

Community health agents changing gender norms: A mixed method data analysis



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"I believe that this job as a community healthcare worker is not an easy one, but one that is important for you to help the community." - Huancayo



BACKGROUND

- Gender norms are deeply ingrained in social structures and influence how individuals behave, interact, and make decisions and can have a powerful effect on individual identity and psychologist sense of self
- Community Health Agents (CHAs) improve access to healthcare in resource-poor areas
- Peru is a middle-high income country with deep gender inequalities under a traditional, patriarchal, machismo society
- Catholic Medical Mission Board (CMMB), an organization that uses a robust CHA model
- Target population: CHAs in Trujillo and Huancayo, Peru
- This study focuses on how being a CHA leads to indirect benefits of changing gender norms

METHODS

- Community-based participatory research model (St. Kates and CMMB partnership)
- In March 2020, six 90-minute focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted in Peru with current and former CHAs
- FGD purpose: learn CHA perceptions of gender norms
- Systematic and comparative analysis to compare themes
- Gender activity administered about domestic responsibilities for men, women, and both
- Percent discordant pairs were calculated to see which domestic activities were most aligned from the current state to the ideal state

TABLE 1. Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

	Trujillo N=21	Huancayo N=32
Age (Mean)	39.7	39.1
Years working as CHA (Mean)	5.8	4.5
	N (%)	N (%)
Education		
None	1 (5)	1 (3)
Primary	4 (19)	3 (9)
Secondary	10 (48)	7 (22)
Technical	6 (29)	16 (50)
University		5 (16)
Marital Status		
Single	5 (29)	2 (6)
Cohabiting Relationship	9 (43)	13 (42)
Married	7 (33)	16 (50)
Divorced	0	1 (3)
Prior Work Experience (Yes)	9 (43)	14 (44)

Demographic information including mean age, mean years working as a CHA, education level, marital status, and prior work experience of CHAs in Trujillo and Huancayo.



RESULTS

TABLE 2. What are the Current Gender Norms?

What are the Current Gender Norms? (N = 72) ^a					
Theme	Sub Theme	N ^b	Sub Sub Theme	N ^b	
Women (54)	Barriers to Progress (26)	4	Lack of Resources	11	
			Unplanned Teenage Pregnancies	6	
			Women Controlled by Family Members	5	
	Disrespect (20)		Violence from Men	11	
			Women Being Dismissed	9	
	Household Roles				8
Men (18)	Attitudes (10)	1	Men Not Listening to Women	6	
			Males Dominating Females in Society	3	
	Decision-Making				7
	Responsibilities				1

^aThere were a total of 72 themes related to current gender norms in relation to women and men identified in the coded transcripts

^bN indicates number of times each theme and subtheme were coded in all six focus group discussions

TABLE 3. What Does Idealized Gender Norms Look Like?

What Do Idealized Gender Norms Look Like?(N = 71) ^a			
Theme	N ^b	Sub Theme	N ^b
Education/Work (26)		Women Working Professional Jobs	24
		Education Leading to Fulfillment	2
Increasing Voice in the World (25)	5	Women are Respected Leaders	12
		Women Not Being Taken Advantage Of	8
		At the Household Level (Family Planning)	9
Women's Inclusion in Decision-Making (11)		At the Community Level	2
		Independence	9

^aThere were a total of 71 themes related to idealized gender norms in terms of education/work, voice, inclusion in decision-making and independence identified in the coded transcripts

^bN indicates number of times each theme and subtheme were coded in all six focus group discussions

TABLE 4. How to Change Gender Norms?

How to Change Gender Norms? (Actions) (N = 64) ^a		
Theme	Sub Theme	N ^b
Women Changing (24)	Women's Voices	15
	Seeking Financial Independence	9
Family Changing (21)	Improving Home Environment	9
	Parents as Active Role Models	7
	Values	5
Community Changing (12)	Including Equal Voices in Community Decision-Making	6
	Increasing Community Resources	5
	Seeing Women as Role Models	1
Men Changing (7)	Seeking Higher Education	4
	Passing on Values to Sons	2
	Sharing Household Responsibilities	1

^aThere were a total of 64 themes related to how to change gender norms identified for women, families, community and men in the coded transcripts

^bN indicates number of times each theme and subtheme were coded in all six focus group discussions

- 53 women participated in FGDs, 21 in Trujillo and 32 in Huancayo
- Current gender norms showcase the disparity between men's and women's capabilities and beliefs in society
- Idealized gender norms allow women to visualize an ideal society with equality between men and women through education, women's perceptions, women's inclusion in decision-making, and independence
- How to change gender norms requires men, women, families, and the community to act and support women's progress in society
- Gender activity: The highest percent of discordant pairs was at 80.5% about who does and should prepare food
- Other domestic responsibilities that scored over 50% for discordancy were 'deciding what the family eats,' 'who does laundry,' 'who takes care of sick family members,' and 'when to seek health care'

TABLE 5. Gender Activity Results - Current Versus Ideal Family Responsibilities

	N = 43	Men N (%)	Women N (%)	Both N (%)	Discordant Pairs (%)
Preparing Food (Current)	1 (2.4)	33 (80.5)	7 (17.1)		33 (81)
Preparing Food (Ideal)	1 (2.3)	3 (7.0)	39 (90.7)		23 (55)
Deciding What Family Eats (Current)	0 (0)	28 (65)	15 (35)		23 (53)
Deciding What Family Eats (Ideal)	1 (2.4)	9 (21.4)	32 (76.2)		
Laundry (Current)	0 (0)	23 (53.5)	20 (46.5)		22 (52)
Laundry (Ideal)	0 (0)	2 (4.7)	41 (95.4)		
Taking Care of Sick Family (Current)	2 (4.7)	20 (46.5)	21 (48.8)		22 (52)
Taking Care of Sick Family (Ideal)	4 (9.5)	4 (9.5)	34 (81)		
Seeking Health Care (Current)	0 (0)	25 (58)	18 (42)		22 (52)
Seeking Health Care (Ideal)	2 (4.8)	7 (16.7)	33 (78.6)		
Earning Money (Current)	18 (41.9)	7 (16.3)	18 (41.9)		21 (49)
Earning Money (Ideal)	7 (16.3)	2 (4.7)	34 (79.1)		
Income (Current)	6 (14)	8 (18.6)	29 (67.4)		19 (45)
Income (Ideal)	4 (9.5)	0 (0)	38 (90.5)		
When to Deliver Baby (Current)	1 (2)	16 (37)	26 (60)		19 (45)
When to Deliver Baby (Ideal)	2 (4.8)	6 (14.3)	34 (81.0)		
Buying Food (Current)	1 (2.3)	16 (37.2)	26 (60.5)		16 (37)
Buying Food (Ideal)	1 (2.30)	3 (7.0)	39 (90.7)		
Where to Give Birth (Current)	0 (0)	23 (53.5)	20 (46.5)		13 (31)
Where to Give Birth (Ideal)	0 (0)	11 (26.2)	31 (73.8)		

Percentages of answers (N=43) for each question regarding family responsibilities including financial and household actions for males and females and both for current and ideal gender norms.

DISCUSSION

- CHAs have a unique perspective on gender norms and how to change them as they are key community leaders
- Powerful example to adolescent girls as an alternative future to traditional gender
- Limitations: No baseline of gender norms prior to study, selection bias, generalizability
- Overall CHA model not only improves communities' health but can have the potential to change gender norms in resource-poor areas



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