



**Campaigning begins at home:**

**Perceptions of FGM and child marriage among development practitioners\***

Female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage are two of the most severe and common forms of child rights violation in Somalia. Consequently, addressing these child right violations are key goals in various programmes and campaigns undertaken by Save the Children Somalia/Somaliland. Since all the personnel working in the organization, irrespective of their particular roles, are expected to be the advocates for elimination of FGM and child marriage in the country, it is critical to understand their individual perceptions on these issues. An online anonymous survey was conducted in August, 2016. The survey was open for all colleagues of Save the Children Somalia/Somaliland, and a total of 230 individuals participated. This 15-20 minutes long survey included perception questions on FGM and child marriage, and several background characteristics of the respondents.

As Table 1 shows, most of the survey participants reported their perceptions in line with the campaign objectives. For example, only 3% respondents reported perceiving FGM being a mandatory religious practice and 85% reported that the practice can be eliminated in Somalia. However, 30% reported that FGM is practiced in their families. Regarding perceptions of child marriage, there are some gaps since 22% do not support a ban on marriage before the age of 18 years, and 65% reported that religion supports marriage of a girl as soon she reaches puberty.

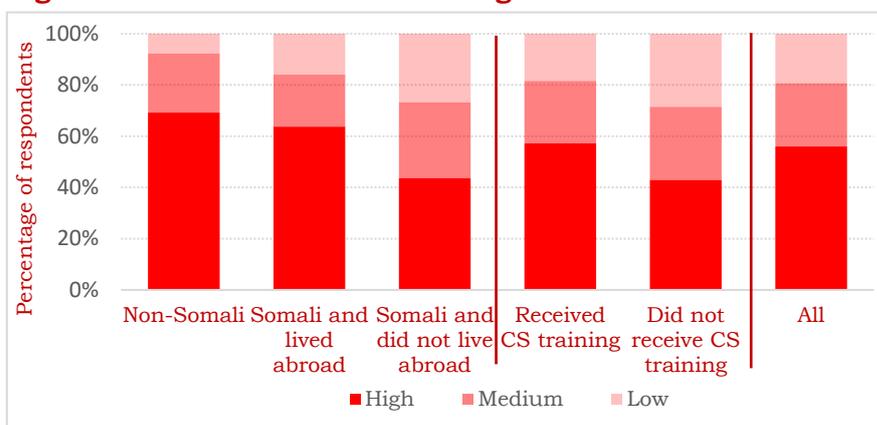
Table 1. Percentage of respondents agreeing to perception statements

Statements	Response (%)
FGM is a mandatory religious practice	3
A girl who has not undergone FGM/C would face difficulty in getting married	14
The practice of FGM/C can be eliminated in the country	85
If FGM/C is done by a health care professional, it has less health risks	22
FGM/C is practiced in my household/family	30
If I have a daughter, I will not let her be circumcised	87
I support a national policy that bans marriage before the age of 18 years	78
There are some benefits for girls getting married early	16
My religion supports a girl getting married as soon as she reaches puberty	65
There are risks for a girl doing wrong things if she is not married early	17
If I have a daughter, I would let her getting married before 18 years	8

Note: the statements were switched between positive and negative statements to avoid response bias

The perception answers were combined into an index of “conviction for elimination” of FGM and child marriage. Analysis of the determinants of these two opinion indices show statistically significant differences between Somali and non-Somali respondents, where the second group expressed higher conviction for elimination of both FGM and child marriage. Among the Somali colleagues, who have lived abroad reported higher conviction than the rest. The second characteristic that shows association with both the opinion indices is their participation in child safeguarding training.

Figure 1. Conviction for eliminating FGM

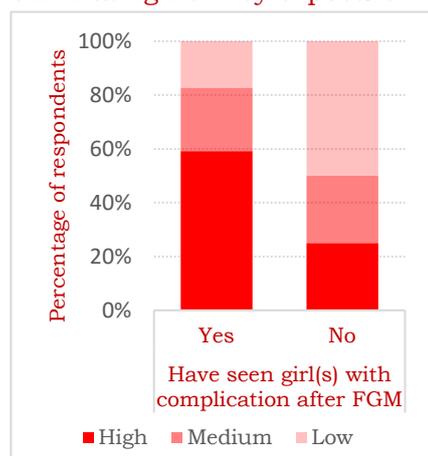


Although this training is mandatory, about 8% respondents reported not receiving this, and their conviction scores are relatively lower than the rest. Descriptive statistics of these differences are shown in Figure 1 and 2, where the high-medium-low ranking are done for comparison purpose and should not be interpreted as absolute categories.

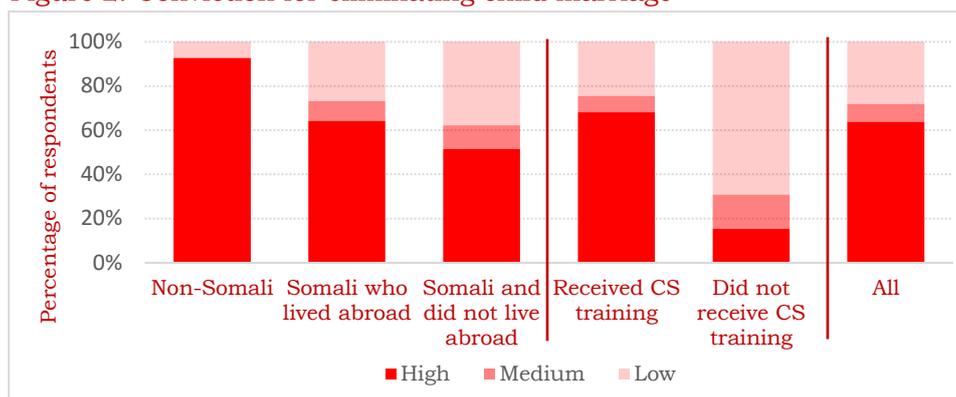
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In terms of other background characteristics, respondents who reported knowing any girl with complication after undergoing circumcision also reported higher conviction for elimination of FGM than respondents who do not know any such girl (Figure 3). Not surprisingly, there is no such association in their opinion on child marriage.

**Figure 3. Conviction for eliminating FGM by exposure**



**Figure 2. Conviction for eliminating child marriage**



These patterns between the respondent characteristics and conviction indices are statistically significant after controlling for their age, sex, education, and tenure and role in organization. These findings imply that there is scope of creating a stronger common voice on both issues. Moreover, there are bigger differences in personal convictions regarding elimination of child marriage among the colleagues by their nationality and exposure to non-Somali environment compared to the differences in their conviction on FGM. However, there are two caveats in this correlation analysis. Firstly, self-reported perception measures have potential bias of reporting to expected norms. It is possible that the individuals with lower values in the conviction index are relatively less biased in reporting. Secondly, it is likely that the perceptions of the Somali colleagues are shaped by the ground realities that they face in their daily activities, and their lower conviction scores reflect the actual realities of what is achievable.

### A list experiment to measure desirability bias in responses

While the practicality aspect needs to be looked at more systematically, the concern of desirability bias was investigated in this survey through a list experiment. In this list experiment, the respondents are randomly divided into “control” and “treatment” groups. Respondents in control group were asked to report *how many* of the statements in a group of three they agree with (i.e. not reporting which statement). The three statements were - a. if a 16 years old girl does not want to study, she should get married; b. if a 16 years old girl does not want to study, she should start working; and c. education for girls can be more important than education for boys. The control group then are asked to respond to a separate statement which is tested for response bias. This experimental statement was on corporal punishment - it can be acceptable in some situations to hit a child to discipline. The treatment group, on the other hand, were asked how many of the four statements they agree to. The idea behind this list experiment is - when reporting on the count of statements instead of direct response, the respondents have less inclination to report desirably and report more accurately. If there is no response bias, adding the average number of statements reported by control group in three statement question and the percentage agreeing to the test statement should equal to the average number of statements agreed by treatment group. In there is desirability bias, the average number of statements agreed by treatment group would be larger.

The data does not indicate any desirability bias, and we find indication of questionnaire effects. In their three statement count, the control group on average agreed to 1.83 statements, and 13% of them agreed to the corporal punishment question. In situation of no desirability bias, therefore, the treatment group would have agreed to 1.95 statements in their four statement question. However, in our experiment, the treatment group agreed to 1.64 statements out of four, which is even lower than the control group average to three statements. And these differences are statistically significant. Distribution of response values indicate questionnaire effects - whereby the respondents emphasized on the last statement in deciding how many statements they agree to. This is reflected by 38% respondents agreeing to zero statements out of their four compared to 22% in control group. While the absence of desirability bias is encouraging, the questionnaire effect indicates the perception indices may have some measurement errors.

**Overall, this survey reveals need for more in-house advocacy and discussions on both FGM and child marriage issues while we work towards making community and national level changes.**