

Accelerating Change towards Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: Effects of Community Dialogues*

Background

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) is a dominant harmful practice affecting over 97% of girls in Somalia. The Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) and Save the Children International (SCI) jointly implemented a 4-year (2016 - 2020) programme in six districts in Southern Somalia aimed at accelerating support for zero tolerance towards FGM/C. The districts were Garbaharey and Belethawa districts in Jubaland and Bosaso, Qardo, Garowe and Eyl districts in Puntland. Community Dialogues (CD) is a key strategy in this joint programme. The CD sessions were held monthly by congregating select community members to inform them on the FGM/C health and socio-emotional consequences. CD sessions also provided space for the participants to openly discuss and reflect on FGM/C. The participants were then expected to deliver these messages and take actions to end FGM/C practices in their communities.

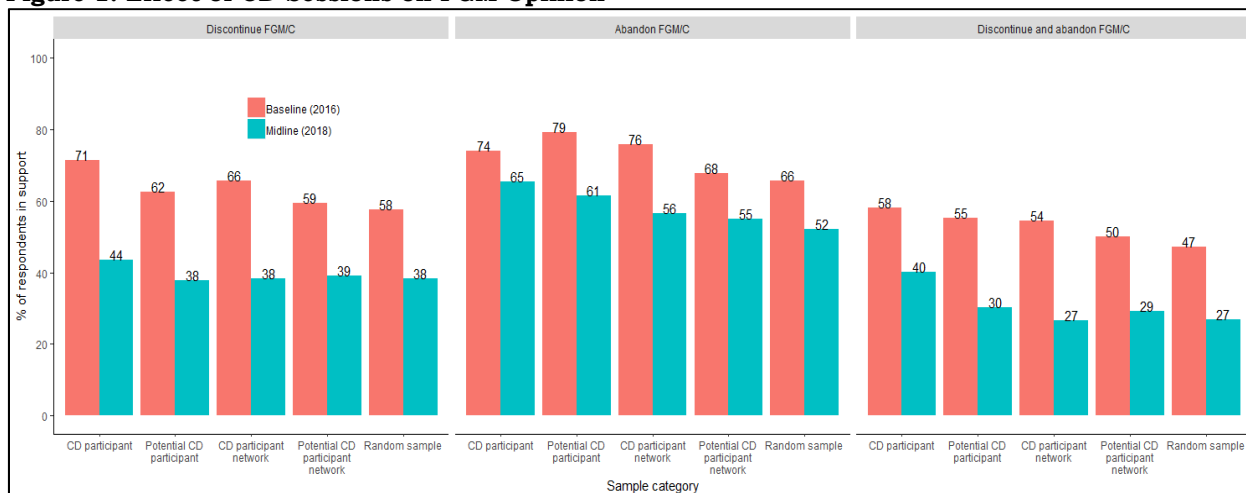
Data and methodology

This factsheet presents effects achieved by the monthly CD sessions held for two years from late 2016. The study compared changes in CD participants and the other households in their network. Five study groups were involved in this study, selected through multi-stage sampling in each of the 18 project communities spread across the six programme 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. Two wave panel survey data was collected from these groups in September-October 2016 and October-November 2018 respectively. In total, 1258 respondents were involved at baseline, 1168 of whom were traced and re-surveyed at midline.

Findings

The study examined if participation in CD sessions created direct and spill-over effects on opinion whether FGM/C should be discontinued and be completely abandoned. As shown in Fig 1 below, at baseline, the communities were against FGM/C to a large extent, however, this shrunk considerably during subsequent follow up. This cannot be interpreted as the community being less supportive of FGM/C discontinuation and abandonment but a reflection of difference in survey terms. In the study area, the community largely supported Sunnah FGM/C type and widely disapproved of the Pharaonic FGM/C type. At baseline survey, the term used was interpreted to be synonymous with only one FGM/C type, Pharaonic. The midline survey rectified this anomaly with appropriate translation that included all FGM/C types. After this midline survey rectification, results show participation in CD sessions increased likelihood of being supportive of FGM/C discontinuation and abandonment. Nonetheless, due to FGM/C terminology difference, the results here in are inconclusive of FGM/C attitude change.

Figure 1: Effect of CD Sessions on FGM Opinion

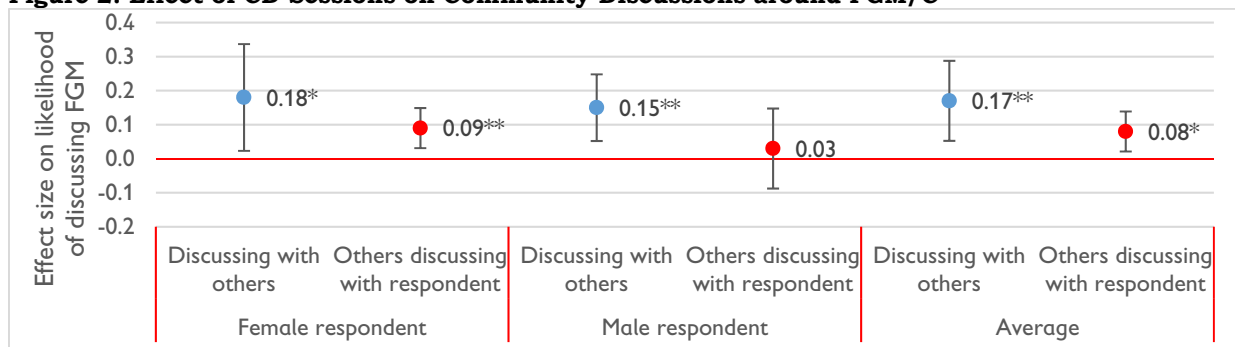


* This Fact Sheet, prepared by Elijah Kipchumba and reviewed by Caroline Mwai and Linda Simiyu, is based on a joint SCI/NCA Midterm Review available [here](#). For more information, contact elijah.kipkech@savethechildren.org.

CD are conceptualized as a space for community members to discuss and reflect on social, health and religious implications of FGM/C. The space is necessary given that FGM/C is not a subject that people, especially of opposite gender, generally talk about in communities. As such, it was hypothesized that the CD sessions would break communication barriers and stimulate discussions on FGM/C not only among direct participants but also in the wider community. When discussions saturate the community, the CD participants are not the only source of information, but they will at times be information recipients from other campaigners. Fig 2 below shows that CD participants were 15 to 18 percentage points more likely to discuss FGM/C issues with other community members after the sessions, especially if the participant was female. CD participants were yet to get others on course, since they were still the dominant source of the FGM/C discourse.

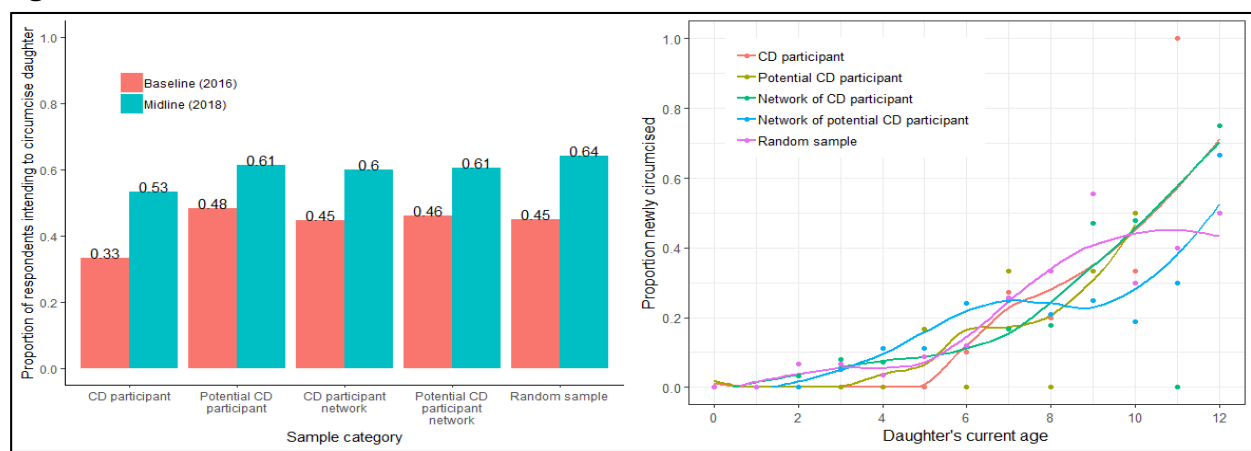
“Before I was ashamed of speaking about FGM; but when I saw men discussing with us on our private issues I learnt that FGM is an issue for everyone”- Female CD participant

Figure 2: Effect of CD Sessions on Community Discussions around FGM/C



As CD participants reflected on FGM/C issues, they became more aware of FGM/C health effects, especially the Pharaonic type. When they discussed this information with other community members, this helped the other community members to be aware of the fact that there were also some community leaders who were against FGM/C. Since religious leaders had a divided stand on FGM/C, community members did not change their perception on religious leaders' stand on FGM/C. This study examined if CD participants would circumcise (or intend to circumcise) less girls within the two-year period relative to other study arms. As shown in Fig 3 above, those in treatment group (CD participant and those in CD participant network) and those in the control group registered nearly similar new FGM/C cases within the two-year period. The intention to have their daughters undergo FGM/C was similar irrespective of participation in CD sessions. These results were attributed to lack of changes in FGM/C opinion.

Figure 3: Effect of CD Sessions on FGM/C Future Intentions and FGM/C Practice



Two years later, FGM/C continues unchanged and the community's resolve to continue with the practice remains high. CD sessions were successful in disseminating information around FGM/C especially the health effects. The CD structure need to be improved to enable critical reflection by the wider community as opposed to select community segment.