



# care® TIPPING POINT

## Baseline Evaluation

## SOCIAL NORMS FINDINGS

### Introduction

#### The Tipping Point Initiative and Child, Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM)

In South Asia and around the world, child early and forced marriage (CEFM) is a symptom of deeply rooted gender inequalities. The Tipping Point Initiative focuses on addressing this root cause by promoting the rights of adolescent girls through community-level programming in Nepal and Bangladesh. This model relies on synchronized engagement of adolescents and community members to ensure that all stakeholders can be part of the transformational change that comes from challenging social expectations<sup>1</sup> and repressive norms.

This brief presents the findings from baseline evaluation on the five social norms that Tipping Point programming focus on. For a more comprehensive reporting of the baseline findings from these countries, please refer to the [evaluation reports and fact sheets for Bangladesh and Nepal](#).<sup>2</sup>

#### Priority Social Norms for Tipping Point

- Girls' mobility
- Girls ride bicycles and play sports
- Girls give input into decisions about her marriage
- Girls can talk with an adolescent boy
- Girls take collective action for girls' rights

In Phase 1 of Tipping Point, a [Community Participatory Analysis](#)<sup>3</sup> was conducted that identified five of the strongest social expectations about how girls should behave. These expectations reflect normative restrictions on girls' mobility, their participation in decision making around marriage and education, girls' sexuality, and girls' voice and participation in their communities. Challenging and shifting these social norms became integral to the 18-month implementation of the Tipping Point intervention package in Phase 2 and the Phase 2 evaluation study design in both countries.

#### Tipping Point Phase 2 Evaluation Design

A multidisciplinary team of researchers is evaluating the Tipping Point Phase 2 model through a mixed-methods cluster randomized control trial to provide a detailed understanding of priority norms in the intervention districts of Bangladesh and Nepal along with an assessment of prevalence of child marriage, and girls' agency. As part of this effort, quantitative and qualitative baseline data were collected among adolescents and adult community members in both countries between December 2018 and May 2019. The qualitative tools developed for evaluating social norms were based on [CARE's Social Norms Analysis Plot \(SNAP\) Framework](#).<sup>4</sup> These tools included Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) based on a Norm by Norm approach, In-depth interviews (IDIs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs).

## Social Norms Analysis Plot (SNAP) Framework

CARE's SNAP framework provides practical guidelines to understand and evaluate norms' strength, influence, and change over time. The first three components of the SNAP framework are drawn directly from social norms theory<sup>5</sup> and describe the nature of the norm in a given context: empirical expectations (what I think others do), normative expectations<sup>6</sup> (what I think others expect me to do), and sanctions (anticipated opinion or reactions from others). The other two components of the SNAP framework further characterize the strength of the norm in question: sensitivity to sanctions (how social sanctions influence behavior) and exceptions (under what circumstances it is considered more acceptable to deviate from the norm). Tipping Point's data collection efforts were designed to assess these five components for each priority norm and thus identify where triggers to 'weaken' a norm existed. Reference groups, i.e. the people whose opinion matter the most to the respondent group were also identified for the girls and parents to ensure these groups were targeted in norms-shifting activities.

## Social Norms Underlying Child Marriage

In this section, we discuss perceived expectations as well as resultant behaviors to understand social norms prioritized by Tipping Point.

### Social Norms related to adolescent girls' mobility

- Most respondents perceived that girls' mobility with respect to education and related activities has improved over time, although the findings of this study suggest that in both contexts, girls' mobility is still quite restricted. This can be overcome if there is a perceived acceptable purpose (mostly

education-related) for a girl to be walking within the village and if permission is explicitly granted. In Bangladesh, a girl moving in and around the village without a purpose was believed to be "bad" and she was perceived to be either involved in a romantic relationship or seeking to become involved in one. This would lead to explicit name-calling and gossip from the community.

- In Nepal, girls and parents believe that community associates girls "roaming around" with the risk of harassment, teasing or assault by other "roaming" boys. Beliefs restricting girls' mobility were connected with disapproval of girls' interaction with boys, by will or not, and hinted at society's perception of threat to a girls' virginity and thus the need to control of girls' sexuality via restricting their freedom of movement.

*"If I go out alone the villagers will say, 'This girl wanders around too much'. They will come up with bad ideas about me. When people from the groom's side will come to see me the villagers will say, 'She roams around too much'. This is why it is not good for a girl to go here and there."*

—Adolescent Girl, Bangladesh

- Neighbors and villagers were widely recognized as powerful perpetrators and the source or transmitter of rumors in cases of girls' deviance of this norm. Both girls and their parents (especially fathers) expected strong sanctions for girls moving around in and around the village, for reasons other than those that were strictly educational.





- Some families were identified as exceptions who provide the freedom to their daughters to move around the village. These families were perceived to be relatively wealthier and more educated compared to the majority of community members or in some cases, girls are raised by relatives while parents are away. In the latter case, the community makes the assumption that control over the girl by the parents is missing, leading up to deviance from the norm. Therefore, the families that emerge as deviants in providing freedom to their daughters are the ones perceived to be not as vulnerable to the loss of reputation.

#### **Social norms around non-traditional behavior: girls' riding bicycles and playing games and sports**

- Restrictive norms exist in both Nepal and Bangladesh around adolescent girls playing and riding bicycles in the village. For most respondents, it was unusual or uncommon for girls to ride bicycles and that family and community would not look favorably on this activity if it were practiced. Once a girl enters puberty, norms restrict around her playing "boys'" sports and riding bicycles, but boys do not experience this restriction.
- Parents and brothers face sanctions from villagers and the community if girls are seen doing these behaviors and in turn they sanction adolescent girls by prohibiting them from playing. Girls also perceive sanctions from the villagers.
- Perceived consequences or sanctions for playing outside imposed by the community includes verbal abuse like labelling of the girl as "bad", "shameless", bringing the girls'

identity in question (for playing "boys' games), labelling of the family of the girl as "bad," etc. These sanctions drive behavior as they restrict parents and brothers from allowing their daughters and sisters to play, especially after they have achieved puberty. The biggest threat comes via gossiping by villagers, resulting in the perceived loss of honor of the family.

***"Even when I was nine or ten years old I played. Then when I was eleven or twelve and was promoted to class eight then I understood and since then I stopped playing."***

—Adolescent Girl, Bangladesh

- Parents and other male family members were strong enforcers of these norms; mothers especially were highly sensitive to the potential damage to their reputation and social standing imposed by other male members in their community should they loosen these restrictions for their daughters.
- However, exceptions exist around these activities. It was considered acceptable in both countries for the younger girls to play outside in the village if done in school settings or related to their education. It is accepted that a girl may ride a bicycle to get to school, particularly if there is a long distance, and play within the school ground and other areas, where girls cannot be seen playing by outsiders, which is where girls themselves feel more comfortable.

### Social Norms related to girls' interaction with boys

- In both the countries, girls rarely socialized with boys unless in a school setting; relatedly, they reported that it would only be considered acceptable to talk with male classmates, peers, and relatives if conversation is educational, is not frequent, not long and not in private. This raised tensions as parents in Nepal recognized that there were increasing interactions with the opposite sex, not only in person but also over the phone.
- Parents of the girls reinforce these norms by not providing approval for conversations with boys and restricting their mobility due to fear of loss of reputation in the community because interaction with boys is seen as a threat to girls' sexuality. Norm enforcers are the community members, and additionally peers in Bangladesh, who emphasize that girls should be disciplined by their parents if girls interact with boys outside of school, so they do not disgrace their family and the entire community.
- Girls and parents expect strong sanctions for unapproved interactions between girls and boys. Girls expect verbal abuse, gossip and name-calling by neighbors and/or parents, while parents, especially fathers are perceived as incapable of controlling their daughters and protecting their honor and thus feel pressure to marry the girl off. The inability to deal with the increased pressure leads often to violence against mother and daughter.

### Social Norms related to decision-making: girls' input into marriage decisions

- In both Bangladesh and Nepal, girls are expected to have minimal say in decisions regarding her marriage. Fathers have the ultimate say on who the girl will marry. In Nepal, these norms are less rigid than Bangladesh. However,

parents' level of agreement varied on how acceptable it was for adolescent girls to refuse marriage proposals, with responses varying by whether she was studying, how old she was, and whether her reputation was in question. For instance, there seemed to be more perceived flexibility for a girl to refuse a marriage if she was considered a promising student or smart. But if she was over age 20 in Nepal or was considered to be deviating the norms put in place to control her mobility and sexuality, it was considered less acceptable for her to object to an early marriage arrangement.

- This is further reflected in quantitative data collected from girls which reported that girls had high aspirations to study and did not want to marry before the age of 18. However, the rate of child marriage was still very high and educational aspirations were not in tandem with the low levels of education of young women.

***"She should agree to her parents' decision, if she doesn't follow the rituals/practices of the community then relatives and friends will say that [a given girl] is doing whatever she wants to do."***

—Adolescent Boy, Nepal

- There is high sensitivity to villagers' rumors towards girls' perceived inability to get married or, the inability of parents to "control" the girl and find a match for her. Parents expect that the family's honor will also be affected as the villagers would criticize the family and assume a romantic relationship, which is damaging for the family's reputation.





- Elopement emerged as a common way for adolescent girls and boys in both countries to deviate from the norm restricting them to choose their partner or timing of marriage. Parents consider elopement a possible consequence of pressure put on the adolescent girls and boys to marry and it was perceived as an act threatening the family's status in the society. However, while in Nepal negative ramifications of forcing a child to marry have made parents more vigilant of their children and more hesitant to put pressure on them to marry, in Bangladesh, this has made parents marry their daughters off at an early age to avoid any situation that may arise in adolescence.

#### **Social Norms related to girls' collective action**

- Most adolescent girls do not take part in collective action to demand their rights, even though they showed high confidence to engage in collective action for girls' rights
- Parents did not report any expectations for girls' collective action, neither supportive nor restrictive. However, adolescent girls reported that they anticipate that the community may express positive reactions, specifically against sexual harassment. This is at odds with the widespread perception that a good girl never talks back to her harassers.
- Adolescent boys, however, hypothesized that if a girl is not willing to get married early and friends support her, then the people will belittle these friends and their opinion will not be taken into account. Thus, across both countries, majority of the collective action described was done by adults on behalf of adolescents and children and around issues such as sexual harassment and early marriage.

## **Conclusion**

The findings from the social norms' data suggest that as soon as girls hit puberty, they perceive more restrictive norms and sensitivity towards sanctions from families and community members leading to girls upholding these norms by following normative behavior. The network of verbal discourse between adult family members and neighbors keeps the fear of sanctions alive in informal community structures. There are some signs of flexibility in repressive norms restricting girls' lives and options, especially when it comes to flexibility in interactions, mobility and decision about marriage for girls in school settings or to pursue education. However, perceived threats to a girls' virginity or reputation as "chaste" that affect her marriageability acts as a push factor towards child marriage. It was not surprising to find a lack of strong norms related to girls taking collective action, as they hardly engage in such actions; it is possible the idea is too abstract to have clear expectations associated with it. However, girls depicted confidence to come together for common purpose. The Tipping Point Initiative seeks to tap this confidence to engage girls in movement building to demand their rights while facilitating a supportive environment of increasingly positive norms and a network of allies to shift harmful and restrictive norms.

For more information on Tipping Point's findings and social norms change approaches, contact us at [tippingpoint@care.org](mailto:tippingpoint@care.org)





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## ENDNOTES

- 1 <https://caretippingpoint.org/phase-2-evaluation-reports/>
- 2 <https://caretippingpoint.org/phase-2-evaluation-reports/>
- 3 [https://www.care.org/sites/default/files/documents/CARE\\_Tipping\\_Point\\_External%20Report\\_Web.pdf](https://www.care.org/sites/default/files/documents/CARE_Tipping_Point_External%20Report_Web.pdf)
- 4 [https://www.care.org/sites/default/files/applying\\_social\\_norms\\_theory\\_to\\_practice\\_cares\\_journey.pdf](https://www.care.org/sites/default/files/applying_social_norms_theory_to_practice_cares_journey.pdf)
- 5 Bicchieri, C., Lindemans, J., & Jiang, T. (2014). A structured approach to a diagnostic of collective practices. *Front. Psychol.* 5:1418.
- 6 Since the creation of the SNAP, other terms have become more commonly used to refer to these concepts: “descriptive norms” for empirical expectations, and “injunctive norms” for normative expectations, coined by Cialdini (1998).

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