

Sensitive survey questions: Measuring attitudes regarding female circumcision through a list experiment

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In this paper we design a list experiment to measure the attitudes among women toward Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) by using new data collected in Ethiopia. The results of multivariate regressions recently developed for the list experiment show that educated women are less in favor of FGM compared to the non-educated ones (6% versus 46%). Using the results of a direct question about FGM support, we show that the social desirability bias is the greatest among non-educated women. In particular, non-educated women that are targets of a NGO intervention have a stronger incentive to reveal a biased answer: being targets makes them less willing to share publicly their real attitudes. We believe that list experiments are a simple way to successfully elicit truthful answers to sensitive questions. Moreover, they need to be analysed in a multivariate framework to study the association between respondents' characteristics and their responses to sensitive items.

