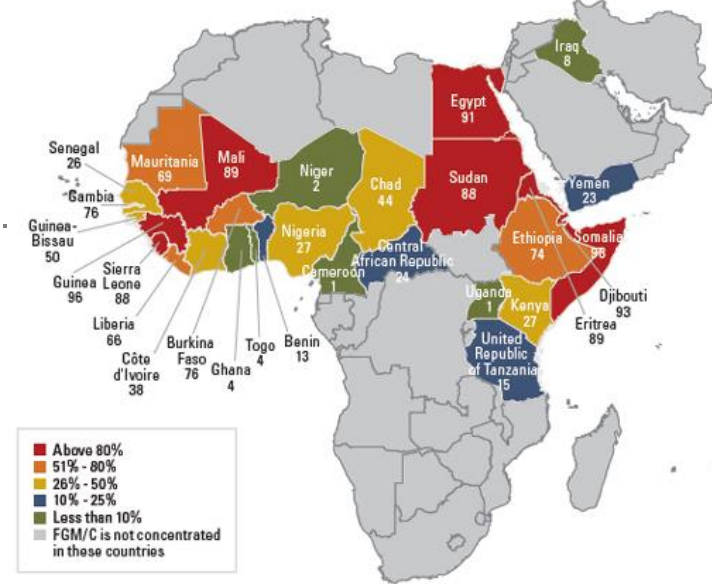


Measuring support for harmful cultural practices: developing techniques to improve data and understanding of female genital cutting in rural Ethiopia

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Female genital cutting (FGC)

‘all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to female genital organs for non-medical reasons’ WHO, 2014

- 29 countries in Africa and Middle East.
- Negative health consequences: include obstetric, psychological and sexual (particularly for most severe forms)
- Intervention schemes have had mixed results

Understanding FGC behaviour is crucial for policy (SDG Goal 5), but challenging:

- It occurs in private, its effects are not externally visible.
- Studies rely heavily on self-report data
- It’s a sensitive topic. There may be pressures to under report or even over report.
- Possibility of both over and under statement makes it especially difficult to assess the prevalence and predictors of support for FGC

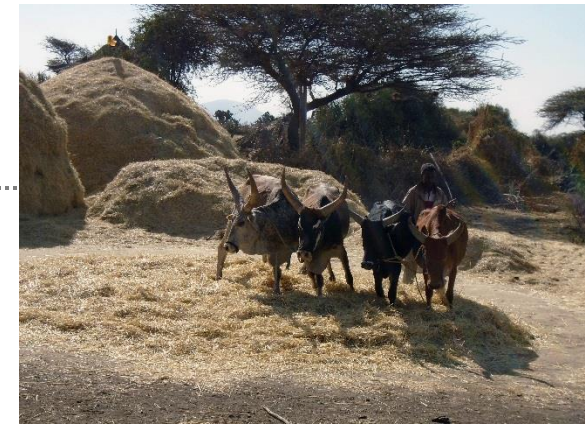
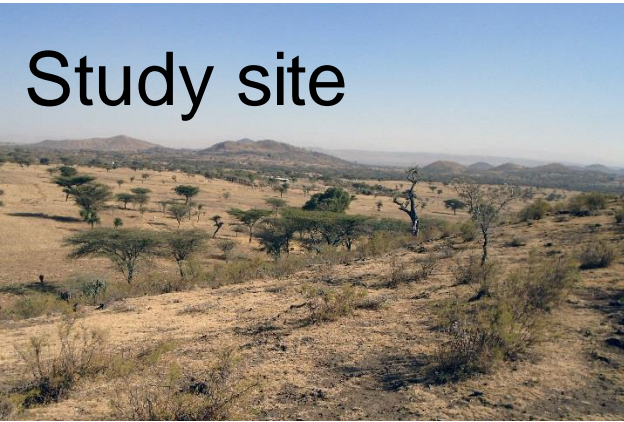
A solution

Employ indirect questioning methods on FGC

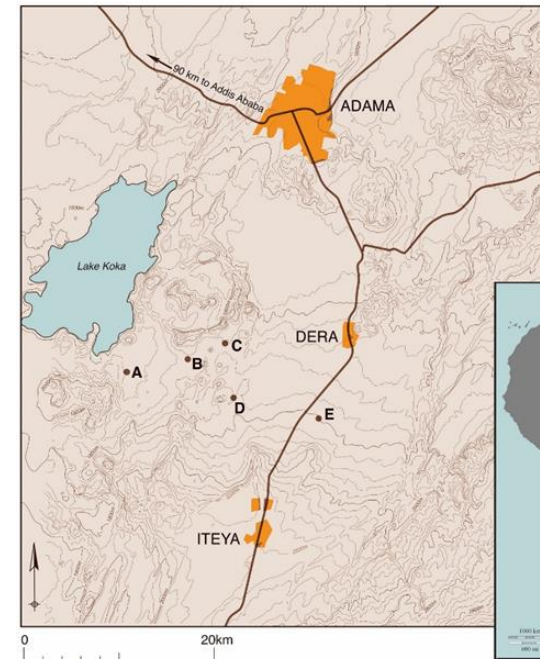
- designed to mitigate the problems associated with sensitive survey topics
- establishes population-level measures without revealing individual status to the interviewer
- provides information on concealed practice (or views)– when compared with direct questioning methods
- little use in low-income settings & on sensitive health topics

e.g. **FGC**: Gibson et al, in press; De Cao & Lutz, 2018; **Abortion**: Moseson et al, 2017; **IPV**: Chellaraj, et al 2017: Peterman et al, 2017

Study site



- **FGC** is a nick or cut to the clitoris, occurs in private in months leading up to marriage (mid/late teens)
- Illegal since 2004
 - Is there a law in Ethiopia that prevents FGC? – 98% said ‘yes’
- Openly-stated rates of FGC suggest its in decline (?)
 - dropping from 90% in 2010 to <20% in 2015



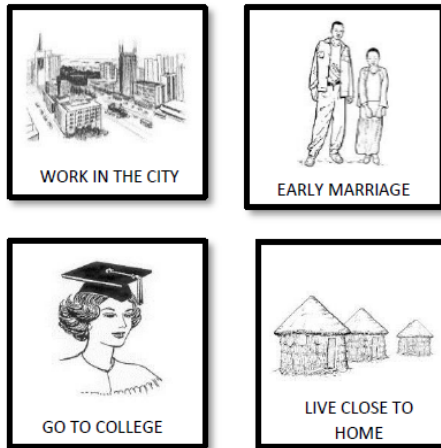
Our method: Unmatched count technique (UCT)

- Participants view a list of items and state how many are true for them
- Some see a list with the sensitive item present, some see it with the sensitive item deleted
- Difference between the two provides an estimate of the proportion for whom the sensitive statement is true.
- At no point does any participant reveal which particular item they chose.

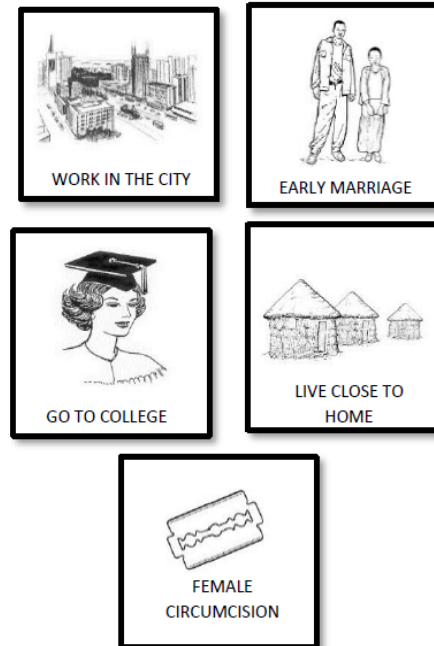
How many of these cards show things you want for your daughter?

How many of these cards show things that you want for your daughter?

Version A (control), short list:



Version B (treatment), long-list:



Mean B – Mean A = estimate of those in favour of cutting for the entire population

Data Collection

- Socio-demographic survey 2016 (2017)
- 1620 (810) adults, equal m and f
- Visiting alternate houses, same sex enumerators
- Randomly given *either* direct *or* indirect (UCT) questions
 - Direct question with (5 card treatment), *or* without FGC (4 card control) (29%, n=508)
 - UCT question with (5 card treatment) *or* without FGC (4 card control) (69%, n=1112)



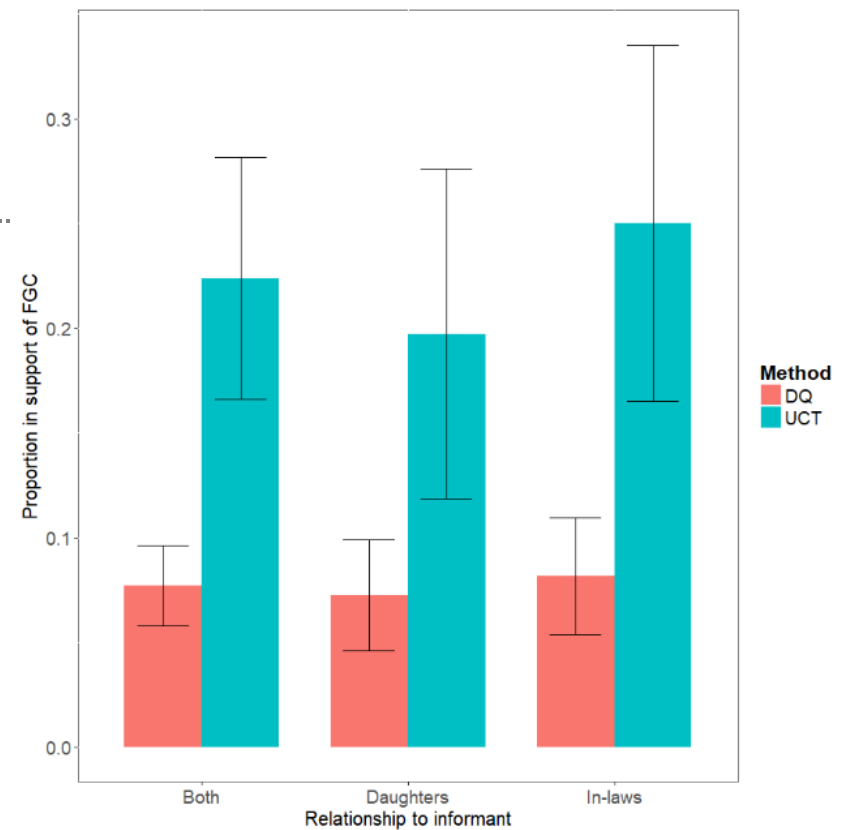


Questions

- Do the Arsi Oromo under-report their support for FGC?
 - Compare open (direct) and private (UCT) views
- Are there individual predictors for FGC support?
 - Gender, education level & age
- Does this vary by relationship to the woman?
 - Compare support for daughters v. daughters-in-law

Results

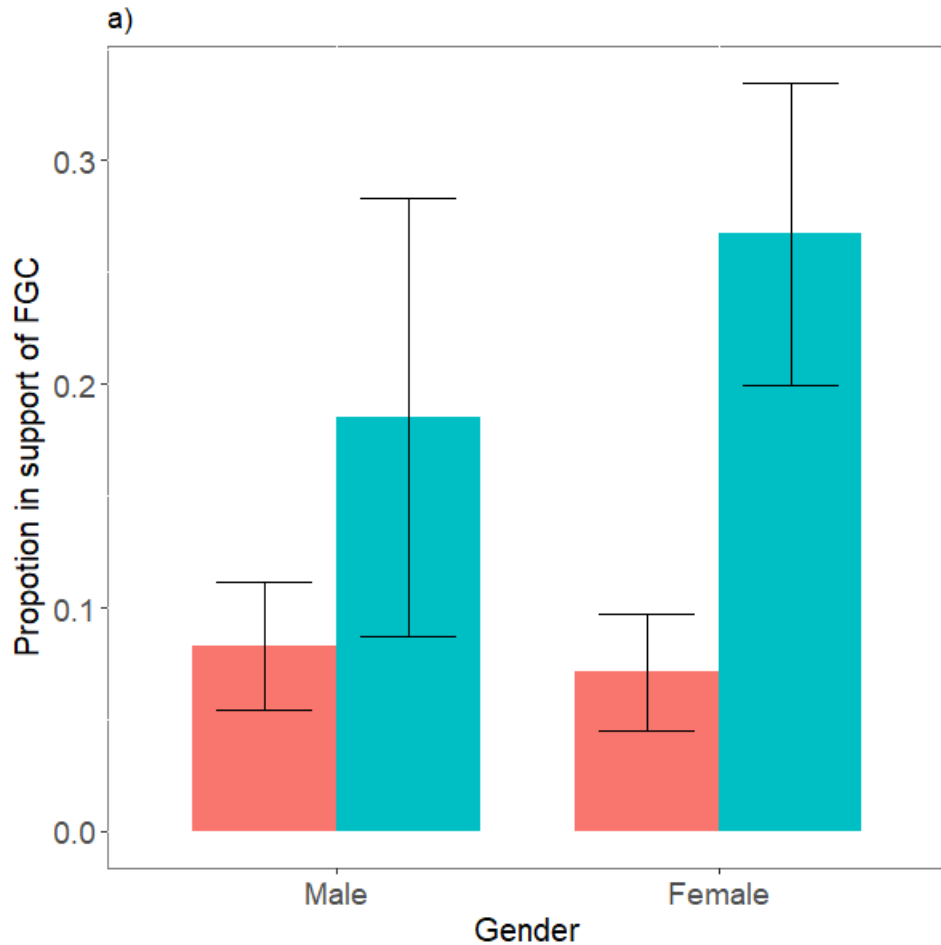
- UCT (private) support for FGC is greater (3 x higher) than DQ (open) support
- No difference in support for daughters versus daughters-in-law
 - DQ 0.07(0.01) v 0.08(0.01), $p=0.6$
 - UCT 0.19(0.04) v 0.25(0.04), $p=0.4$



	Direct estimate ^a	Indirect estimate ^b	Concealed support ^c
Daughter	7.3%	19.7%	12.5%***
In laws	8.2%	25.0%	16.0%***

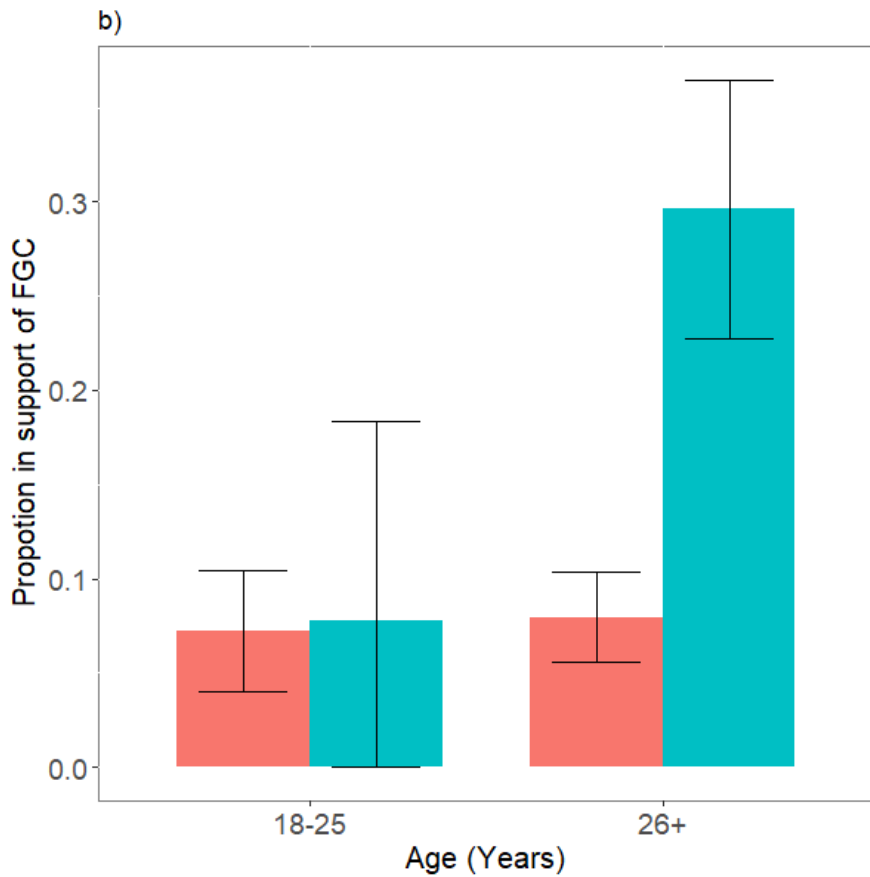
Analyses performed in R, including list
xpt package: Blair & Imai; 2010 v. 8.

Gender of informant



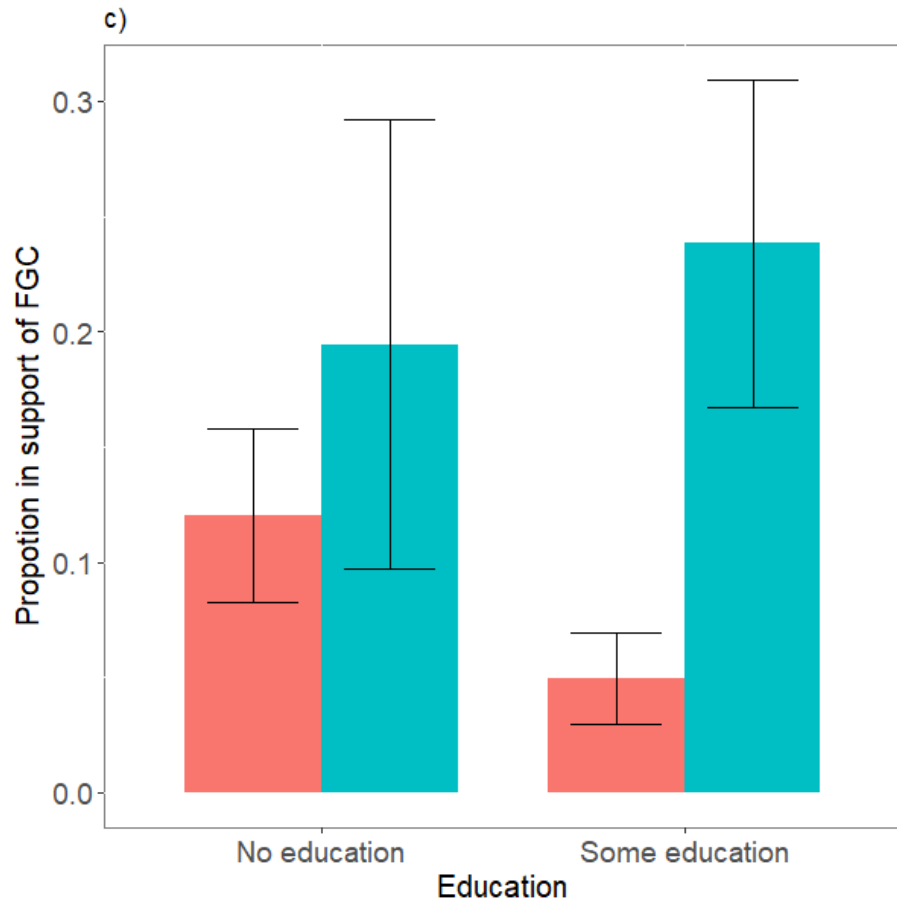
	Relative	DQ ^a	UCT ^b	Conceal support ^c
Male	Daught	7.4%	14.2%	6.8%
	In-law	9.2%	22.8%	13.6%*
	Both	8.3%	18.5%	10.2%*
Female	Daught	7.1%	25.6%	18.5%***
	In-laws	7.1%	27.8%	20.7%***
	Both	7.1%	26.7%	19.6%***

Age



	Relative	DQ ^a	UCT ^b	Concealed support ^c
18-25 yrs	Daughters	7.2%	9.4%	2.2%
	In-laws	7.2%	6.1%	-1.1%
	Both	7.2%	7.8%	0.5%
26+ years	Daughters	7.3%	24.9%	17.6%***
	In-laws	8.6%	34.4%	25.8%***
	Both	8.0%	29.6%	21.6%***

Education level



	Relative	DQ ^a	UCT ^b	Concealed support ^c
No educ	Daught	11.6%	15.5%	3.9%
	In-law	12.4%	23.3%	10.9%
	Both	12.0%	19.4%	7.4%
Some educ	Daught	4.5%	21.9%	17.4%***
	In-law	5.4%	25.7%	20.3%***
	Both	5.0%	23.8%	18.9%***

Summary

- FGC support is being under-reported in DQ (22.4% v 7.4%)
- UCT has identified variation (which was not apparent using direct methods)

1) Youngest are less supportive, both directly (DQ) and in private (<10%), while older cohort (=>26 yrs) endorse FGC (30%) but hide this support in DQ.

- May indicate change in social norms overtime (cohort effect).
- Or that individuals change their views with age.

2) People are equally supportive of FGC for their daughters, and for their daughters-in-law

The costs and benefits of FGC are equivalent for the Arsi Oromo, its linked directly to women's socio-economic security (marriage)

3) Overall women and men are equally supportive of FGC, but men less likely to conceal (particularly daughters)

Possibly reflects pressures for men to signal marriageability of their daughters to potential spouses and parents-in-law.

4) Educated people conceal their “true” support for FGC

- Similar links between education and under-reporting of sensitive attitudes (e.g. racist beliefs, Ostapczuk et al, 2009)
- Community intervention programmes lead to change in FGC practice to prevent detection (e.g. Camilotti, 2015).
- Education expansion (at least in its early stages) may not change views (and/or behaviour), it may simply heighten secrecy

4) Is there subgroup for whom FGC endorsement is normative (>50%)?

- Yes. **Older, educated males** hold the strongest views in favour of the practice, and are most likely to conceal these views
- Represent 12% of population, and hold positions of authority, leadership, and lead key social rites (e.g. arranging marriages).
- Concealed support of these powerful males could explain the persistence of the practice in this community

Policy implications

- Identification subgroups is important:
 - as social alliances based on similarity, and conformity may explain the popularity of FGC (Howard & Gibson, 2017)
 - pockets of high support may therefore explain the persistence of FGC in populations in which it is an overall minority practice.
- Indirect methods (like UCT) can provide useful insights into factors which may underpin culturally sensitive behaviours (which direct questioning are unable to identify)
- Useful method for design/impact/evaluation of interventions (IPV: Peterman et al., 2017)

Thanks to



Addis Ababa
University



Our UCT study design

- Use of picture cards, not written lists –addressed low literacy in our population and improved randomization of item presentation.
- We tested for “additional item effects” – to check that adding FGC item did not influence responses to the other four items on the list.
- We piloted and selected non-sensitive items from the list to avoid “floor/ceiling effects”
- We assigned some of our sample to direct questioning methods to measure and compare openly-stated versus privately-held views