

# TARGETING THE ULTRA POOR IN AFGANISTAN: A Zoom on Women Empowerment



Presented by Thomas Escande

November 15, 2023

This presentation is based on:

- [Bedoya, G., Coville, A., Haushofer, J., Isaqzadeh, M., & Shapiro, J. \(2019\). No household left behind: Afghanistan targeting the ultra poor impact evaluation. \*Policy Research Working Paper. No. 8877\*](#) and
- [Bedoya, G., Belyakova, Y., Coville, A., Escande, T., Isaqzadeh, M., & Ndiaye, A. \(2023\). The enduring impacts of a big push during multiple crises: experimental evidence from Afghanistan. \*Policy Research Working Paper. No. 10596\*](#), with accompanying brief [Building resilient livelihoods: the enduring impacts of Afghanistan's ultra-poor program](#).



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TRANSFORM DEVELOPMENT

# Motivation

- More than **700 million live in extreme poverty** around the world. **Two thirds of them** expected to reside in fragile and conflict-affected (**FCV**) contexts by 2030 (World Bank 2020 & 2022)
- There is limited evidence of the impact on **gender-related outcomes** in a setting with **extremely restrictive gender norms** about women's participation in economic and social activities.
- **Gender gaps**, which are often greater among the poor, are **often exacerbated by the interaction with conflict** (Duflo 2012; Jayachandran 2015).
- Other TUP studies find **small to no impacts** on women empowerment. (Banerjee 2015)
- Question for this session:
  - What is the impact of a big-push **Targeting the Ultra Poor (TUP)** program on **Women Empowerment and Gender Equality** in Afghanistan, **one of the most fragile contexts with constraining social norms for women**, 2 and 5 years after the asset transfer ?

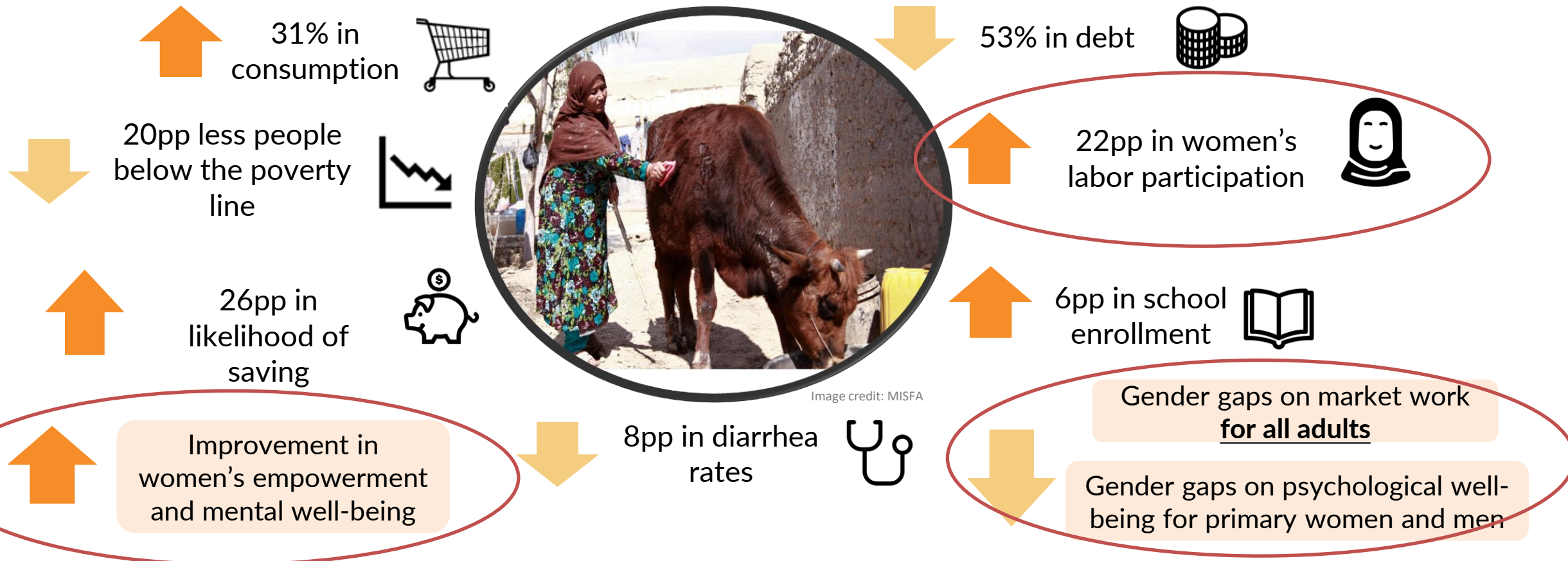
# Context

**Reminder: All points and statistics presented today are from before the regime change.**

Low levels of women's labor participation and human capital both in at the national level and in our sample.


ALCS 2018, Afghanistan, national level	Ultra-poor women in rural villages in our sample (control group, 2018):
27% labor participation	35% labor participation (84% for men)
20% literacy rate (vs. 82% worldwide)	7% literacy rate (vs. 14% for men)
33% women ages 15-49 <b>report participating in 3 decisions:</b> own health, major household purchases, and visiting family.	Women report high level of participation in <b>decision-making:</b> managing household finances (75%), decision to have children (62%), and children's health (85%)

# 2 years after the asset transfer the TUP significantly improved women's empowerment and reduced gender gaps



\* All impacts are measured with respect to the mean UP control group

Source: Bedoya, G., Coville, A., Haushofer, J., Isaqzadeh, M., & Shapiro, J. (2019). No household left behind: Afghanistan targeting the ultra poor impact evaluation. Policy Research Working Paper (8877).



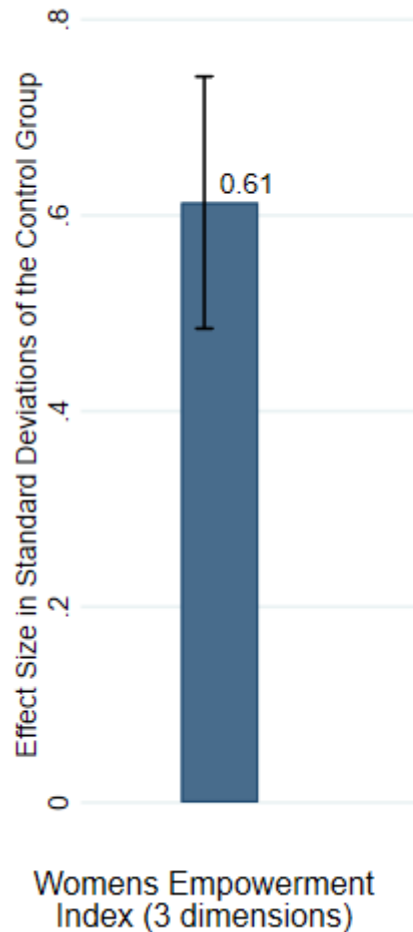
**We find that the TUP has large positive  
impacts on women empowerment 2  
years after the program...**

We define empowerment following Naila Kabeer's definition of empowerment as **“the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability.”**

It is articulated around three dimensions: **resources, agency, and achievements.**

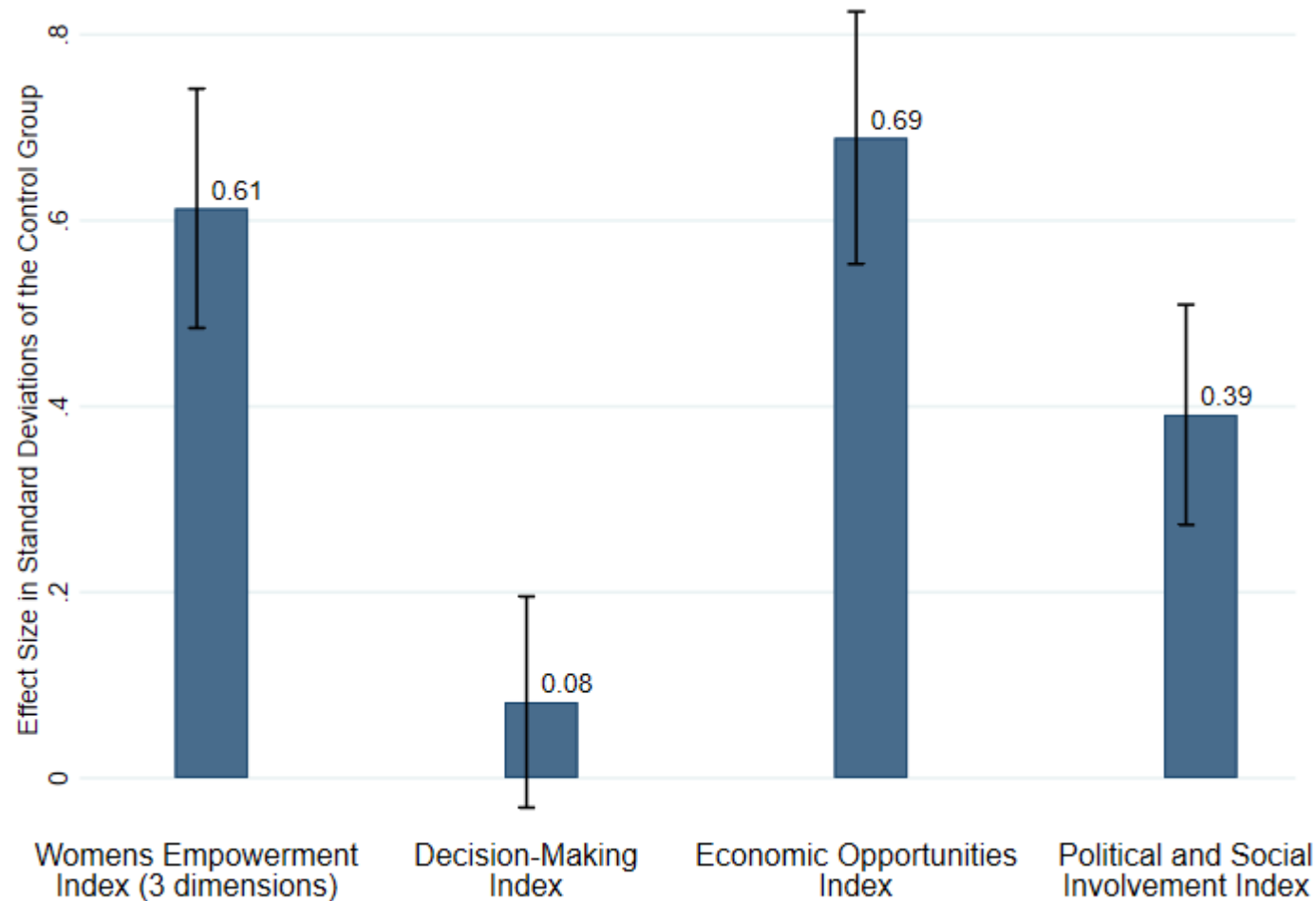
# Large Impacts on women's empowerment when we define women's empowerment as multi dimensional

## Afghanistan TUP Impact on Women's Empowerment UP Primary Woman (in SDs of control, Normalized)



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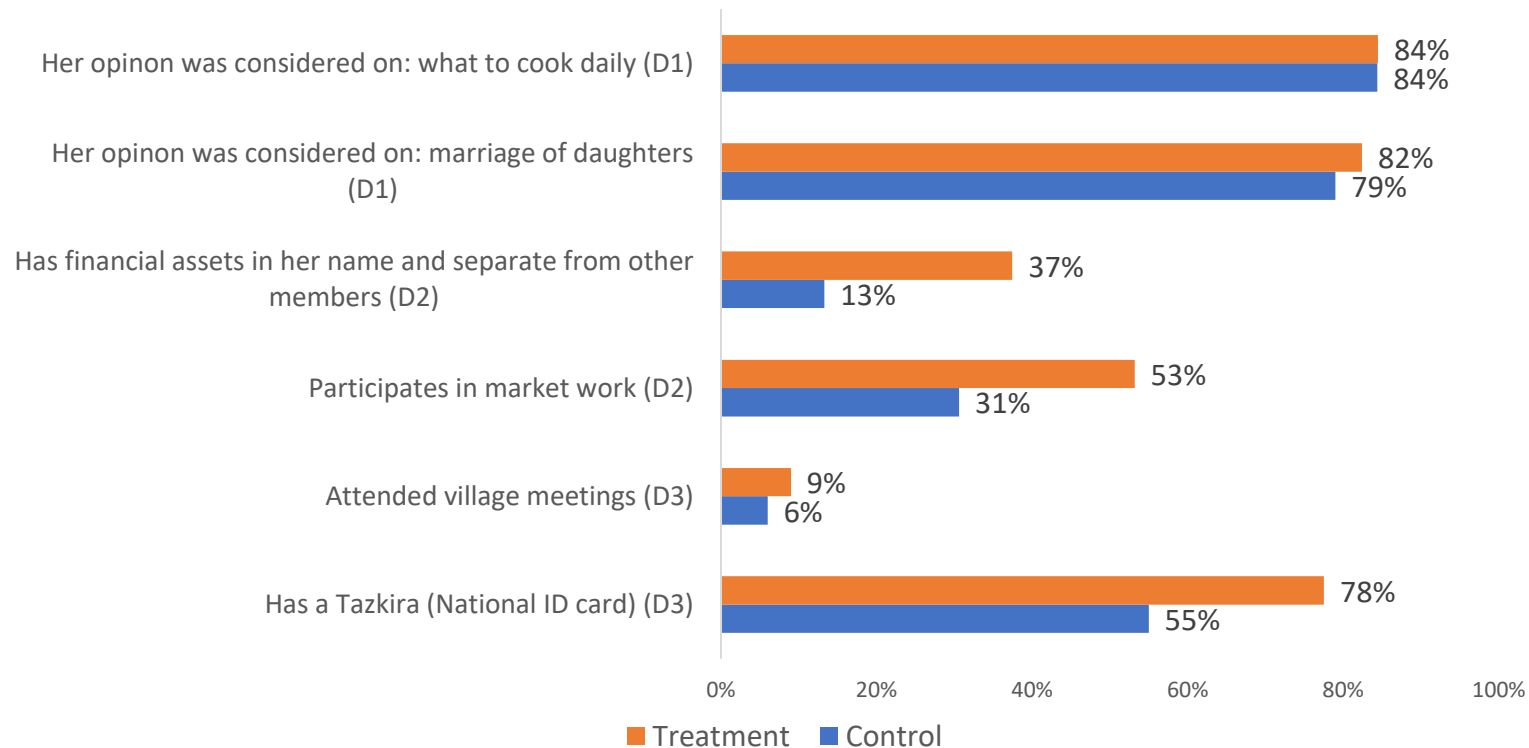
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# Illustration of questions included in the 3 indexes

Illustration: Questions across the 3 dimensions of empowerment  
Households with a primary woman and a primary man



D1: Decision-Making  
D2: Economic Opportunities  
D3: Political and Social Involvement

# Measuring TUP's impacts on **women's empowerment**

Examples of high-impact and low-impact items

Illustration 1: **High-impact** indicators of empowerment

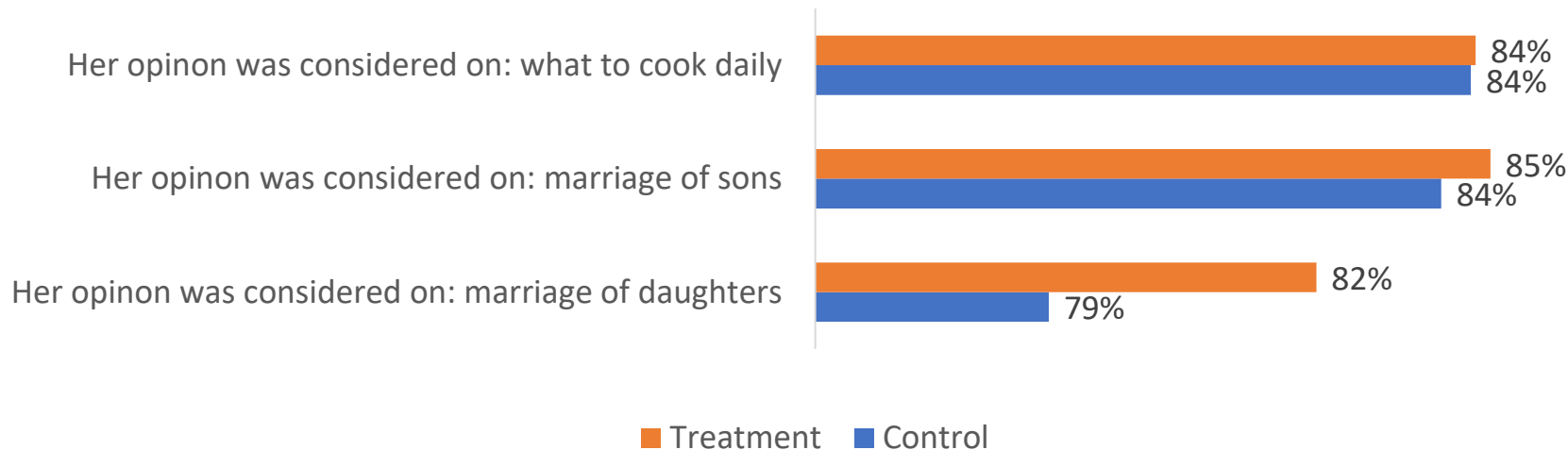
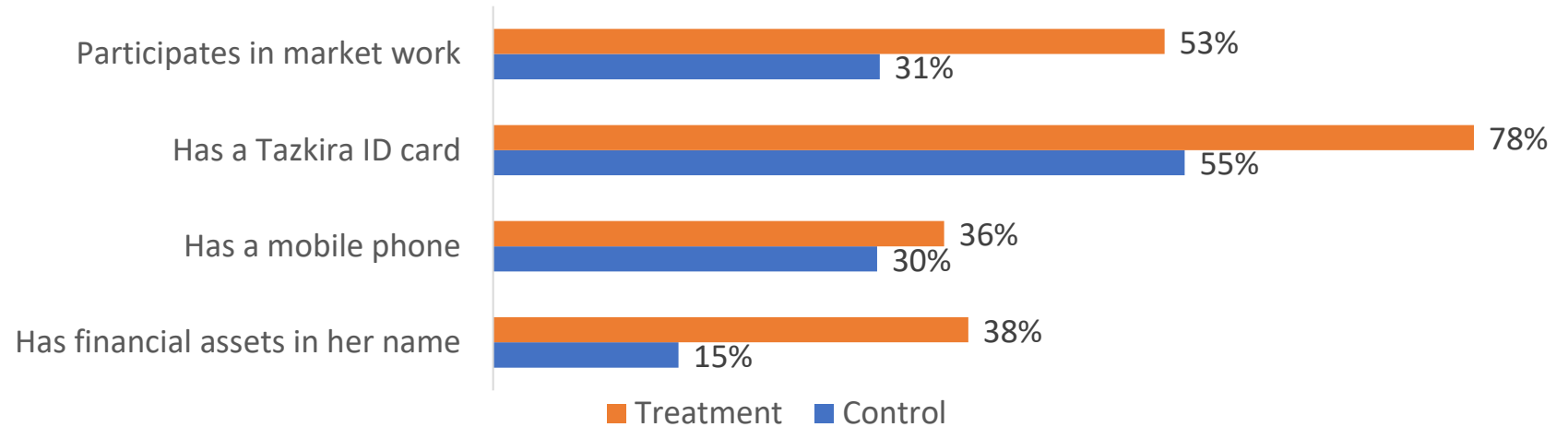
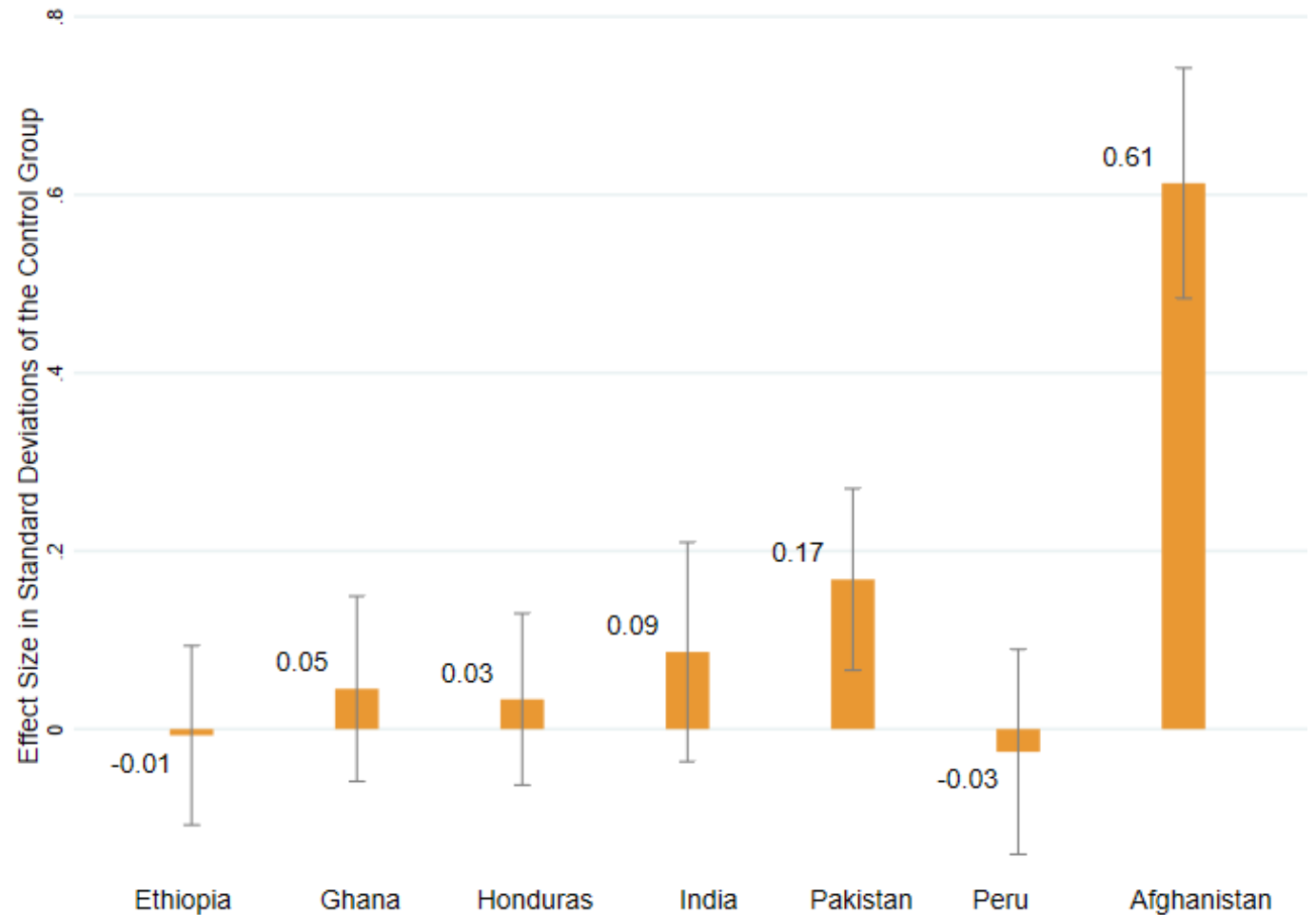


Illustration 2: **Low-impact** indicators of empowerment

Such large impacts might seem at odds with the impacts found in TUP studies before...

Impact of TUP on Women's Empowerment Indices in 7 Countries  
Standard deviation of control



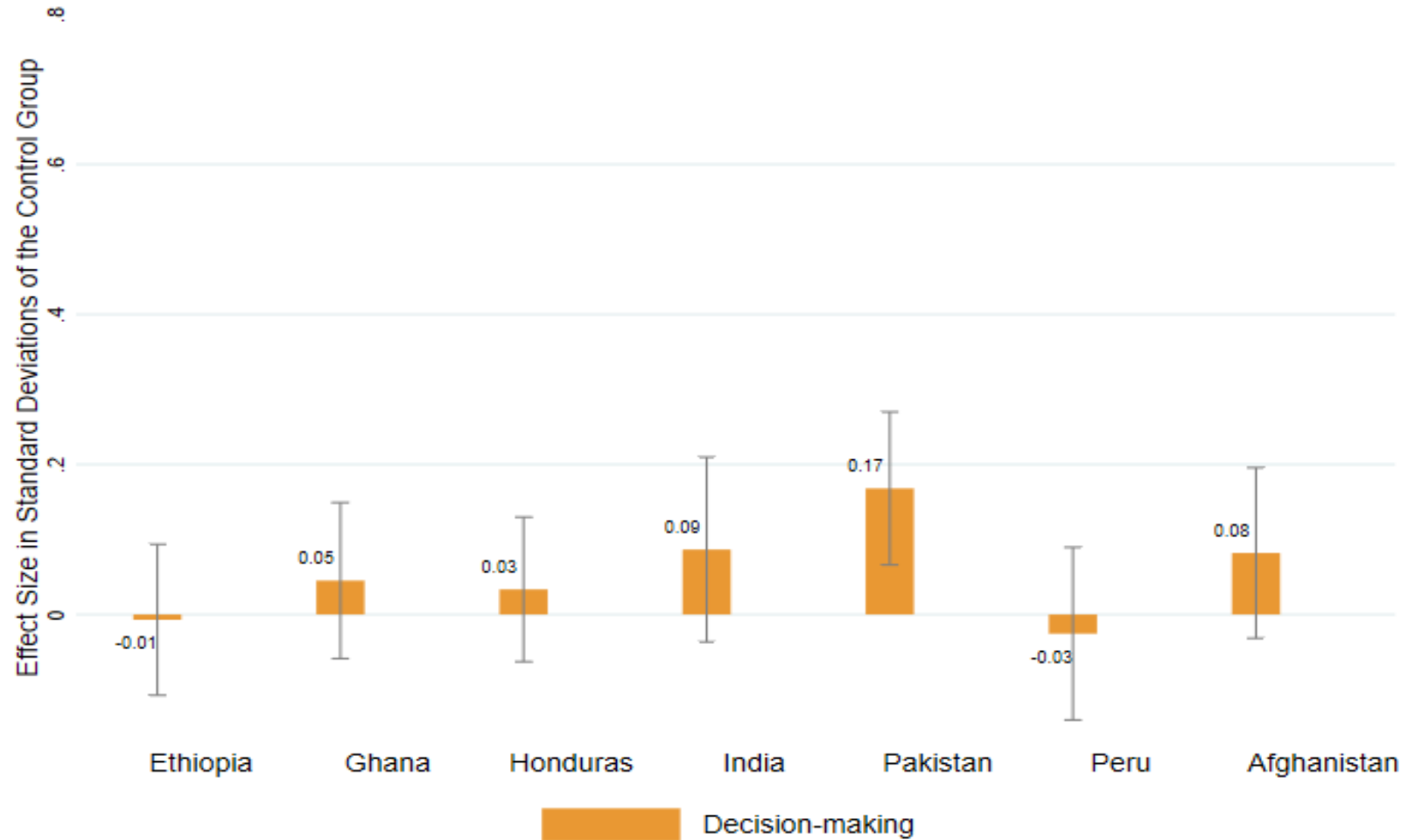


**Part of the difference comes from  
additional dimensions of WE measured.**

**Let's see what happens if we use similar  
indicators as in other TUP studies**

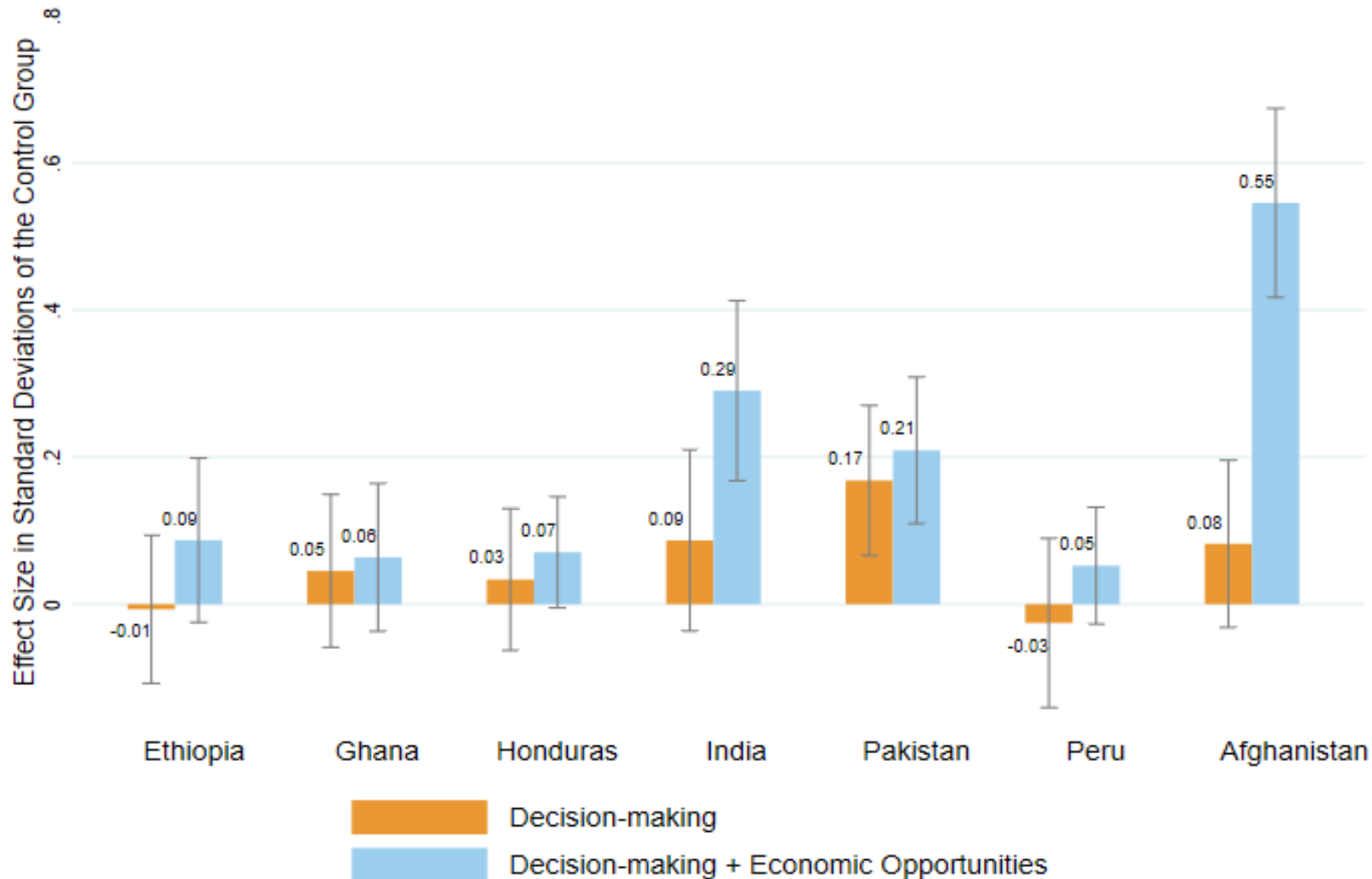
# Impact of TUP on Women's Empowerment Indices in 7 Countries

## Standard deviation of control



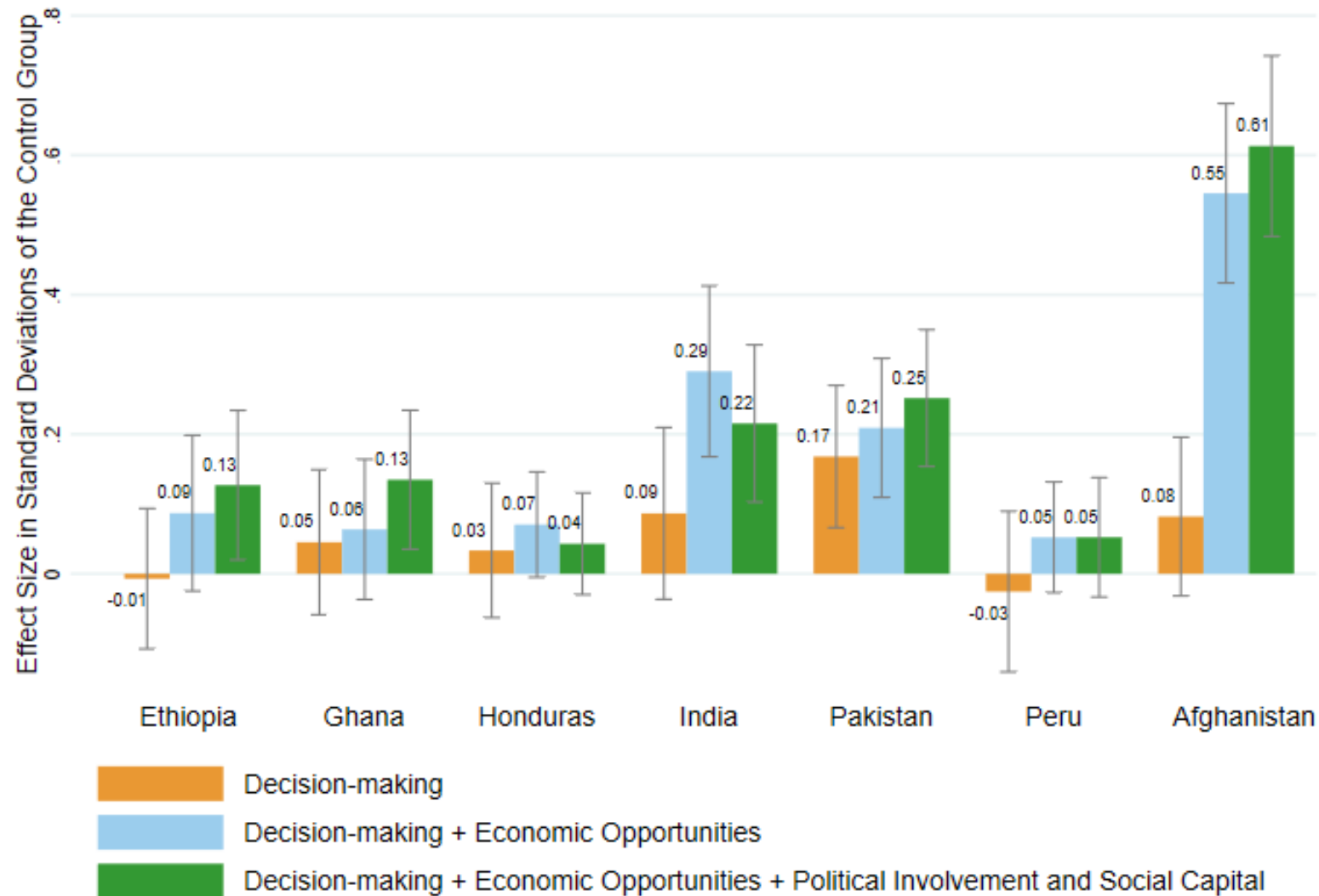
# Impact of TUP on Women's Empowerment Indices in 7 Countries

## Standard deviation of control



# Impact of TUP on Women's Empowerment Indices in 7 Countries

## Standard deviation of control





**The variables we measure matter!**

**Let's see another example**





**The TUP program also decreased gender gaps ...**

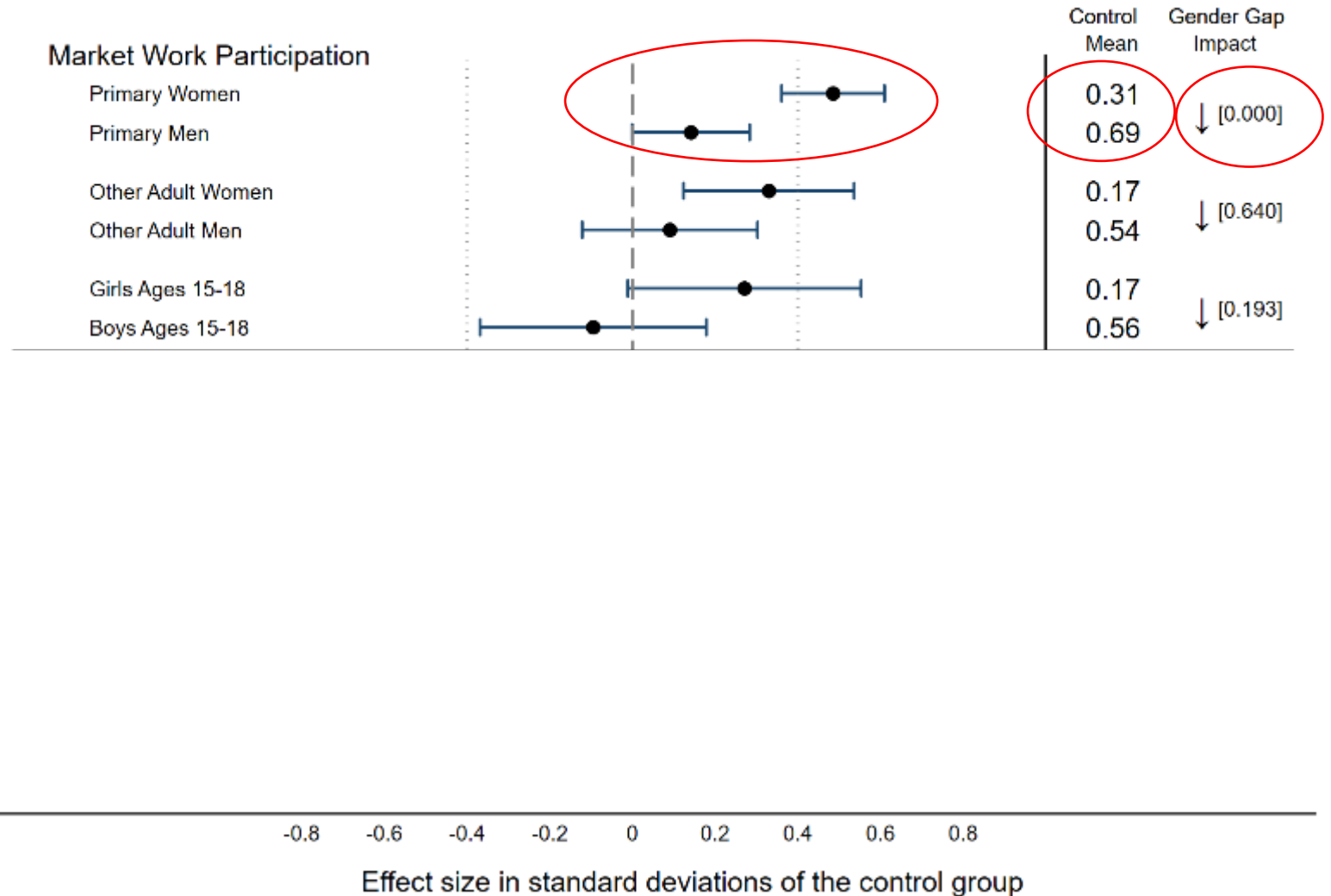
**... which has not been measured in other TUP  
programs before ...**

**... leading to underestimating the impact of the  
program!**

## Impacts on Market Work, Psychological Well-Being, Phone Ownership, and School Enrollment by Gender

### Main Results On Selected Outcomes by Gender

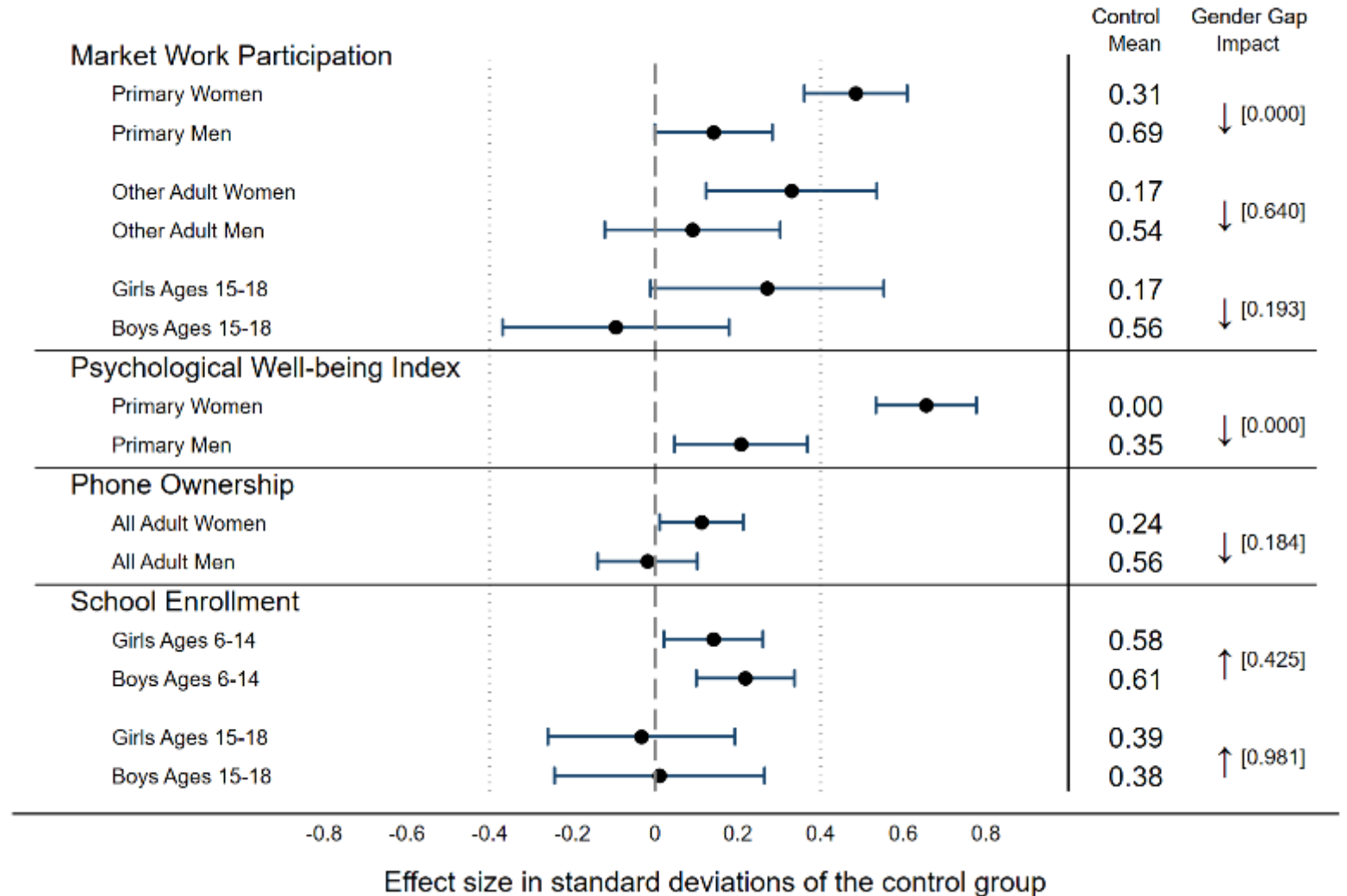
2 years after asset transfer, impacts are larger for women than men, reducing gender gaps, compared to the control group



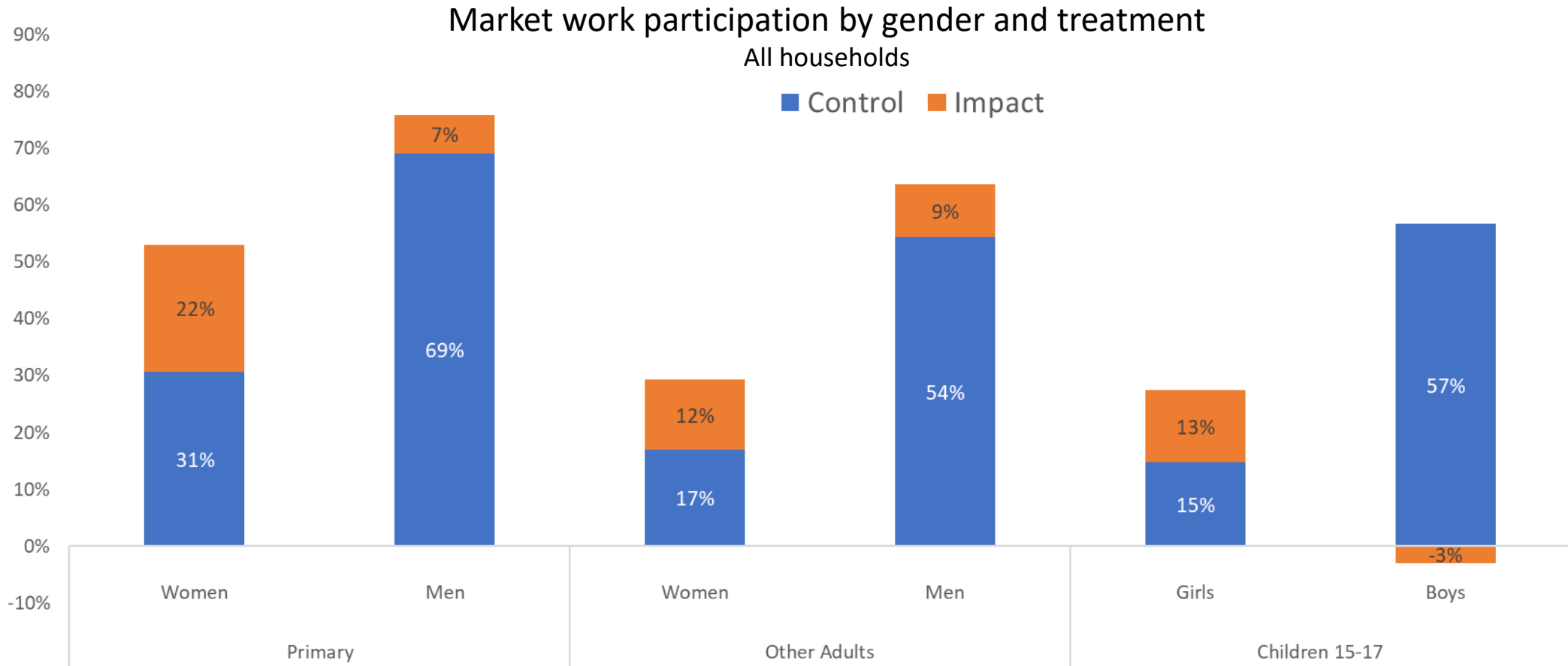
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### Main Results On Selected Outcomes by Gender

2 years after asset transfer, impacts are larger for women than men, reducing gender gaps, compared to the control group



# The TUP decreases gender gaps in market work participation for adults and older children



**Gender Gap= (Men-Women)**

↓ 38 pp  
23 pp

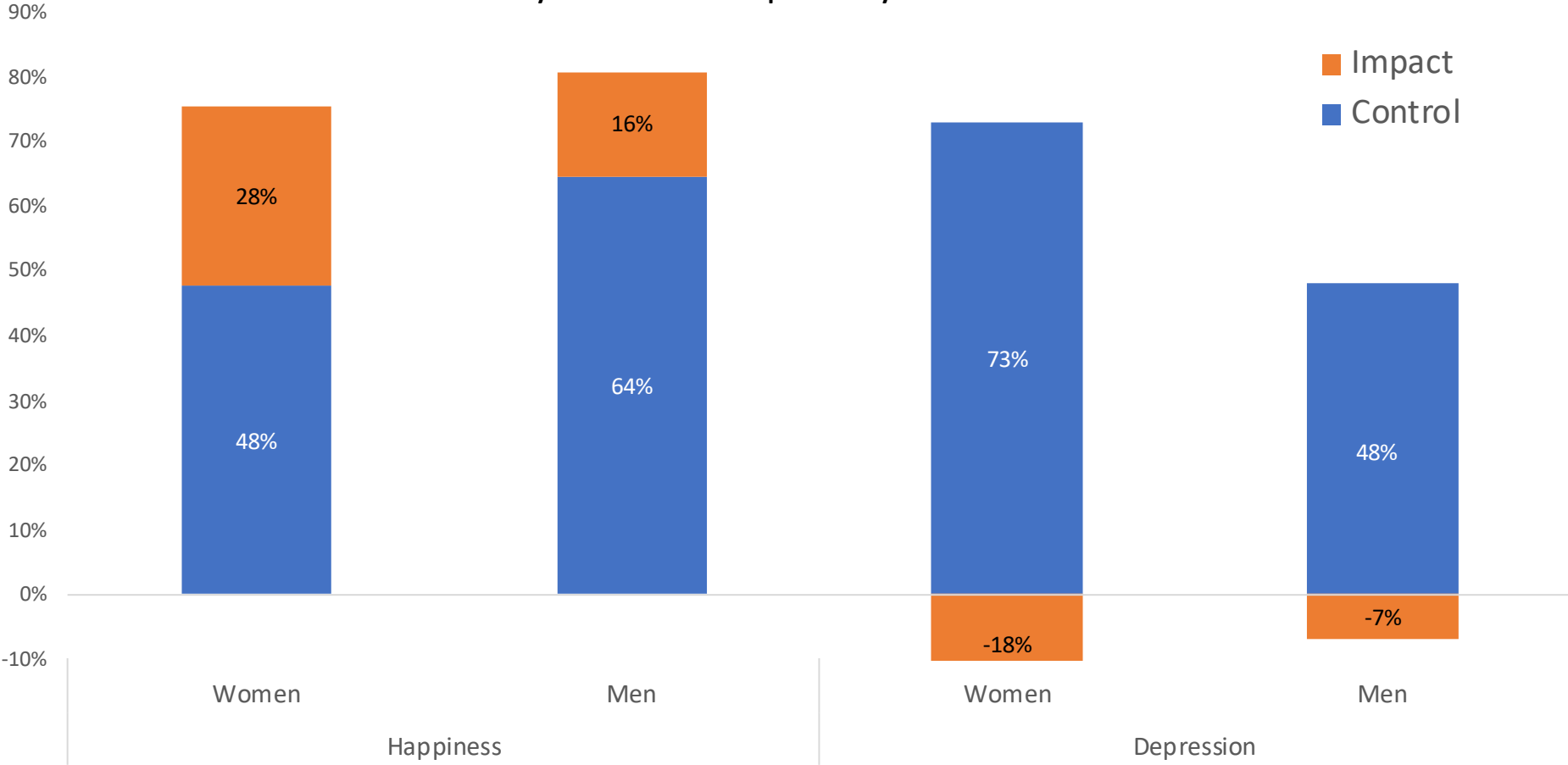
↓ 37 pp  
34 pp

↓ 42 pp  
26 pp

# What does the reduction in gender gaps in psychological well-being mean?

Psychological Well-being for select dimensions by gender and treatment  
Primary women and primary men

- % of respondents
- Happy/quite happy
- Depressed (CESD)



↓ 16 pp  
4 pp

↓ 25 pp  
14 pp



**Decreases in gender gaps can create  
intergenerational impacts, putting girls on a  
pathway to higher empowerment**

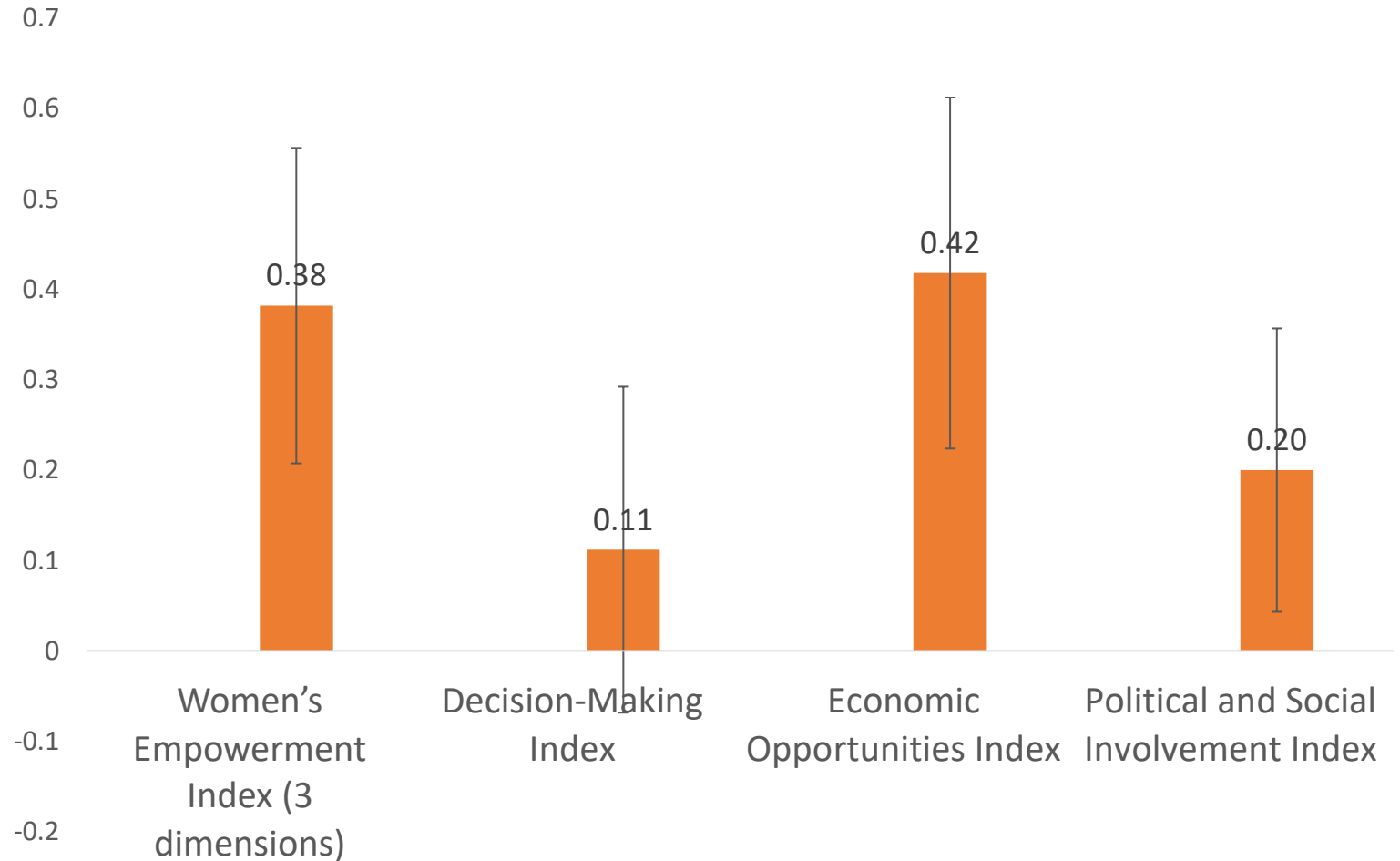


**What happens 5 year after the asset transfer, in the midst of big shocks to the households?**

# TUP women show higher empowerment...

(compared to control ultra-poor households)

Measured on three dimensions  
(standardized by the control group)



\* All impacts are measured with respect to the mean UP control group

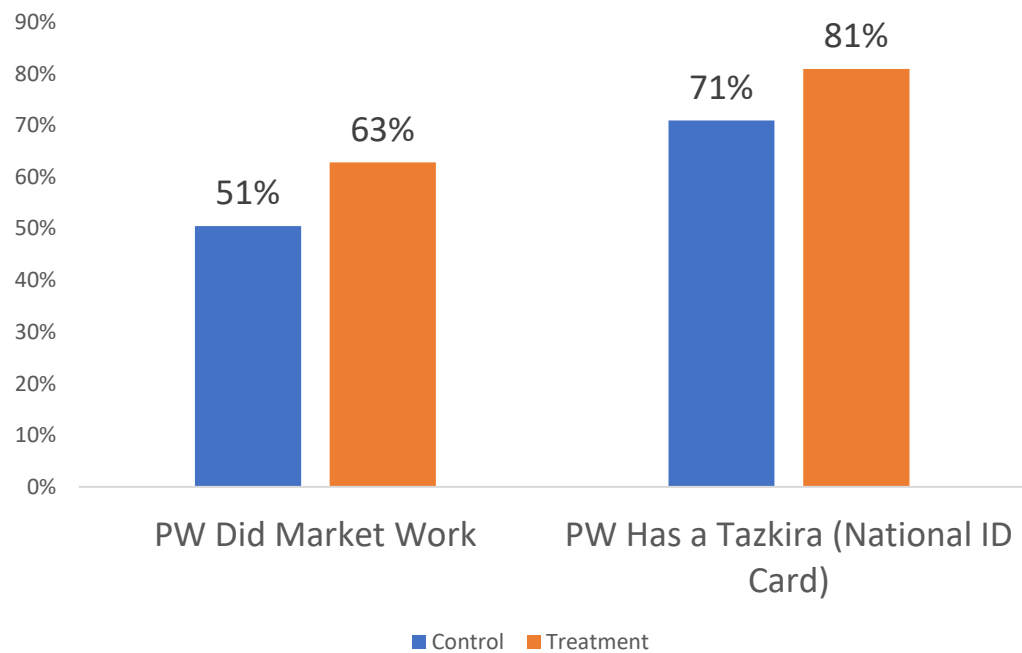
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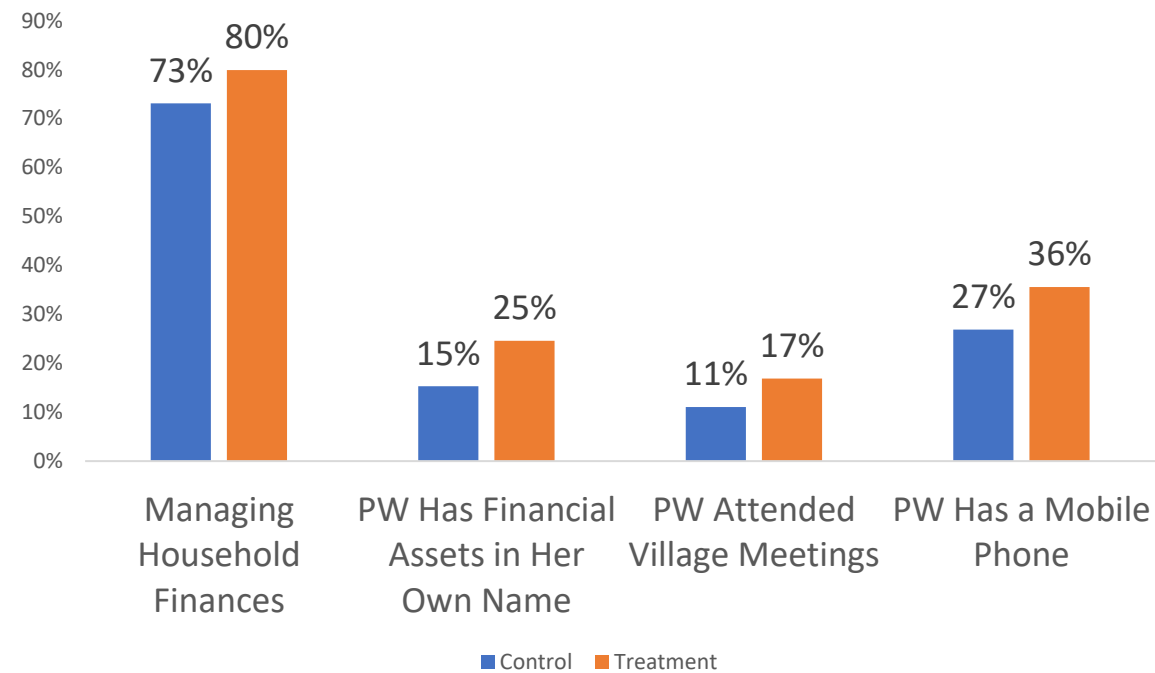
# TUP women show higher empowerment...

(compared to control ultra-poor households)

Driven by variables targeted by the intervention...



...But not only



\* All impacts are measured with respect to the mean UP control group

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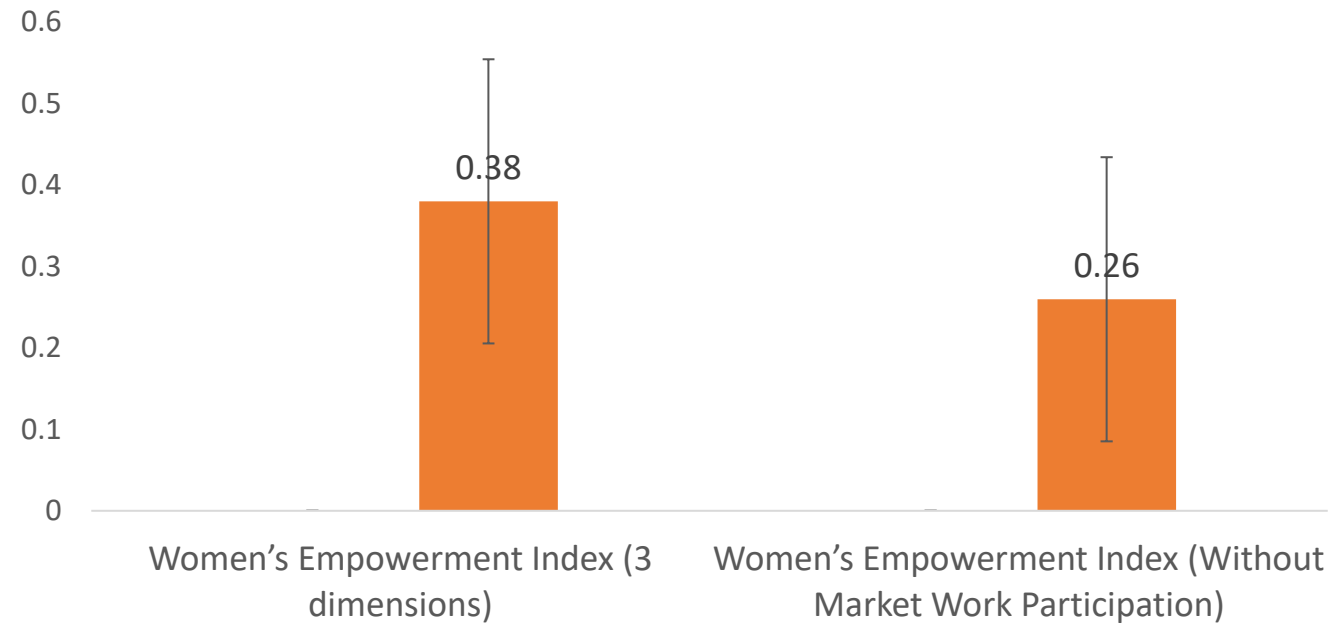


**A debate in the literature on women's  
empowerment:**

**Are all increases in women's market work  
welfare enhancing?**

# TUP women show higher empowerment even without including Market Work Participation

(compared to control ultra-poor households)



Impact is still large and statistically significant

\* All impacts are measured with respect to the mean UP control group

Source: Bedoya, G., Belyakova, Y., Coville, A., Escande, T., Isaqzadeh, M., & Ndiaye, A. (2023). The enduring impacts of a big push during multiple crises: experimental evidence from Afghanistan. Policy Research Working Paper (10596).

# Is increased market work adding another time burden on women?

At midline, time spent working by the primary woman increases by 2.3 full-time-day equivalents per month.

The women in the control group spend 12 full-time-day equivalents in all productive activities, including household chores.

The increase in women empowerment is consistent with a sustained increase in psychological well being

**Thinking about women empowerment in the context:**

**In a conservative setting, the ability to work from home can be empowering, especially, if it is replacing idle time**

# Recap of Main Results

- 2 years after the asset transfer, the TUP reports large impacts on women empowerment.
- A multi-dimensional more comprehensive definition of women empowerment, adds to the understanding of the impacts of the TUP program
- 2 years after the asset transfer, gender gaps along selected outcomes have declined
- Impacts on women empowerment are sustained 5 years after the asset transfer despite big shocks to the households.
- What we measure matters!

# Thank You!



## AFG TUP Extended Team

The research team at different stages includes Guadalupe Bedoya, Yulia Belyakova, Aidan Coville, Thomas Escande, Johannes Haushofer, Mohammad Isaqzadeh, Aminata Ndiaye and Jeremy Shapiro. The TUP implementation team includes Aminata Ndiaye, Ahmed Rostom, Naila Ahmed, and Guillemette Jaffrin, who led the World Bank–funded Access to Finance project. The MISFA team, including Bahram Barzin and Khalil Baheer and supported by Matin Ezidyar, Shafkat Shahriyar Bin Reza and Hashmat Mohmand, delivered the program.

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- Finance, Competitiveness and Innovation Global Practice

