

JORDAN

Harnessing the power of social networks to create positive change in norms and attitudes towards GBV among youth in Jordan

RESEARCH TEAM: Ana Langer Jewel Gausman, SV Subramanian, Areej Othman, Eman Abu Sabbah, Iqbal Hamad, and Maysoon Dabobe

RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS: Women & Health Initiative at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health; School of Nursing, University of Jordan; The Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development, JOHUD

INTRODUCTION

Research focused on the mechanisms through which gender-based violence (GBV) is perpetrated, entrenched, and reproduced within complex ecological systems is an important new direction in the field of prevention. The determinants of GBV interact and accumulate across the lifespan at multiple levels, including at the individual, family, community, and societal levels. An individual's social network is one way in which the levels of the ecological model interact. Social network research has been vital to understanding the formation and transmission of attitudes and behaviors across a vast set of health outcomes, while also informing promising interventions. GBV is widespread among youth in Jordan, as are attitudes that support gender inequity. While attitudes are often first established, normalized, and entrenched within the home, childhood beliefs are reaffirmed and challenged by new social interactions as youth begin to develop their own social networks. Better understanding how these social interactions influence attitudes related to gender and GBV among youth in Jordan may be instrumental in designing interventions that promote social transformation.

PROJECT AIM

This study aims to understand how attitudes and behaviors related to GBV and gender inequity among youth in Jordan are developed and transmitted across social networks in Jordan at different levels of the social ecological system to develop evidence-based intervention strategies. The project aims to: 1) Describe how social networks relate to GBV and gender equity, 2) Examine the mechanisms through which attitudes related to GBV and gender equity are transmitted across networks, 3) Disentangle the relative effect of social context on attitudes related to GBV and gender equity, 4) Promote evidence-based recommendations for research replication and GBV network interventions, and 5) Build research capacity within partner organizations.

PROJECT METHODS

The research questions and approach represent a novel direction in the field of GBV. The project will conduct a cross-sectional, egocentric social network study among 1,000 youth (aged 18–24 years) living in East Amman. Previously validated tools and instruments to collect the data will be used while employing innovative analytic techniques such as multilevel modeling and graphical analysis. To promote replication of the study and utilization of its results, a robust dissemination platform will be used to reach a variety of audiences, and support extensive capacity building efforts.

Study Site and Population

The study will be conducted in East Amman, which has become more conservative, disadvantaged, and ethnically diverse because of the refugee crisis. Thirty percent of Jordan's Syrian refugees live in East Amman²⁶ as well as large numbers of Palestinians, Iraqi, Yemeni, and Sudanese refugees.²⁷ East Amman is an ideal

site for the research because of its high population density, large youth population, and ethnic diversity. The local partner, JOHUD, has a strong relationship with the community and supports a variety of initiatives with youth including health, gender, and economic activities.

The study population will include men and women aged between 18–24 years.

Data Collection

Data will be collected through individual surveys administered by trained, local data collectors. Participants will be interviewed in private rooms at a community center of their choice.

Analysis

The study will examine how the hypothesized mechanisms that generate and transmit attitudes operate within the network. Threshold models will be used to examine critical mass, i.e. whether individuals engage in a behavior based on the proportion of alters who espouse the given behavior. Social engagement will be examined by an individual's group participation. Social learning will be examined based on the closeness of an individual's relationship with their alter. Finally, social support will be examined by analyzing the flow of resources (including information, emotional, and appraisal) between individuals within a network.

The study will also examine the relative importance of different social contexts on GBV and gender-related attitudes using multilevel statistical models. Individual and group-level variables will be considered, and cross-level interactions will be examined to explore how individual characteristics interact with different layers of social context in relation to GBV and gender.

ADDED VALUE

This study will contribute practical evidence to design new and innovative approaches that aim to prevent GBV in a variety of LMIC settings while transforming norms that sustain gender inequality and violence.

Social network interventions show promise when the goal of an intervention is to accelerate and enhance social and behavioral change within populations, but the effective design of such interventions first requires an understanding of the complexity of the social network. GBV interventions often rely on network principles to promote change, such as identifying champions in a community to model desirable behavior and influence others; however, network theory posits that the most influential individuals may not only be those who are identified as being outspoken opinion leaders. Network analysis might reveal instead that they are actually the individuals who are most central in the network (have the largest number of relationships with others) or those who serve as bridges between disparate social groups within a community. Developing a richer understanding of how ideas related to GBV and gender equity spread within networks would help support these programs in making more effective, evidence-based decisions in designing future interventions.

