

# Outcomes of an individually randomized controlled trial to determine the effectiveness of the Women for Women International Program in Reducing IPV and strengthening livelihoods among women in Afghanistan

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WhatWorks

TO PREVENT VIOLENCE

A Global Programme To Prevent  
Violence Against Women and Girls



WOMEN *for* WOMEN  
International



# Background

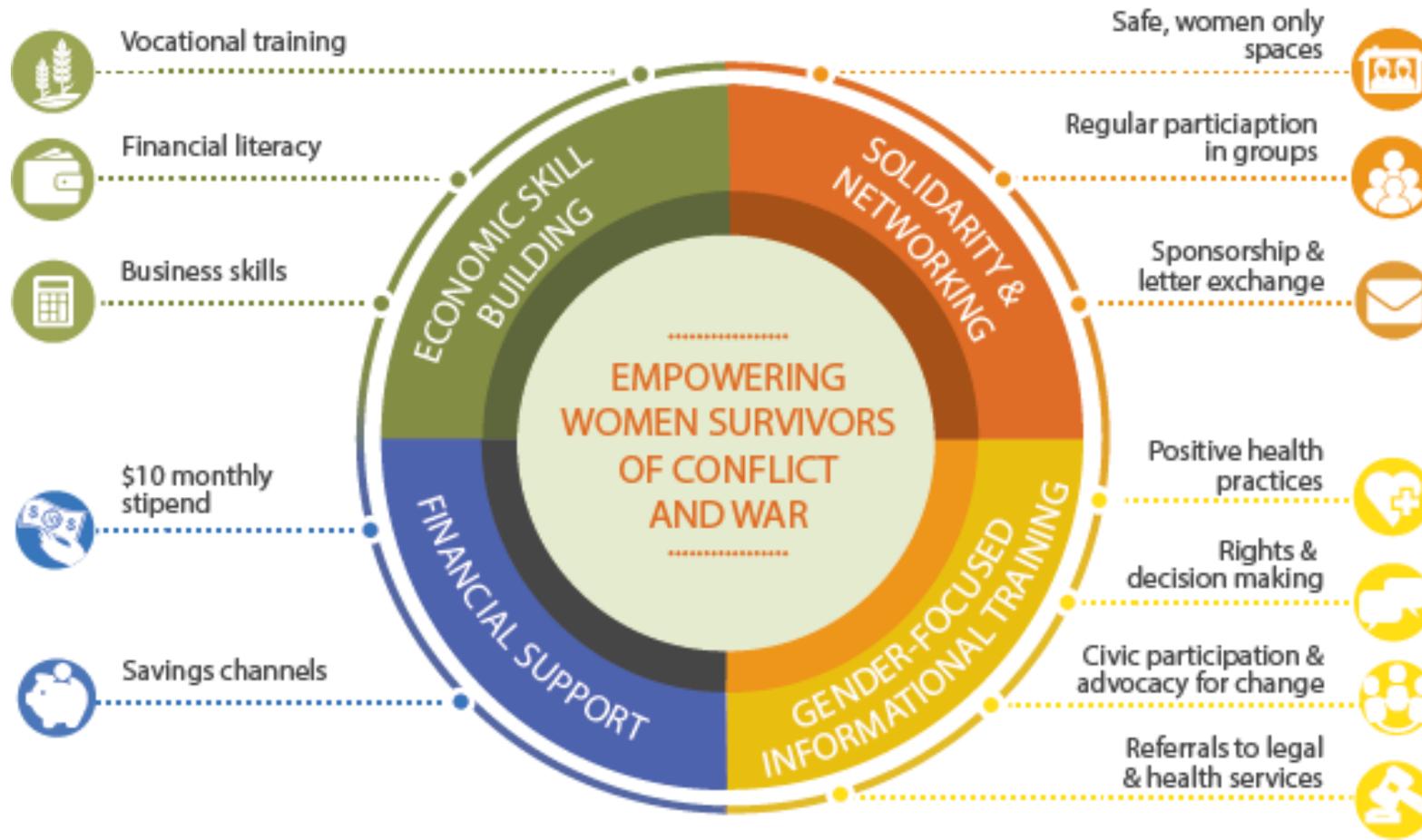
- Intimate partner violence (IPV) is the most common form of violence against women in conflict and post-conflict settings. But evaluations of interventions to reduce IPV in these settings are rare, particularly in Asia.
- In lower- and middle-income countries, combined economic empowerment and social empowerment interventions can be successful in reducing IPV, particularly when incorporating gender transformative approaches. However, there is limited data and mixed findings about the efficacy of such interventions in conflict- and post-conflict settings.
- As part of the DFID-funded What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls Global Program, we evaluated the impact of Women for Women International's economic and social empowerment program in Afghanistan on women's experiences of IPV, depression, livelihoods and gender equality.

# Context: Afghanistan

- More than 40 years of conflict; many active government opposition groups
- 1.5 million displaced in 2017
- 12.5 million below the poverty line (40%)
- 86% illiteracy for Afghan women; women are only 19% of the workforce
- 70-80% women are in forced marriages
- According to the DHS (2015), national past-year physical IPV prevalence rate is 46%, and as high as 84% in some provinces.



# Women for Women International: Program description



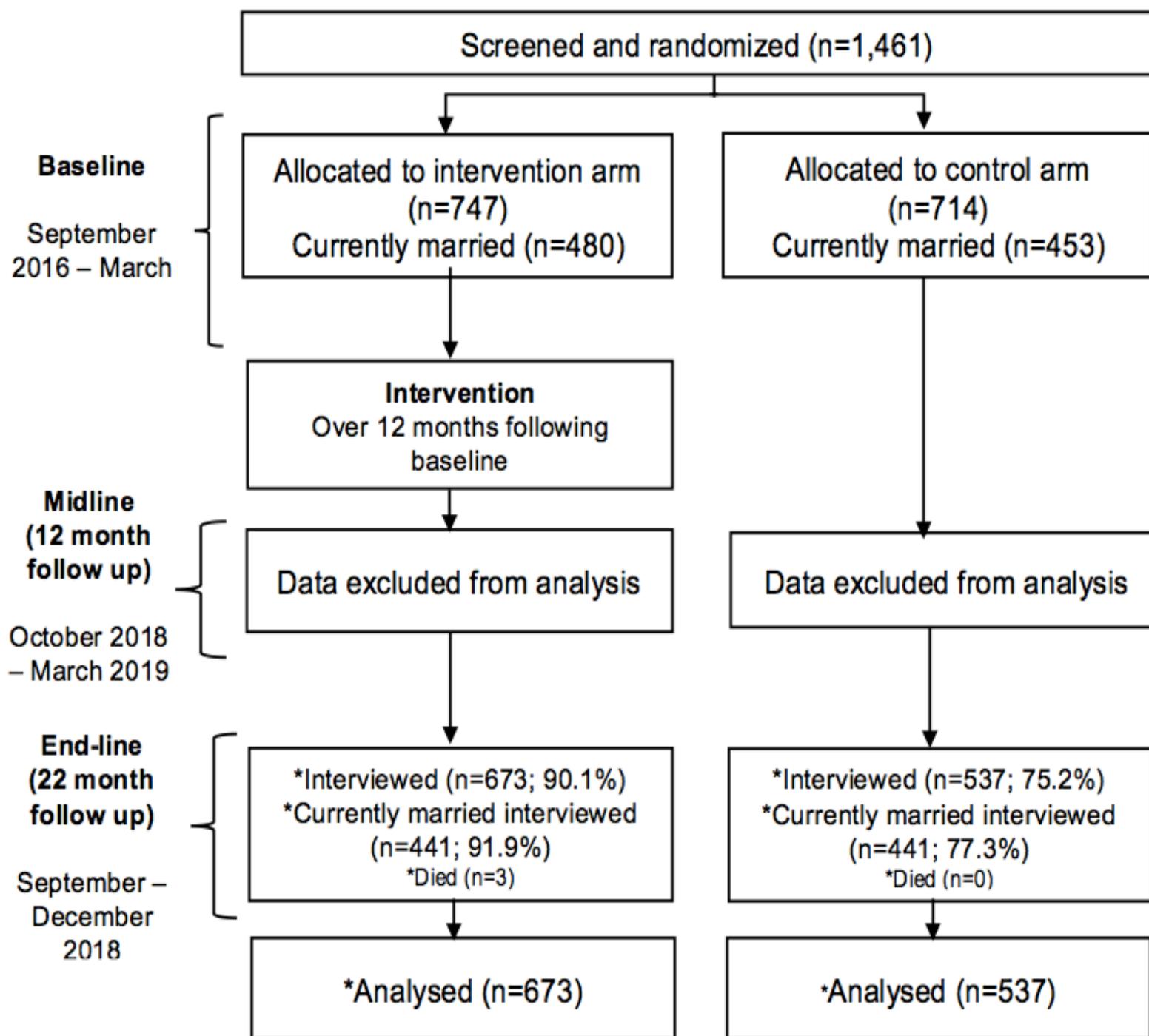
Four components rolled out over one year, with weekly sessions.

**1. Foundational training** modules, including economic, health and rights based knowledge;

**2. Skill-building** in numeracy and a chosen vocational skill (e.g. sewing);

**3. Resource provision** in the form of a monthly cash stipend (USD \$10), and formal and informal savings groups;

**4. Connections** to other women through safe spaces, and support to women-led social and economic groups.



## Study design

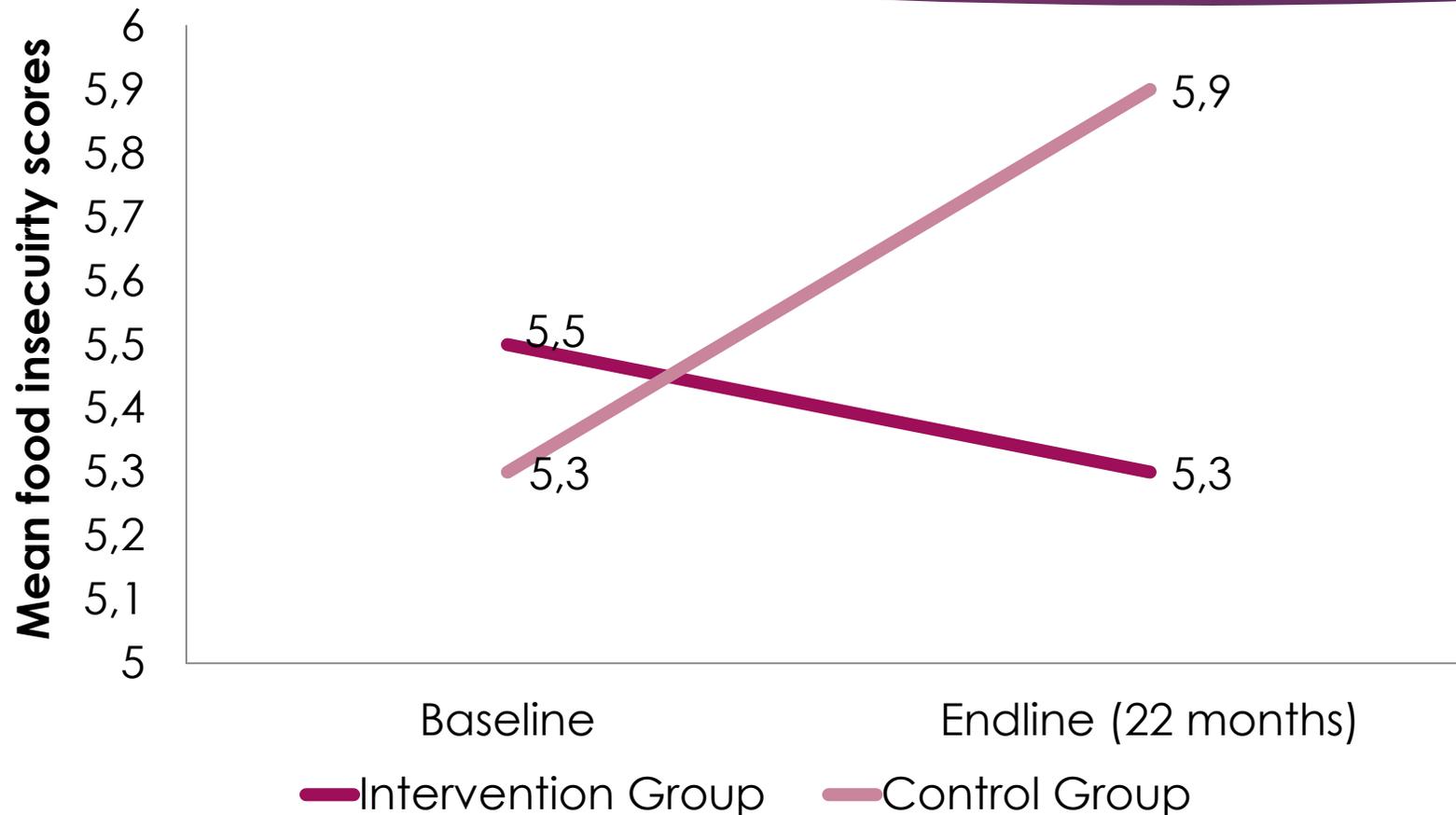
- ▶ Two-arm individually randomized controlled trial in six communities
- ▶ 1,461 women randomly allocated to receive intervention (n=747) or be part of a control group (n=714).
- ▶ Participants aged 18-45 years
- ▶ Participants interviewed at baseline with 12 month and 22 month follow up. 83% of women retained at endline.
- ▶ Additional qualitative research conducted at endline with 28 intervention participants.

# Trial outcomes

Type	Primary outcomes
IPV	Past year experience of physical IPV among currently married women
	Past year experience of severe physical IPV among currently married women
Depression	Women's past week depressive symptoms
Type	Secondary outcomes
IPV	Past year experience of emotional IPV among currently married women
Economic	Household Food Insecurity in past 4 weeks
	Women's monthly income
	Women's total savings
Social	Married women's participation in household decision making
	Women's mobility

# Economic outcomes – food security

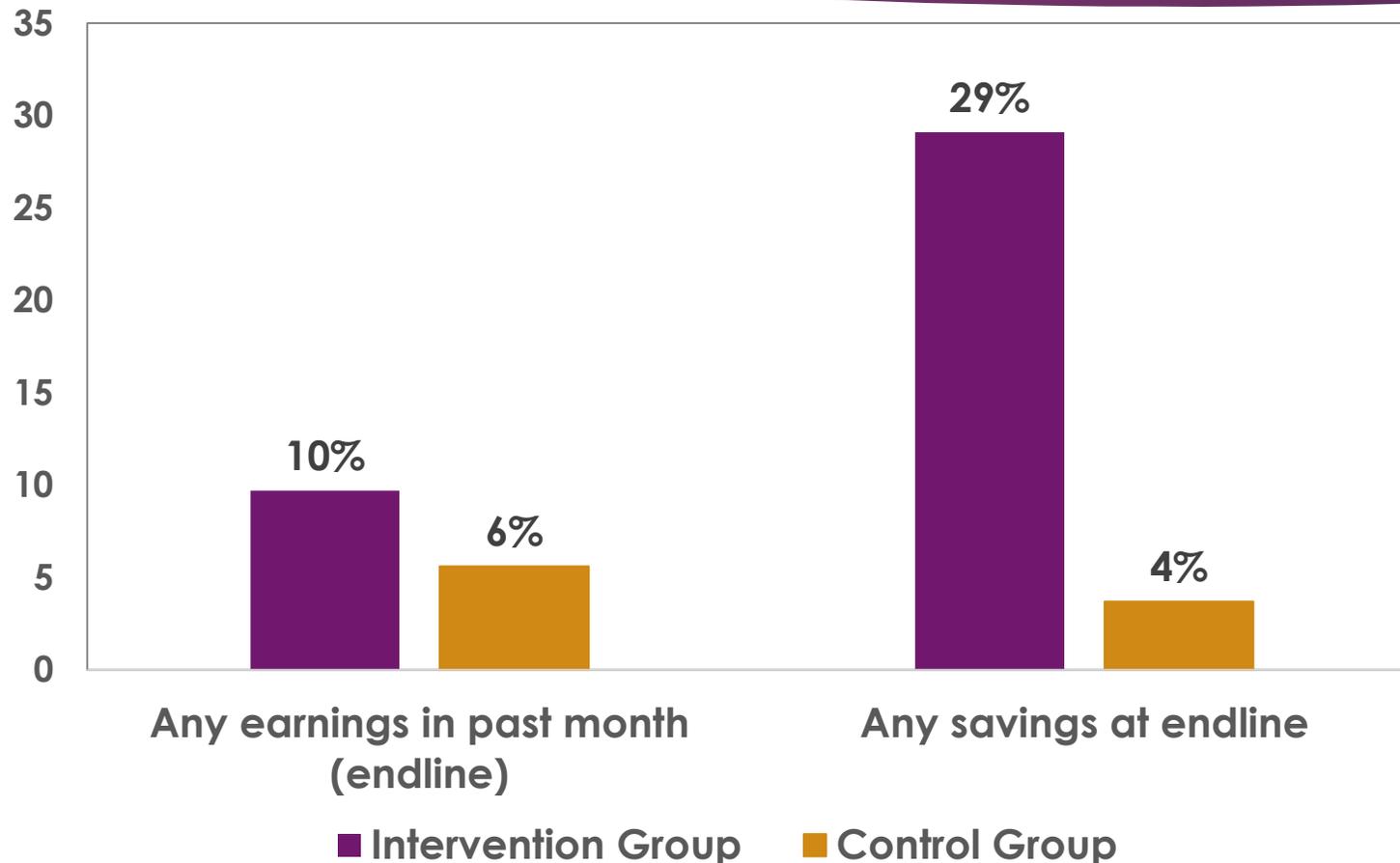
Changes in food insecurity score over 22 months, by trial arm



- Women in the intervention group had significantly less household food insecurity compared to the control group at endline ( $p=0.01$ )
- Food insecurity in the intervention arm decreased during the study period, while increasing among those in the control arm.

# Economic outcomes – earnings and savings

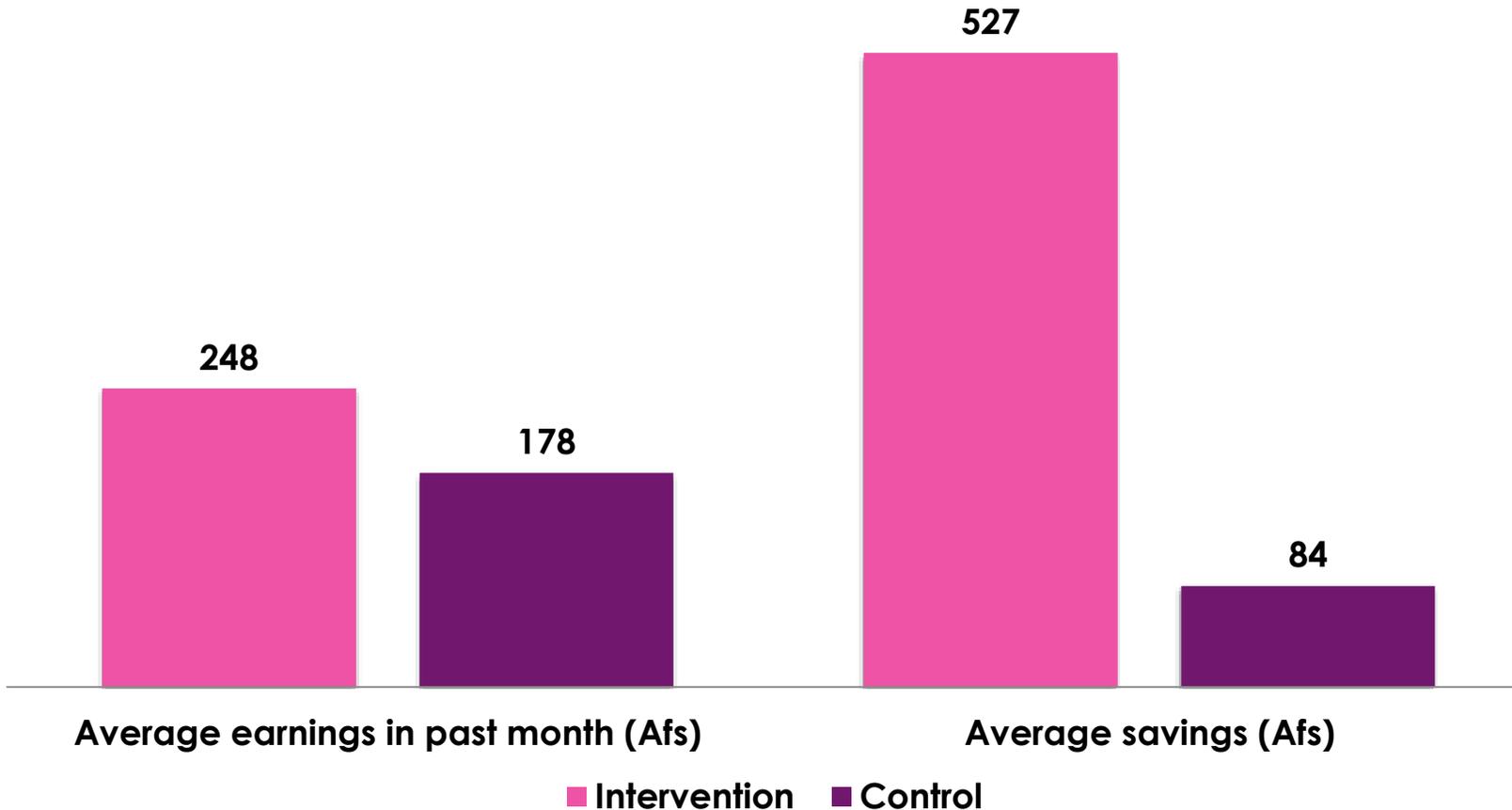
Percent of women reporting any earnings in the past month and any savings at endline



- At endline, intervention women were almost twice as likely to report having earned anything in the past month, compared to the control group.
- At endline, women in the intervention were seven-times more likely to have savings compared to women in the control group.

# Economic outcomes – earnings and savings

Women's average past month earnings and savings at  
endline (Afghani)



Despite significant impact, economic gains were small. Women's mean earnings in the intervention arm were 248 Afghani (US \$3.31) in the past month, compared to 178 Afghani (US \$2.41) in the control arm.

# Economic outcomes

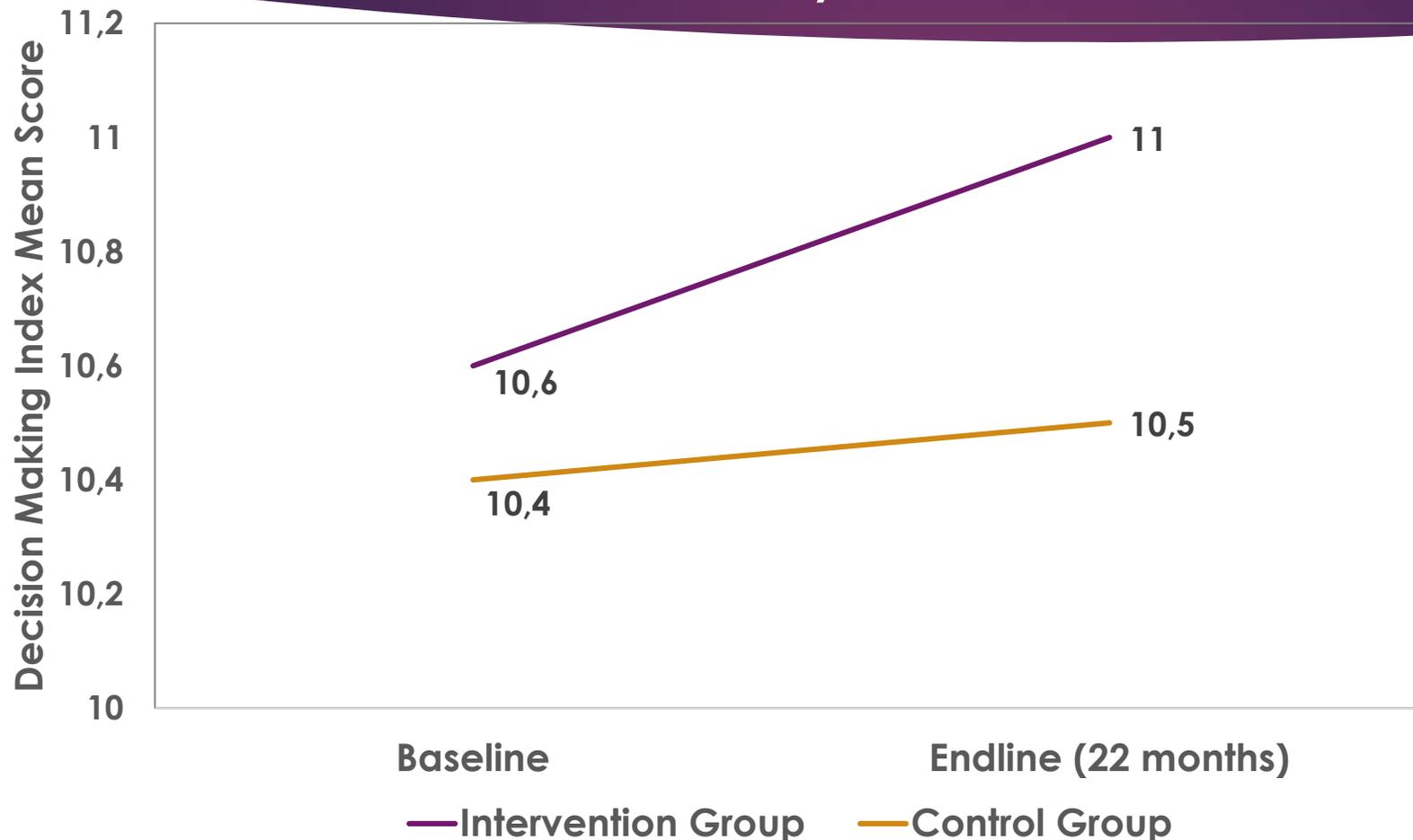
Women found the \$10 monthly stipend they received useful for buying what they needed, although most women did not save the money. Some women reported cycling back into similar poverty conditions that they faced at the start of the program. This suggests that the economic impacts of the program are not sustainable for many women given their everyday poverty and burden of life circumstances.

*“I bought things with it like notebooks for my daughter or medicine for the man, or some yoghurt for him.”*

*“I tried to save money for a few months, but because we were poor, I had to opt out of the savings group. Unfortunately, I couldn’t save because of my family needs. Seven children and two of us, nine people in the family, I couldn’t do it.”*

# Social empowerment outcomes

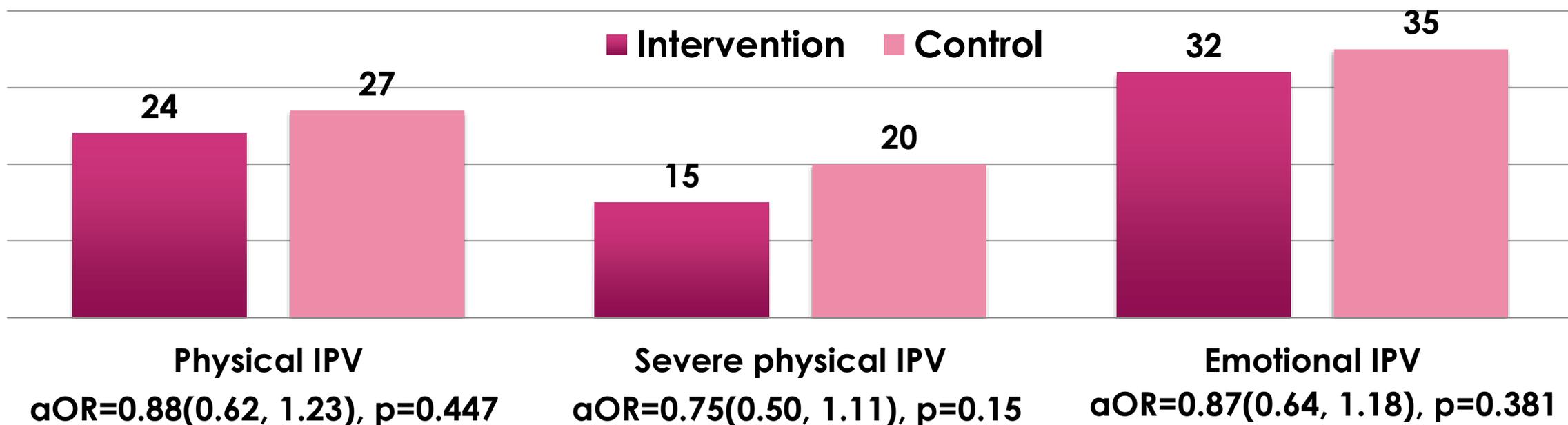
## Changes in household decision-making score over 22 months, by trial arm



- Married women in the intervention reported greater decision-making within the household, but this was not significant ( $p=0.078$ ).
- There were limits to this decision-making.
- “Well one has to be careful not to do anything that would make a man angry. I might suggest something, but if he does not agree, I do as he wants.”

## IPV outcomes – past year IPV (%) at endline

Overall there was no significant impact of WfWI's intervention on women's past year physical, severe physical or emotional IPV



# IPV outcomes by food security

Amongst women with moderate levels of food insecurity at baseline, there was a 44% reduction in their experience of physical IPV at endline, and a 55% reduction in severe physical IPV at endline.

## Primary outcomes by food insecurity levels at baseline

	Odds ratio/ unadjusted coefficient (95%CI)	P- value	Adjusted odds ratio/coefficient (95%CI) <sup>a</sup>	P-value
<b>Past year physical IPV</b>				
Food secure (n=381)	1.06(0.65, 1.72)	0.82	1.06(0.64, 1.74)	0.821
Mild insecurity (n=171)	0.44(0.21, 0.92)	0.03	0.47(0.22, 1.01)	0.052
Severe insecurity (n=199)	0.89(0.49, 1.61)	0.702	0.89(0.48, 1.64)	0.711
<b>Severity of IPV</b>				
Food secure (n=381)	0.88(0.49, 1.58)	0.669	0.96(0.53, 1.76)	0.897
Mild insecurity (n=171)	0.35(0.15, 0.85)	0.021	0.38(0.16, 0.93)	0.034
Severe insecurity (n=199)	0.73(0.38, 1.39)	0.336	0.76(0.38, 1.49)	0.424

<sup>a</sup> Adjusted for baseline term and age

# Why no overall reductions in IPV?

- ▶ WfWI's intervention does not target IPV reduction (not part of theory of change).
- ▶ Economic gains were small and may not have been large enough to support economic transformation.
- ▶ Gender inequality is deeply entrenched and incremental advances may not amount to a tangible increase in women's power.
- ▶ **Overall, women face multiple barriers and their options for negotiating power in their relationships are highly constrained. Leaving violent relationships through divorce is not an option for many women.**

*Interviewer: "What can the woman do if she is unhappy with her husband? Can she leave him? What could happen if she left him?"*

*Respondent: "She has no choice but to tolerate it. What can she do? She has nowhere to go. She must put up with it."*

# Conclusions

- ▶ WfWI's combined economic and social empowerment intervention, while impacting on known risk factors for IPV, had no impact on women's overall risk of IPV.
- ▶ Previous evaluations in conflict-affected populations have also showed limited impact on IPV outcomes, suggesting that economic strengthening and gender transformative interventions that are successful in more stable contexts and populations may face challenges in translating to conflict-affected settings.
- ▶ There is an urgent need for more large-scale evaluations of combined economic and social empowerment interventions in conflict and post-conflict settings to understand what modifications are needed.
- ▶ Further research is also needed to understand how to translate the positive findings in this trial into sustained reductions of IPV for Afghan women.