



# **Is money enough to improve children's well-being?**

## **Midterm findings from an impact evaluation of IRC's VSLA and family-based program in Burundi**

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# Targeting 1600 families in Burundi



# Reducing child abuse and neglect: What does previous research tell us?

Family-based programs—several evidence-based models

(WHO, 2009; Kaminski et al., 2008)

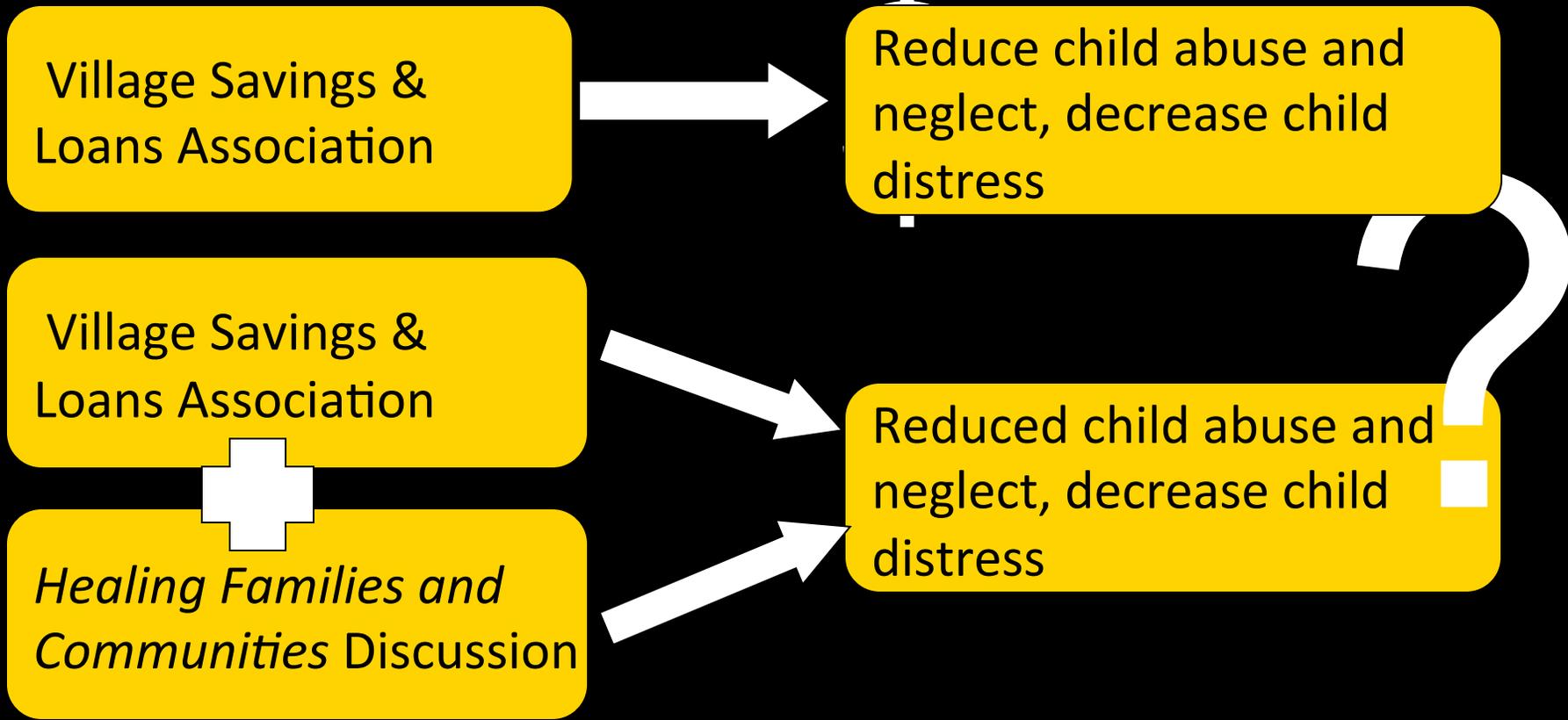
in conflict affected and low resource settings?

But are family programs really needed or would alleviating poverty suffice? (Ozler: “stressful condition”)

Savings programs – growing evidence of impact on household economics

VSLAs? on child outcomes?

# Is money enough?





# Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA)

Self-selected groups of 15-25 members

Each member saves (in the form of shares) at every meeting

Loans are given to members from the savings of the group and are paid back with interest

Members receive their savings plus interest earned



# Advantages of VSLA

- Safe place to keep money
- Easy access to short-term loans of an appropriate size
- No collateral required
- 30%-40% return on savings
- Builds social cohesion
- Simple methodology, sustainable and easily replicated



# VSLA: Assessing the Impact



Extremely popular (8 INGOs have  
**4.6 million** members worldwide)

Offers basic financial services to  
those too poor for formal  
microfinance

Despite popularity: Never been  
rigorously assessed

This study: first randomized impact  
evaluation of VSLAs



# The family based intervention: Discussion Groups

- Group based family-focused intervention
- Builds on prior research and the cultural context
- Parent-child interaction: discipline, communication
- Parent interpretations and beliefs about parenting

Effective in this context?



# Discussion Group Themes

DG1

- Introduction

DG2

- Well-being and children's participation

DG3

- Children's education and health

DG4

- Attitudes about parenting/Discipline

DG5

- Child protection in communities

DG6

- Daily life and household economy

DG7

- Developing a plan of action

DG7

- Conclusion

# Program Participants

- 52.7% Female
- Average household size: 6 members
- Average adult education:
  - Male - 4<sup>th</sup> grade
  - Female – preschool
- 38% never went to school
- Adult literacy: 61.7%
- Average income: \$30 per month

## Step 1

77 eligible self-selected VSLA groups representing  
1595 households identified for program participation  
January-March 2010

## Step 2

**Baseline Household Survey:**  
96% of households represented in the 77 eligible VSLA  
groups were surveyed:  
1,548 households, 8,919 individuals  
5,074 children (2,501 boys and 2,573 girls)  
**Baseline Child Survey:**  
400 randomly selected children, 362 interviewed

## Step 3

37 VSLA groups  
randomly assigned to  
waitlisted, control  
group  
**(791 households)**

20 VSLA groups  
randomly assigned to  
VSLA intervention  
group  
**(399 households)**

20 VSLA groups  
randomly assigned to  
VSLA Plus  
intervention group  
**(403 households)**

**Step 4**  
**April-May 2011**

**Mid-Term Household Survey:**

491 of original control households

**300 new households**

**Mid-Term Child Survey**

**Mid-Term Household Survey:**

303 of original VSLA treatment group households

**Mid-Term Child Survey**

**Mid-Term Household Survey:**

275 of original VSLA Plus treatment group households

**Mid-Term Child Survey**

**Step 5**

19 VSLAs in original control group randomly assigned to VSLA group in 2nd cycle (June 2011 – April 2012)

**18** VSLAs in original control group randomly assigned to VSLA Plus group in 2nd cycle (June 2011 – April 2012)

continue with minimal IRC support

continue with minimal IRC support

**Step 6: Final evaluation – August 2012**

# Measurement

- Household consumption
  - Household assets
  - Spending on children (education, clothes, health)
  - Child labor (UNICEF MICS). Parent & Child
  - Child discipline (UNICEF MICS). P&C
  - Overall child wellbeing, distress, aggression (emergent from qualitative work) P&C
  - Family problems & functioning (emergent from qualitative work) P&C
  - (Health behaviors)
- + Participatory qualitative methods with children (& parents)

# Midterm Findings: Impact of VSLA and Family-based program

# Process Indicators



- 40 VSLA groups, one cycle
- Overall savings: 52,250 USD
- 3,108 loans disbursed
- 135,409 USD worth of loans
- 43.6 USD average loan value
- 47.8% Return on savings
- VSLAs highly effective from output point-of-view (delivery of basic financial services)

But what about the impact?

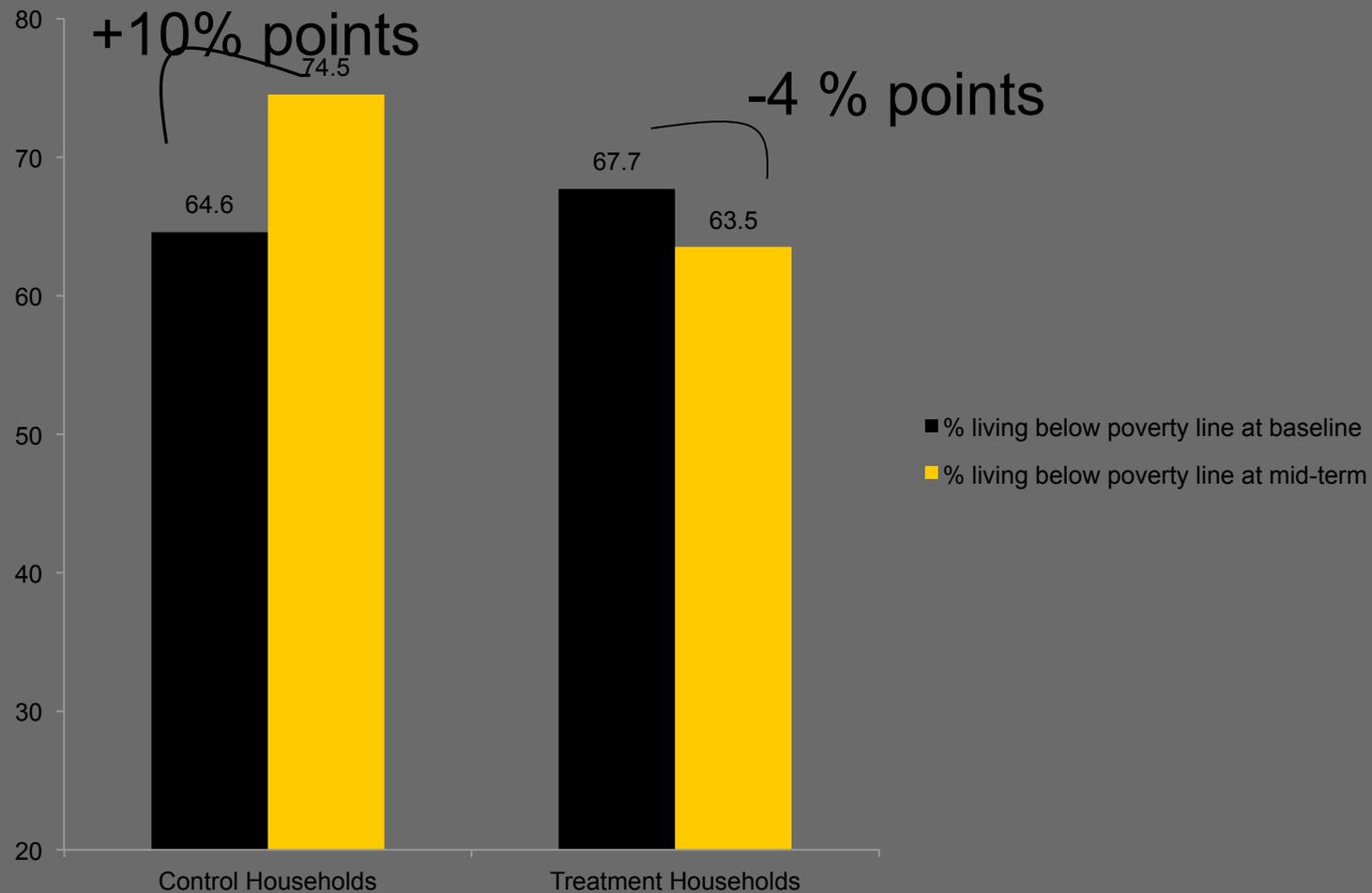
# After 1 year, VSLA participation increased expenditures & assets

Increase in per capita  
consumption:  
\$7 per month  
= 23% increase

Increase in assets: 0.22  
SD on asset index



# VSLA participation led to poverty reduction



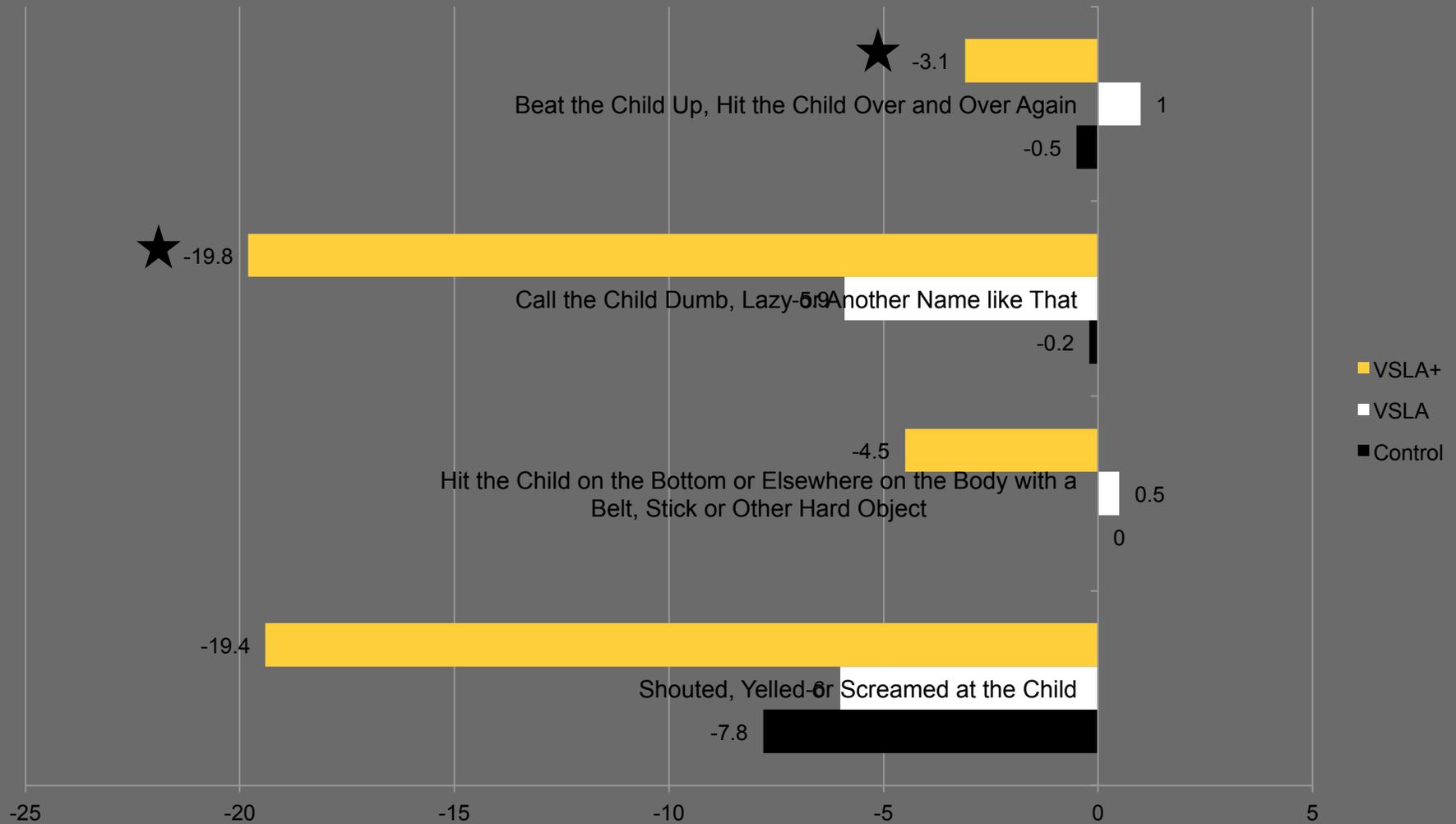
“There were a lot of financial problems. We did agricultural work, but we didn't have capital so we couldn't use all of our land.”

“For me it is easy to get a loan to improve the daily life of my family, giving them food and clothes.”

“Little by little we get out of poverty.”

## Use of loans?

# Family program reduced harsh discipline

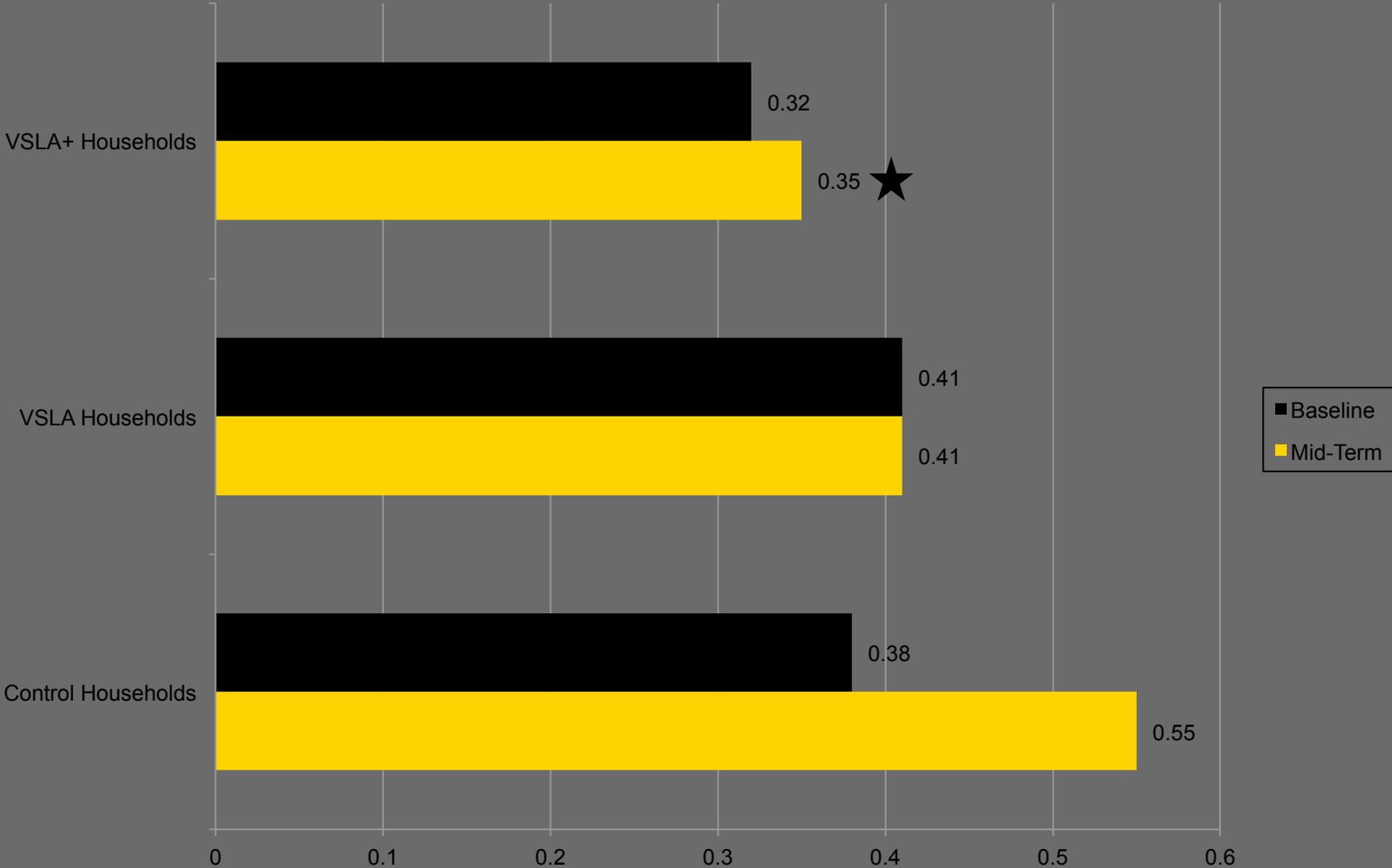


Child report similar.

"Nowadays we prefer discussion over physical punishments. If a child makes a mistake, we approach him or her and give advice."

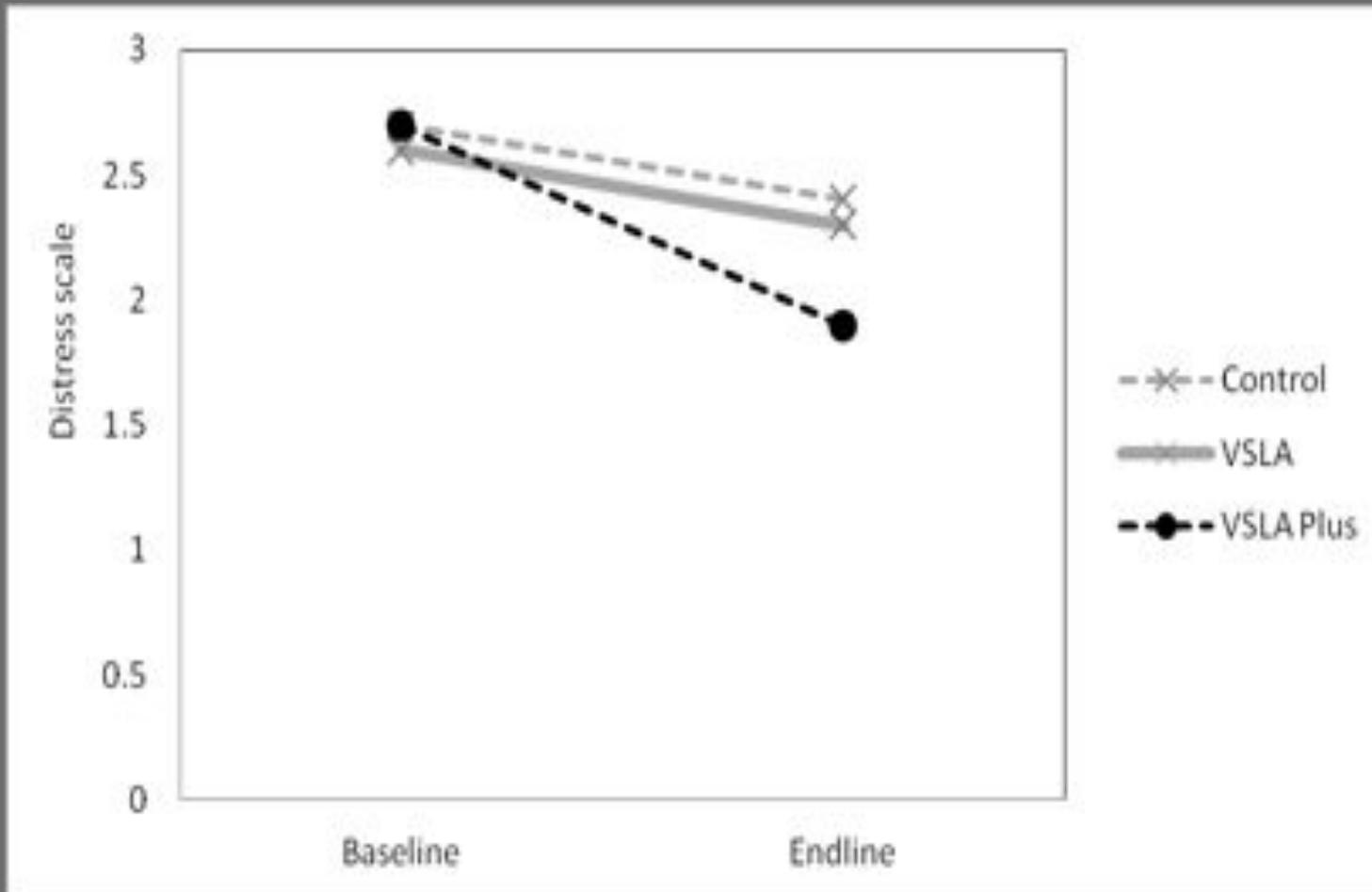
"I discipline children by asking them to fetch water and clean the house and the older children I ask to cook"

# Family program reduced family problems

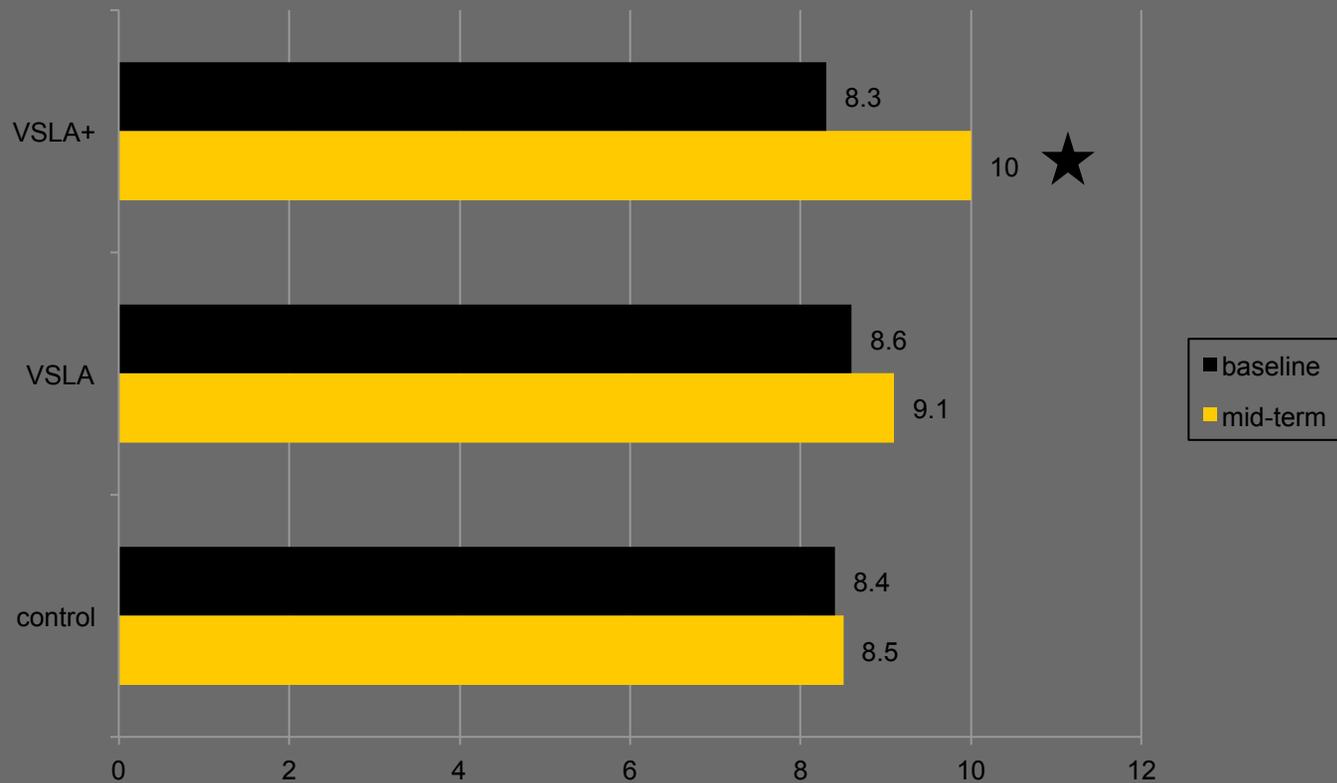


Reported by children

# Family program (likely) improved children's mental health



# Family program improved child wellbeing



Reported by children.

# Spending and child labor?

- More spending on children except on child health
- No clear conclusion about child labor

\*UNICEF definition: **12 to 14-years of age** -- at least 14 hours of economic work or 28 hours of domestic work per week.

## Conclusion

- VSLAs have significant impact on household economic wellbeing
- At this point, improved economic wellbeing did not directly translate into improved child outcomes
- Discussion modules show promise of even greater impact
- We need to wait for final results to have stronger conclusions



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**Stay tuned:  
Final evaluation  
August 2012  
[children@rescue.org](mailto:children@rescue.org)**

**Thank you**

