

Combating COVID-19 in Mozambique

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CORRECTING MISPERCEPTIONS ABOUT SUPPORT FOR SOCIAL DISTANCING TO COMBAT COVID-19: A POLICY BRIEF

We design and test an intervention that corrects individuals' underestimates of community support for social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

KEY LESSONS

- Individuals typically underestimate community support for social distancing.
- Correcting individuals' underestimates of community support is an inexpensive and effective method to increase social distancing compliance in areas with high COVID-19 caseloads.
- Social distancing promotion strategies should advertise community acceptance of the behavior.

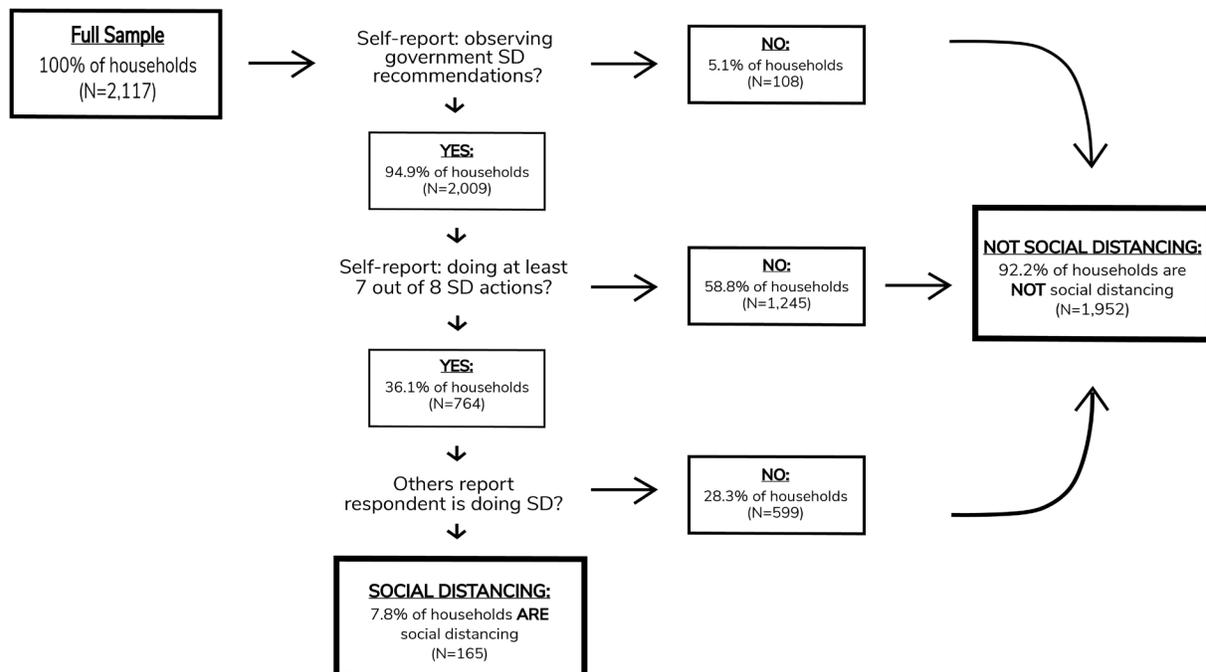
Research design

People’s perceptions of social norms can heavily influence their behavior. Therefore, to improve social distancing behavior at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, we tested a norms correction intervention and a local leader endorsement intervention using a randomized controlled trial. We conducted three rounds of phone interviews across 76 communities in Sofala, Manica, and Zambezia provinces of Central and Northern Mozambique between July and November 2020. We asked respondents if they support social distancing and what share of their community they think supports social distancing. For the norms correction intervention, we corrected those who underestimated community support or confirmed their correct belief. Lastly, we constructed a social distancing measure that incorporated both self and others’ reports of respondent social distancing behavior and estimated the effects of our interventions on that measure. For further details on this work, visit our website at www.fordschool.umich.edu/mozambique-research or read [the full study](#).

Is self-reported social distancing accurate?

In our social distancing measure, we find a large gap between self reports and others’ reports of social distancing behavior (SD actions). **Figure 1** shows that while 95 percent of respondents claim to observe government social distancing recommendations. However, when we incorporate self-reported actions (i.e., do you shop in crowded areas?) and reports from other community members into our measure of social distancing, the rate of social distancing falls to 8 percent.

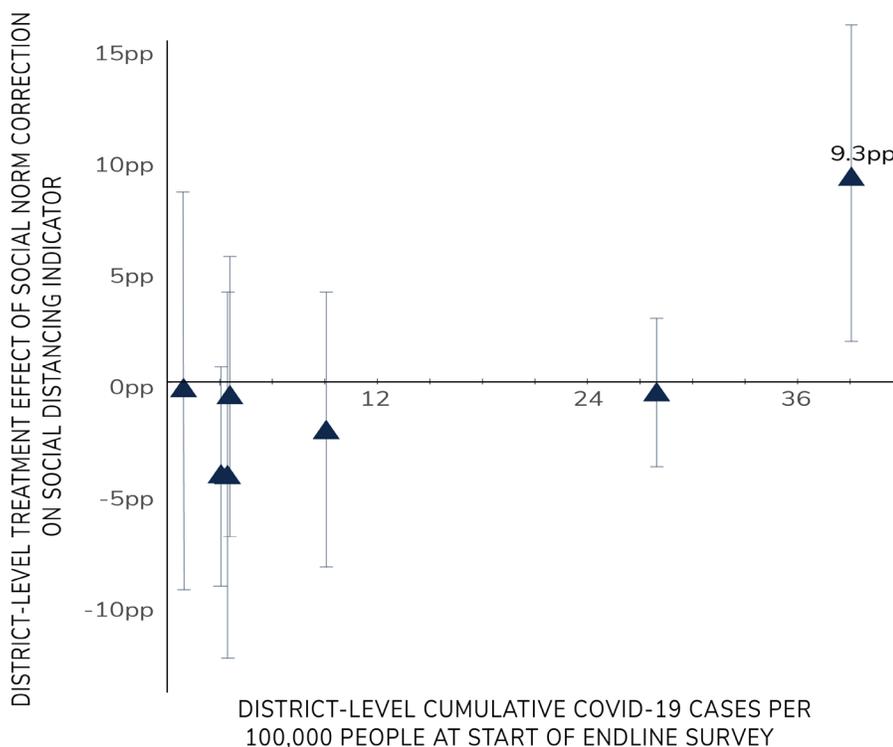
FIGURE 1: SELF REPORTED VS. OTHERS' REPORTS OF SOCIAL DISTANCING



Findings and recommendations

The social norms correction intervention did not have a significant effect on social distancing behavior in the overall sample; however, as displayed in **Figure 2**, in areas with high levels of COVID-19 cases, the intervention had a significantly positive effect. In the district with the most COVID-19 cases, the intervention increased social distancing by 9.3 percentage points, a 75% increase from the district's control group. Norms correction is an inexpensive and effective tool to increase take-up of life-saving measures like social distancing and to dismantle COVID-19-related misperceptions. Social distancing policy promotion strategies should advertise community acceptance of the behavior in areas where cases are high.

FIGURE 2: HETEROGENEOUS EFFECTS OF THE SOCIAL DISTANCING TREATMENT



For survey instruments, summary statistics, additional analyses, and future updates please see our [website](http://www.fordschool.umich.edu/mozambique-research): www.fordschool.umich.edu/mozambique-research

Questions? **Comments?**
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