



Community-level factors, ranging from social capital to collective efficacy, play an important role in condom use. This brief highlights key studies demonstrating the impact of community-level factors on condom use in low and middle-income countries.

Social Norms

Norms are rules, common beliefs or standards of behavior shared by members of a social group. As norms can guide and govern behavior, they are particularly relevant in condom use across various contexts.

- A study examining sexual risk behaviors among young people in Zambia found that despite extensive condom promotion, use during high-risk sex was estimated at only 40 percent due to negative norms surrounding condom use.¹
- In many countries, condom use is synonymous with suspicion and mistrust, negatively impacting use.²⁻³¹
- Increased interpersonal communication at the community level has been associated with increased condom use as it can help eliminate myths and stigma.^{32,33}
- In communities with male dominated social structures, women are less likely to have relationship power, thus less likely to request condom use.^{34,35}
- Women carrying condoms are often perceived as “bad,” “ruined,” or “loose,” and are referred to as “whores” and “prostitutes,” discouraging women from using condoms in many countries.^{24,35-54}
- In Malawi, individuals who live in communities with higher condom use compared to other communities were more likely to use condoms themselves.⁵⁵
- In 14 studies, social stigma around condoms was a barrier to condom use.^{3,36,56-67}



Social Capital

Social capital is the network of social connections that exist between people, and their shared values and norms of behavior. It often results in collective benefits that come from cooperation among individuals and groups. As social capital is closely related to collective action, it plays an important role in condom use.

- Various studies have found that communities with strong social capital understand the collective benefits of using condoms to reduce the likelihood of HIV transmission.^{1,68}
- Community groups also may have a positive effect on condom use.^{55,69} In South Africa, nearly 60 percent of community group members used condoms compared to 45 percent of non-members.⁶⁹
- Social capital and the perception that others can work on one’s behalf predicted intentions to use condoms in Namibia.⁷⁰
- In Zimbabwe, young female members of sports clubs were more likely to use condoms with casual partners than non-members.⁷¹

Collective Efficacy

Collective efficacy is “the shared belief in the ability of a group to address problems when it acts conjointly... in community setting, collective efficacy is the belief held by community members that together people can make a difference.”³³ A community’s confidence in believing they can make a difference in combating HIV is closely related to condom use.

- Several studies found an increase in condom use is likely among communities that perceive they are collectively able to prevent HIV.^{33,72-74}
- Female sex workers and men who have sex with men who reported greater collective efficacy were more likely to engage in consistent condom use in India.⁷⁵

From social norms and social capital to collective efficacy, community level factors are crucial in condom use. Communities with higher levels of each factor are more likely to support and promote condom use, and members are more likely to use condoms. Health communication can strengthen the capacity of communities to encourage condom use as a norm and support HIV prevention efforts more broadly.

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