

Social and cultural norms that support violence

PhD (C.) Mirgeta Kapa
University of Tirana, Albania

Abstract

The foundations of human society are built on the culture and structure of society. Norms are principles made by the people. Western and Eastern societies have different norms. First comes the social structure, followed by culture, therefore by the cooperation of the individual with each other. Unfortunately, many norms are built to support violence and evil against the person. Starting from the principle and protective instincts of man as a rational animal 'protection' is one of these instincts. During this article more descriptive and sensitizing writing is presented to understand that social and cultural norms have two sides in which people can interfere and improve. Social and cultural norms are woven into interpretations and expressions of health and illness through dynamic, interactive relationships at all levels of influence from the gene to the society. Social and cultural norms often mediate the relationship between ethnicity and health, even effecting gene expression through such practices as marriage rules, lifestyle choices and environmental exposures.

Keywords: Social, cultural norms, violence.

Introduction

Social norms determine the behaviors that, among all those that are possible in a given situation, "others (as a group, as a community, as a society) think are the correct ones, for one reason or another" (Lahlou, 2017, 124). By defining the socially accepted ways of acting in certain contexts and situations, social norms are a central part of social regulation, the process through which "other stakeholders regulate our activity". By doing this, they also mark our membership and place in a group, how we perceive social situations, how we relate and interact with others, and how we respond to cultural products (Sherif, 1965). Empirical studies in psychology and other disciplines have explored extensively the potential of using interventions based on social norms to transform behavior in real-world settings (Tankard, M. Paluck, E.L, 2016, 181–211). These empirical studies have identified a wide variety of general topics of enquiry and moderators that influence the potential of social norms to change behavior. We list a few of the most popular areas of research below, differentiating between those that focus on the importance of the attributes of behaviors and social norms, and those that emphasize the importance of the contexts in which those behaviors and social norms are embedded. Social norms can be thought of as: "rules that prescribe what people should and should not do given their social surroundings" (known as milieu, socio cultural context) and circumstances. Examination of norms is "scattered across disciplines and research traditions, with no clear consensus on how the term should be used" (Hechter, Michael; Opp, Karl-Dieter, 2001). Cultural norms are rules or expectations of behavior and thoughts based on shared

beliefs within a specific cultural or social group. As a noun from French culture or directly from Latin *cultura* 'growing, cultivation'; the verb from obsolete French *culturer* or medieval Latin *culturare*, both based on Latin *colere* 'tend, cultivate' (see cultivate). In late Middle English the sense was 'cultivation of the soil' and from this (early 16th century), arose 'cultivation (of the mind, faculties, or manners)'; culture dates from the early 19th century. While often unspoken, norms offer social standards for appropriate and inappropriate behavior that govern what is (and is not) acceptable in interactions among people. Cultural norms are highly influential over individual behavior in a broad variety of contexts, including violence and its prevention, because norms can create an environment that can either foster or mitigate violence and its deleterious effects. "Members of a culture must conform to its norms for the culture to exist and function. Hence, members must want to conform and obey rules. They first must internalize the social norms and values that dictate what is "normal" for the culture; then they must socialize, or teach norms and values to, their children" (Jackson, 2003). If internalization and socialization fail to produce conformity, some form of "social control" is eventually needed. Social control may take the form of ostracism, fines, punishments, and even imprisonment. Cultural norms are the standards we live by. They are the shared expectations and rules that guide behavior of people within social groups. Cultural norms are learned and reinforced from parents, friends, teachers and others while growing up in a society.

Understanding Cultural Differences around Social Norms

Behavioral change interventions based on social norms have proven to be a popular and cost-effective way in which both researchers and practitioners attempt to transform behavior in order to increase environmental and social sustainability in real-world contexts. Societies have norms which you've described as tight or loose, what does it mean for norms to be tight or loose, and how is that put into practice? Today more than ever, we need to understand cultural differences. A lot of times, we think about our differences in terms of rather superficial characteristics like red versus blue, East versus West, rich versus poor, religious versus secular. Certain groups are tight, they have strict rules and punishments for deviance and other groups are loose they're more permissive and accept a wider range of behavior. For example, cultures like Japan and Singapore tended to veer tight whereas cultures like Greece and Brazil veer more loose. Tight-loose is related to but distinct from other cultural dimensions like individualism-collectivism. Our work has shown a clear trade-off that tight-loose confers to groups. Tight groups tend to have a lot of order they tend to have less crime, more synchrony (even in city clocks and financial markets), and have more self-regulation (lower debt and drug abuse). Loose cultures struggle with order, but they corner the market on openness to different people, ideas, and change. All cultures have tight and loose elements, it's the cultures that get too extreme in either direction that start to become dysfunctional (Nussbaum, D, 2019). Cultures evolve to be tight or loose. It has to do with threat. When groups experience chronic threat either from mother nature (think natural disasters and famine) or from human nature (think invasions, pathogens, or high population density) they need strong rules to

coordinate to survive. Today, more than ever, we need to negotiate fake threat so that we don't tighten unnecessarily. There are good reasons social and cultural to be tight or loose. It has to deal with threat.

Female genital mutilation (FGM)

Societies are rife with negative, damaging practices, from open defecation to female genital cutting, endemic in many developing countries, to corruption and violence against women and children that we also witness in many societies. The theoretical and practical challenge we face is twofold. On the one hand, we want to explain what! Generates and supports such practices. Often norms support or embed certain practices so that eliminating the latter involves changing the former. Sometimes, however, norms have to be created in order to eliminate a negative practice and support a new one, as we know of several widely practiced behaviors that are not supported by norms but can be changed by introducing them. Empirical expectations are always important since in their absence we may be tempted to disobey social norms especially those that demand behavior that may conflict with self interest. Female genital mutilation (FGM) comprises all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. FGM is recognized internationally as a violation of the human rights of girls and women. It reflects deep-rooted inequality between the sexes, and constitutes an extreme form of discrimination against women. It is nearly always carried out on minors and is a violation of the rights of children. The practice also violates a person's rights to health, security and physical integrity, the right to be free from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, and the right to life when the procedure results in death. FGM has no health benefits, and it harms girls and women in many ways. It involves removing and damaging healthy and normal female genital tissue, and interferes with the natural functions of girls' and women's bodies. FGM is mostly carried out on young girls sometime between infancy and adolescence, and occasionally on adult women. More than 3 million girls are estimated to be at risk for FGM annually. FGM is therefore a global concern. The practice is mainly concentrated in the Western, Eastern, and North-Eastern regions of Africa, in some countries the Middle East and Asia, as well as among migrants from these areas. The reasons why female genital mutilations are performed vary from one region to another as well as over time, and include a mix of socio cultural factors within families and communities. Against the argument that women willingly choose FGM for their daughters, UNICEF calls the practice a "self-enforcing social convention" to which families feel they must conform to avoid uncut daughters facing social exclusion (Cappa, Claudia, et al. 2013.) Because of poor access to information, and because circumcisers downplay the causal connection, women may not associate the health consequences with the procedure.

Conclusions

To abandon negative norms, we need to change people's empirical and normative

expectations. Cultural and social norms do not necessarily correspond with an individual's attitudes (positive or negative feelings towards an object or idea) and beliefs (perceptions that certain premises are true), although they may influence these attitudes and beliefs if norms becomes internalized. Different cultural and social norms support different types of violence additionally, strong evidence and violent behavior means that cultural and social norms can also encourage and justify violent acts. Child maltreatment, intimate partner violence, suicide and self-harm, sexual violence, youth violence, community violence often are unspoken, these norms offer social standards of appropriate and inappropriate behavior, governing what is (and is not) acceptable and co-coordinating our interactions with others. Violent behavior is strongly influenced by cultural and social norms; so efforts to prevent violence must consider how social pressures and expectations influence individual behavior. While it is difficult to ascertain the effectiveness of laws and policies in changing social attitudes, legislation that is enforced can send clear messages to society that violent behavior is not acceptable.

References

- Cappa, Claudia, et al. *Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: A Statistical Overview and Exploration of the Dynamics of Change*, New York: United Nations Children's Fund, July 2013.
- Gelfand, M. (2018). *Rule makers, rule breakers: How tight and loose cultures wire our world*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Hechter, Michael; Opp, Karl-Dieter (2001). *Social Norms*. Russell Sage Foundation. ISBN 978-1-61044-280-0.
- Lahlou, S. *Installation Theory: The Societal Construction and Regulation of Behaviour*; Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, 2017 p. 124.
- Nussbaum, D. (2019). *Tight and Loose Cultures: A Conversation with Michele Gelfand*. *Behavioral Scientist*.
- Sherif, M.M. *The Psychology of Social Norms*; Octagon Books: New York, NY, USA, 1965.
- Tankard, M.; Paluck, E.L. Norm Perception as a Vehicle for Social Change. *Soc. Issues Policy Rev.* 2016, 10, 181–211.
- World report on violence and health. Geneva, World Health Organization, 2002.