

VALIDATING THE TRUTH ABOUT GENDER IN THE WEST BANK FOR PROGRAM DESIGN

International development practitioners can see strategies and interventions “eaten for breakfast” if they don’t understand their customers’ cultural norms, but capturing norms is often resource intensive. Cultural Consensus Analysis (CCA) provides a novel approach to capture cultural patterns, including among population subgroups, and to tailor interventions to reflect local culture. We tested application of CCA in a USAID-funded justice project in the West Bank, Palestine. We believe this is the first application of CCA as an approach to measure gender norms in international development programming.

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BACKGROUND

Cultural norms and practices perpetrate gender inequality when women have limited social power and fewer rights than men. In the Middle East, many factors, including authoritarianism, conflict, military occupation, and religious fundamentalism, affect culture and perpetuate gender inequality. Women have:

- Fewer opportunities to inherit
- Limited access to courts to enforce their rights
- Difficulty in obtaining divorce
- Fewer legal safeguards and options for redress
- Norms regulating their public and private conduct within legal frameworks and beyond the law



Gender-based violence (GBV) in the West Bank has been exacerbated by decades of violence, including economic sanctions, military occupation, and clashes with Israeli army and settlers, with 35 percent of married women subject to domestic violence. Reporting abuses by family members violates social norms, with women and children who report rape or incest likely to incur further abuse or even murder by family members due to the shame to family reputation. The rapist’s marriage to his victim still carries legal absolution of the rape. Because of long-held cultural values, justice sector officials can minimize, ignore, or even punish victims for making complaints. Women are reluctant to report violence, with fewer than 1 percent stating they would seek assistance from justice institutions.

CONTEXT

The USAID-funded **ENHANCED PALESTINIAN JUSTICE PROGRAM** (EPJP) was implemented by Chemonics International from 2013 to 2018 in the West Bank and focused on family courts that handle marriage, divorce, child custody, visitation, and inheritance. EPJP improved service delivery by strengthening individual and institutional capacities and increasing their engagement with citizens, and strengthening support for victims of GBV. EPJP used CCA to assess assumed norms about gender inequality and GBV that could impact intervention designs and results.

METHOD

SURVEY ITEM DEVELOPMENT. Three anthropologists led CCA tool development, reviewing academic literature about GBV in the Middle East and the West Bank and EPJP program documents. Items derived from these sources focused on norms propagating GBV and women’s empowerment in divorce and inheritance in family courts and cultural practices. With local experts, the team tested items and settled on 60 questions, collecting data on key demographics, including gender, age, marital status, religion, and education.

TRAINING. The anthropologists trained 20 individuals on research ethics, CCA theory, survey data collection and protocols, and data entry.

SAMPLE FRAME. The sampling frame included equal proportions of gender, age, type of municipality, and region. Twenty participants were recruited from public spaces per type of municipality (city, village, refugee camp) in Bethlehem, East Jerusalem, Hebron, Jenin, Nablus, Ramallah, and Tulkarem. We conducted 392 convenience interviews using true-false response to statements about women’s empowerment and GBV and tested three propositions.

ANALYSIS. After data cleaning, UCINet was used for all consensus modeling.

- **Proposition 1.** To assess existence of one shared cultural model, we conducted consensus analysis on the total sample – all responses to all 60 items.
- **Proposition 2.** We assessed the existence of variations by subgroups, testing correlation factors with gender, municipality, region, and education.
- **Proposition 3.** We compared the answers for 22 items on empowerment with the responses expected based on program documents.

FINDINGS

We found no single cultural understanding of women’s empowerment and GBV across West Bank Palestinians (Proposition 1), possibly driven by the shifting status of some gender norms. Distinctive cultural models for women and other subgroups exist, though there were no shared cultural models among men (Proposition 2). Program assumptions about structural barriers to women’s empowerment were validated (Proposition 3). We find that CCA is useful to identify subcultural models, valuable in targeting interventions to population subgroups.

The assertion of likelihood of violence for women claiming their rights in divorce and inheritance was striking. EPJP trained judges on women’s rights and conducted public outreach about court processes. However, the risk of violence when women claim their rights emphasizes the need for targeted programming and education with men (in particular) to avoid unintended consequences from EPJP interventions.

OPPORTUNITY AND CHALLENGES

USING CCA IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT.

International development programs are seeking tools to identify levers for behavior and societal norm change to inform intervention design by high-quality cultural data, since traditional data collection methods are typically expensive and time-consuming.

CHALLENGES.

- Smaller sample size calculations for CCA may not be sufficient where cultural norms vary among many subgroups; CCA has been useful among more static subgroups with clear differences. We found no evidence of shared understanding among a major subgroup – men – where the sampling size should have been sufficient.
- Anthropologists supplied specialized knowledge of CCA, the art to creating questions around norms, and the analysis, likely beyond skills of most project monitoring specialists. Cost efficiencies realized through a lower sample size and rapid survey deployment may be offset by costs incurred in expertise, which may not be available in a country or region.

OPPORTUNITIES.

- CCA is useful to rapidly collect data on cultural norms to inform programming and provide an efficient means to ground-truth basic assumptions.
- Low agreement among subgroups suggests CCA may be just a first step, with more detailed study necessary to understand norm within key subgroups, but CCA does help to identify these subgroups.



CONCLUSION

Our study identifies uses of CCA to identify local variation in norms around gender empowerment and to validate assumptions in program design. The significant diversity of norms within subgroups, once identified, could be used to better design, target, and monitor interventions. By applying the method to a greater diversity of topics in other settings, it will be easier to identify how and when this novel approach might be most reliable, valid, and useful. Ultimately, better methods for rapidly and efficiently appraise cultural knowledge and identify related cultural barriers to programming would greatly enhance development practice.