV, WEE and GBV. Husbands were mainly noted as a **punitive** reference group by all respondents, as they were found to use sanctions such as violence, divorce, and arguments if their wives challenged their control over household decisions. However, they were also found to support or facilitate certain behaviors. Therefore, storylines can demonstrate husband's support for behaviors that align with community' approval. For instance, when married young women receive their husbands' approval to work, it is usually to relieve the family's financial stress. Media can show that a couple shares financial stress and that young women can contribute to the household's financial success, which community members already approve of.

Girls' Peers

Girls, boys and parents all noted that girls' friends influence SRH-related behaviors. For instance, boys and parents perceived girls' peers as pressuring unmarried girls to have premarital sex and not seek information on HIV. Alternatively, girls said their friends were a **supportive** relationship for GBV and CEFM—meaning they offer a space for them to talk about problems and find support.

Boys' Peers and Other Men

Married and unmarried boys frequently mentioned this **punitive** reference group who use sanctions like mocking or avoidance when norms related to household decision making and sexuality were challenged by wives or girlfriends. Friends of husbands used the threat of “women gaining power” as a powerful warning to husbands, which resulted in husbands restricting married girls' opportunities.

Even though young men's peers effectively enforce some toxic attributes of masculinity, they also sometimes oppose violence and offer each other support. For instance, boys' peers and other men often punish male perpetrators who beat their girlfriends. Additionally, married boys said they trusted their peers with conversations related to violence, HIV and contraceptive use. Storylines can use these positive behaviors and attributes to build male characters that reject violence and have open conversations about “taboo” topics, popularizing what “mature” men look like.

What are reference groups?

- A group of people whose behavior and beliefs shape one's behaviors and beliefs.
- Those who pass on and enforce social norms by rewarding behavior that aligns with a norm and punishing those acting outside the bounds of norms.

For more information about reference groups—particularly the impact of girls' mothers-in-laws and community leaders on the study's priority behaviors, refer to the full GNLA Norms Diagnosis report.

Personas

Norms in the Lives of Adolescents and Young People and How to Leverage the Findings

Characters in stories can illustrate how norms impact lives and help shift norms by:

- 1 reinforcing healthy existing norms
- 2 challenging negative norms
- 3 demonstrating positive new norms

The following personas are based on discussions with adolescents, offer potential character components, and identify opportunities for these characters to play a part in norms change.



PERSONA 1 | Unmarried adolescent girl

This girl receives information from social media,¹ her friends at school, and her married older sister. She knows about various contraceptive methods but has not considered using any since she is not yet having sex with her boyfriend. This is partly because she learned from her parents that getting pregnant is irresponsible if you are not married and are still in school, and her father is likely to disown her or punish her in another way if she becomes pregnant. The biggest challenge in her weekly routine is spending enough time with her boyfriend in between school, friends, and other activities in a way that her parents will not find out about him.

HOW CAN UNMARRIED GIRLS PROMOTE A POSITIVE NEW NORM?

Demonstrate positive conversations about contraceptive use with boyfriends and friends, and promote HIV testing by using the “girl who is focused” narrative: “However, if you get a girl who is focused, she will insist on getting tested. She cannot be with somebody yet they have not tested”. (married boys, Nairobi)



Tim Freccia / CARE

PERSONA 2 | Married adolescent girl

This girl receives information from her mother- and sister-in-law on pregnancy- and family planning-related issues. She worries about having a third child too soon, especially when her husband does not always give her enough money for food. To help with the family's expenses and have her own source of income, she wants to start a fruit stand so she can build a better life for her children. The biggest challenge in her weekly routine is stretching the money her husband gives her for food.

HOW CAN MARRIED GIRLS PROMOTE POSITIVE NEW NORMS?

Model the process of discussing contraceptives and finding work outside the home, connecting (married) adolescents' financial concerns and goals with their desire to plan their families and use contraception and community approval of girls' contributions to the household through working outside the home, and then obtaining assets to expand her income.



Anne Ackermann / CARE

PERSONA 3 | Young man married to an adolescent girl

Married at age 17, and now 25 yrs old, this young man thinks violence is not a way to solve conflict, but acknowledges that many young men use violence against their spouse. He is concerned about earning enough to provide for his family, so the biggest challenge in his weekly routine is making sure he gets hired enough days to pay for the rent.

HOW CAN MARRIED YOUNG MEN PROMOTE POSITIVE NEW NORMS?

Demonstrate conversations with their older brother about his frustrations with his wife, while recognizing that violence will not solve their financial problems. This helps to expand disapproval of violence before marriage to rejection of violence in serious relationships/marriages. This also opens the door to conversations about his wife working outside the home and acknowledging her as a financial contributor to the household.