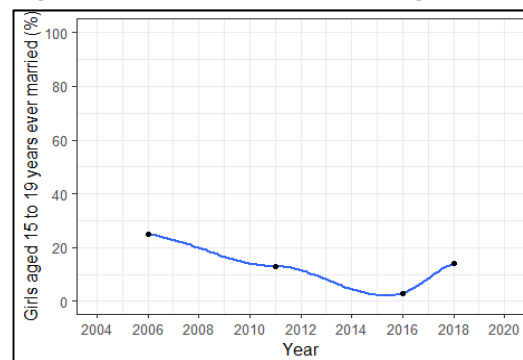


Perception versus Practice Disconnect on Early Child Marriage in Somalia: Evidence from a Two-Year Panel Survey*

Background

Child, Early and Forced Marriages (CEFM) result in negative consequences; including higher maternal and infant mortality rates, reduced human capital accumulation, increased poverty and wider gender inequality, among others. CEFM risk factors that are dominant in Somalia include; poverty, insecurity, lack of education access and approval for young marriage. Figure 1 shows a declining prevalence of girls aged 15 to 19 years who had been married off, from 25% in 2006 to between 3% and 8% in 2016. Thereafter, rates are seemingly going up. Leveraging on a 4-year (2016 - 2019) Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) and Save the Children International (SCI) joint programme implemented in 6 districts in Southern Somalia, this study documents the dynamics of CEFM alongside community opinion. The programme aimed at accelerating support for zero tolerance towards harmful traditional practices including CEFM.

Figure 1: Trends in Child Marriage Rates



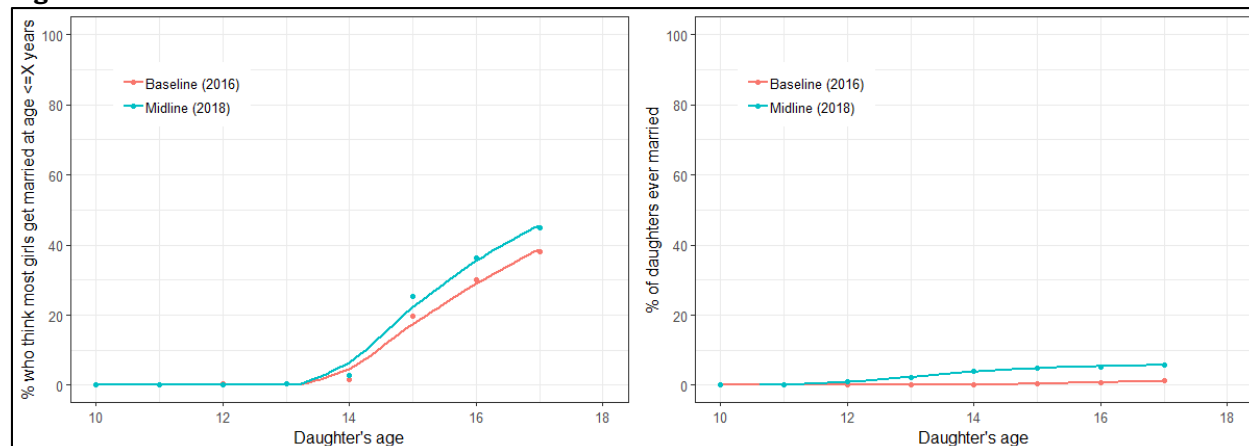
Data and methodology

This study utilizes data from a two-wave panel survey of 1168 households collected in September-October 2016 and October-November 2018 respectively. The households were drawn from a multi-stage sampling used to sample 5 groups in each of the 18 programme communities spread across the six programme districts: Garbaharey and Belethawa, Bosaso, Qardo, Garowe and Eyl districts. The first group was made up of individuals participating in community level discussions, the second group was of individuals not participating in community level discussions but matching individuals in the first group while the third and fourth groups were those in the network of the first and second group. Those in the fifth group were a random sample of community members. CEFM was established through listing all respondents' daughters and their marital status at baseline and relisting unmarried daughters for follow up on marital status two years later.

Findings

The actual rate of child marriage was much lower than what people reported to be the case. For instance, 4 in every 10 respondents think most girls get married before attaining the age of 18, especially as soon as they hit puberty (Fig 2a). Practice is contrary to perception, 6% of girls aged between ages 10 and 17 years in 2018 had been married off (Fig 2b). This was slightly higher than the 1% CEFM prevalence reported in 2016. There was localized increase in CEFM, in Garowe and Eyl districts (prevalence increased from 0% to 13% in both). Prevalence stagnated in other districts.

Figure 2: Perceived versus Actual CEFM Rates

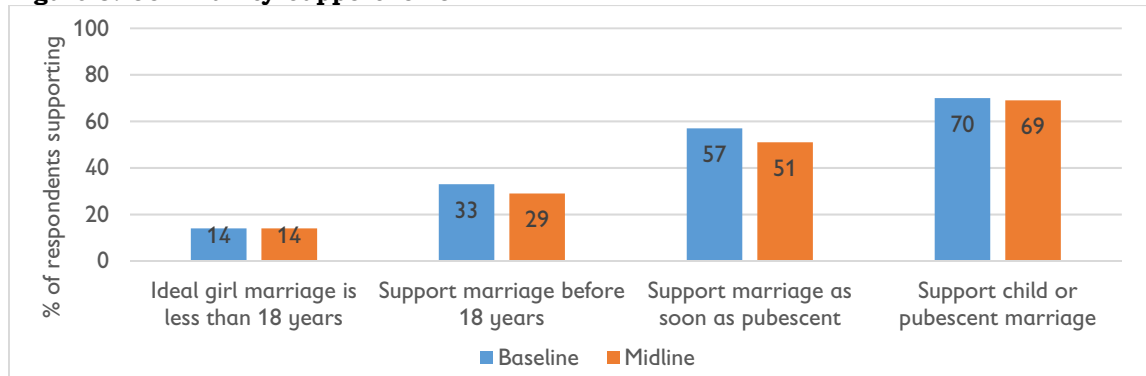


* This Fact Sheet, prepared by Elijah Kipchumba and reviewed by Caroline Mwai and Linda Simiyu, is based on a joint SCI/NCA Midterm Review available [here](#). For more information, contact elijah.kipkech@savethechildren.org.

Other than perception versus prevalence, another issue to examine is the approval of CEFM. To examine approval, the study explored respondents' perceptions of the ideal marriage age; whether they support marriage as soon as a girl attains puberty or whether they support marriage generally before attaining age 18. When explored from the age perspective, only 14% indicated below 18 years as the ideal marriage age for girls. However, over a half thought that a girl should be married off as soon as she reaches puberty (See Fig 3). Therefore, support for child marriage should not be interpreted as a matter of age only but also as a perception that girls who have attained puberty can be married off. Combining these perceptions shows support for child marriage is quite widespread, about 70%.

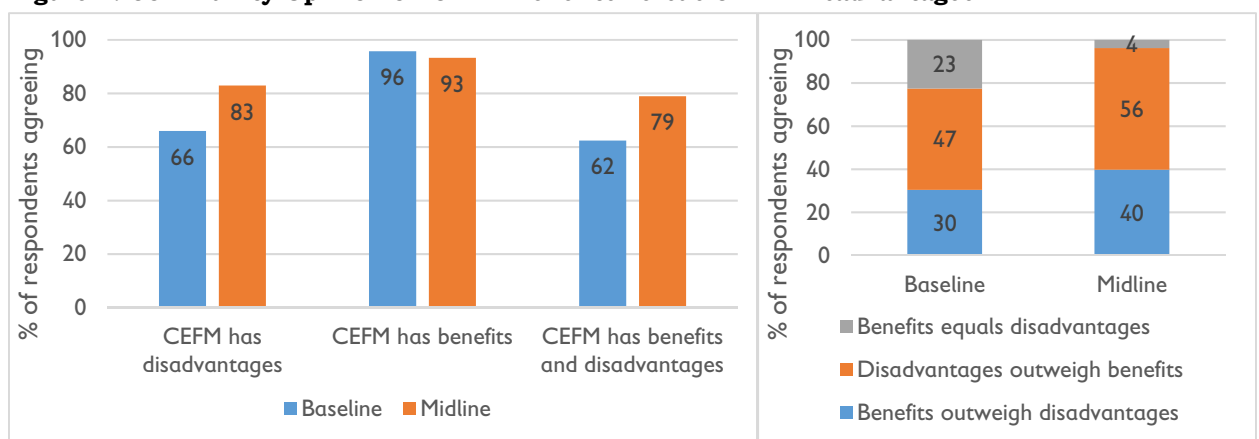
"The right marriage age for girls is the time she gets her menstruation period and it is not depending on the age"
 Religious Leader

Figure 3: Community Support for CEFM



About two thirds of the study participants recognized CEFM as harmful. The proportion of respondents aware of negative CEFM effects increased with time while those who thought the practice was beneficial marginally declined. In terms of relative weights, both male and female respondents were of the opinion that disadvantages of CEFM outweigh resulting benefits. Over time, those who thought the advantages outweigh disadvantages have increased; their opponents also increased by a similar margin. CEFM was deemed harmful mostly due to health problems to the teenage mother and weaker infants as a result of teenage motherhood. Negative CEFM consequences such as a lost childhood, domestic violence and dropping out of school were also cited but to a lower extent. On the other hand, CEFM was cited beneficial as it enables daughters produce children early as well as reduce chances of her making mistakes.

Figure 4: Community Opinion on CEFM Benefits versus CEFM Disadvantages



Community members perceive child marriage as a widespread practice yet reality is far from this. In addition, the community support the practice (especially pubescent marriage) and at times deem its benefits outweigh the negative consequences. Awareness raising is needed to correct the CEFM misconceptions. Further research is also needed on disconnect between CEFM perception and the reality.