

Can limited-term cash transfers confer (lasting) child protection benefits?

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS FROM THE ASPIRES FAMILY CARE PROJECT

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Accelerating Strategies for Practical Innovation and Research in Economic Strengthening (ASPIRES)

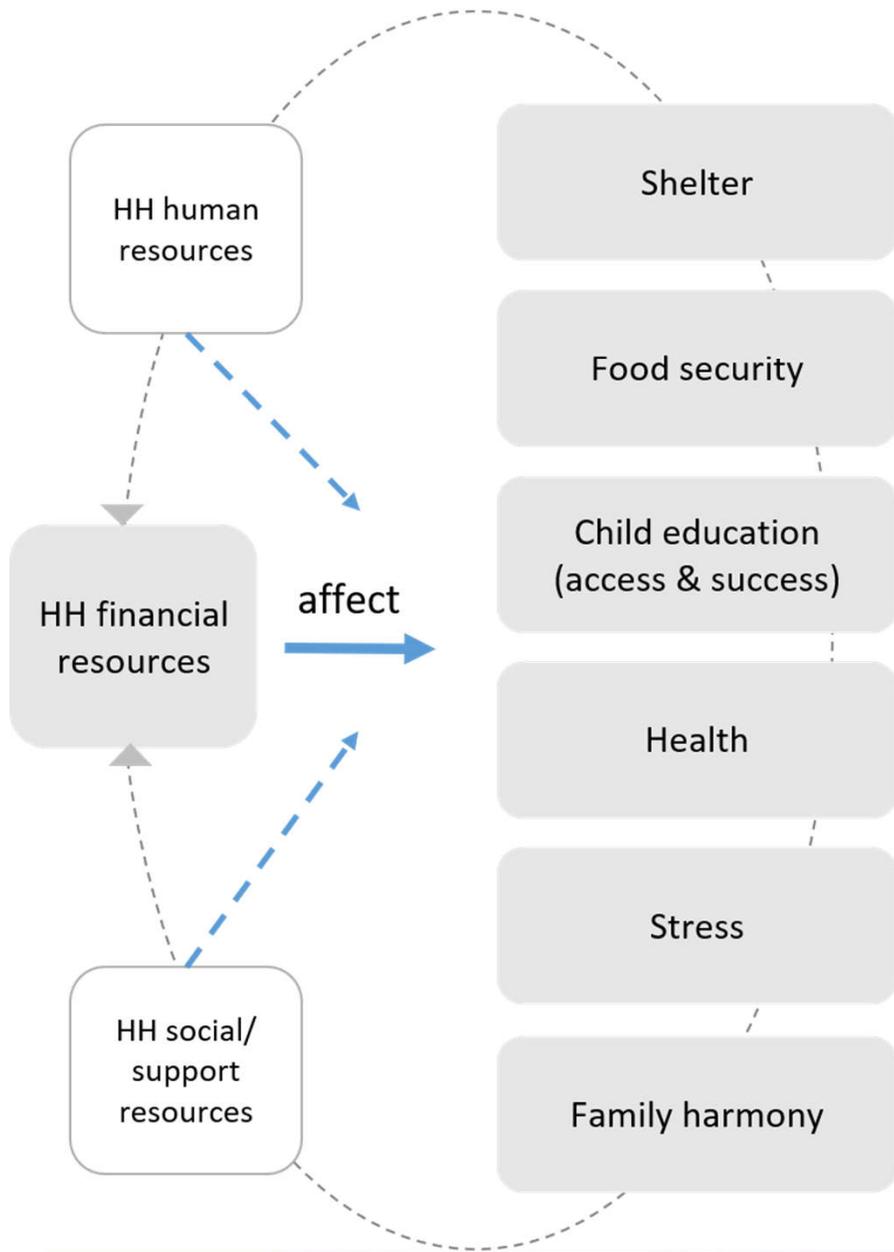


Background – problem

The number of children living without parental care may exceed 24 million.¹

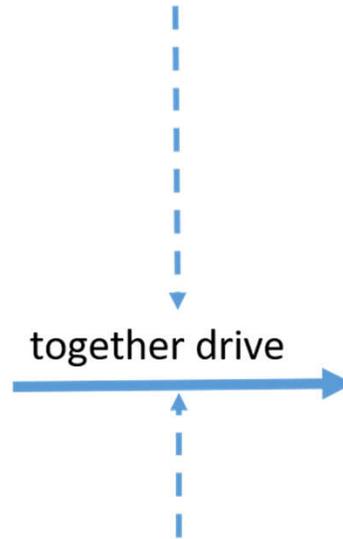
- Families experience multiple, compounding challenges that lead to family-child separation, with financial hardship a common theme.^{1,2,3}





Extra-HH Moderators

- Presence of CCI
- Presence of child labor markets



Intra-HH Moderators

- Death, absence, disability, or illness of caregiver
- Violence, abuse, neglect, harsh discipline practices
- Substance abuse
- # dependents in HH
- Parenting skills

Background – problem

- Requires integrated solutions^{3, 4, 5, 6}
 - Support families to access and use financial resources, directly or through improved skills and capacities
 - Economic
 - Social
 - Emotional/Caregiving

Which interventions might work for which kinds of families and why?

Objective

USAID's Displaced Children and Orphans Fund (DCOF) approached the ASPIRES project to work on this issue.

- The Family Care project was funded to
 - develop evidence and programming guidance on economic interventions in low and middle income countries
 - to facilitate the reintegration of separated children into families, and
 - to prevent unnecessary separation of children from their families



Approach

- Learning from other projects and research
- Conducting evaluation research on two Family Care funded projects
 - Competitive solicitation for proposals for Rwanda, Uganda, Colombia, Guatemala and Haiti
 - Each to include three economic strengthening activities with at-risk and reintegrating families
 - Serve children (700)/families for 12 months
 - Top-scoring proposals both from Uganda



ASPIRES Family Care Projects

Shared broad theory of change:

Tailored ES activities + FS activities →

↓ drivers → resilient families →

↓ separation + ↑ reintegration



ChildFund's Economic Strengthening to Keep and Reintegrate Children in Families (ESFAM)

Gulu, Luwero, Kamuli Districts (towns, rural)

- 89 reunified children (formerly in CClS) and their families
- 611 families at risk of separation

Case management approach: assessment, household plans, visits/monitoring
 Reunification package for reintegrating families

Economic status	Economic Strengthening Interventions
Most vulnerable	Household financial literacy training + cash transfer + transition to village-based lending and saving association (VSLA) + group-based business skills training + economic and social coaching at home
Highly vulnerable	Household financial training + matched saving accounts at banks + business skills training at home + economic and social coaching at home
Very vulnerable	VSLA + group-based financial literacy and business skills training + economic and social coaching at home



AVSI Foundation's Family Resilience (FARE)

Kampala Capital City and Wakiso District (urban, peri-urban, slums)

- 268 reunified children (street-connected children centers and government remand home) and their families
- 350 families at risk of separation

Case management approach: assessment, household plans, visits/monitoring

Economic status	Activities & Interventions
Most vulnerable	Business skills training + cash transfer
All could choose (as appropriate/ accessible)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VSLA (+ late-stage business skills training) • Apprenticeship for adolescents • Small scale production skills • Life skills training and discussions for adolescents • Parenting skills training • Community dialogues on selected topics + linked services • Recreational activities



Assessing the effects of cash transfers

Cash transfers may be an efficient way to help households address basic needs, smooth consumption, address caregiving needs and cope with shock but evidence is limited in the context of family-child separation.^{1,6,8,9,10}

- Effects on economic vulnerability indicators
 - Income, savings, ability to pay for basic needs, and resilience to financial shocks
- Effects on child protection/well-being indicators
 - Permanency of reintegration/prevention of separation
 - Child and caregiver well-being
 - Regular attendance at school
 - Use of harsh discipline

Assessing the effects of FS + CT only

- CTs preceded by financial literacy training (ESFAM) or business skills training (FARE)
 - These families could also choose to participate in VLSA or other ES interventions—focus here is Family Strengthening (FS) + CT-only

“FS + CT-only” households				CT description	
	At risk	Reintegrating	Total HH	Value	Modality
ESFAM	55	5	60	420,000 Ugandan Shillings/ ~116USD	3-6 payments, 6-12 months, variable
FARE	2	36	38		6 months, fixed amount
Total	57	41	98		Mainly mobile money



Evaluation Research Methods

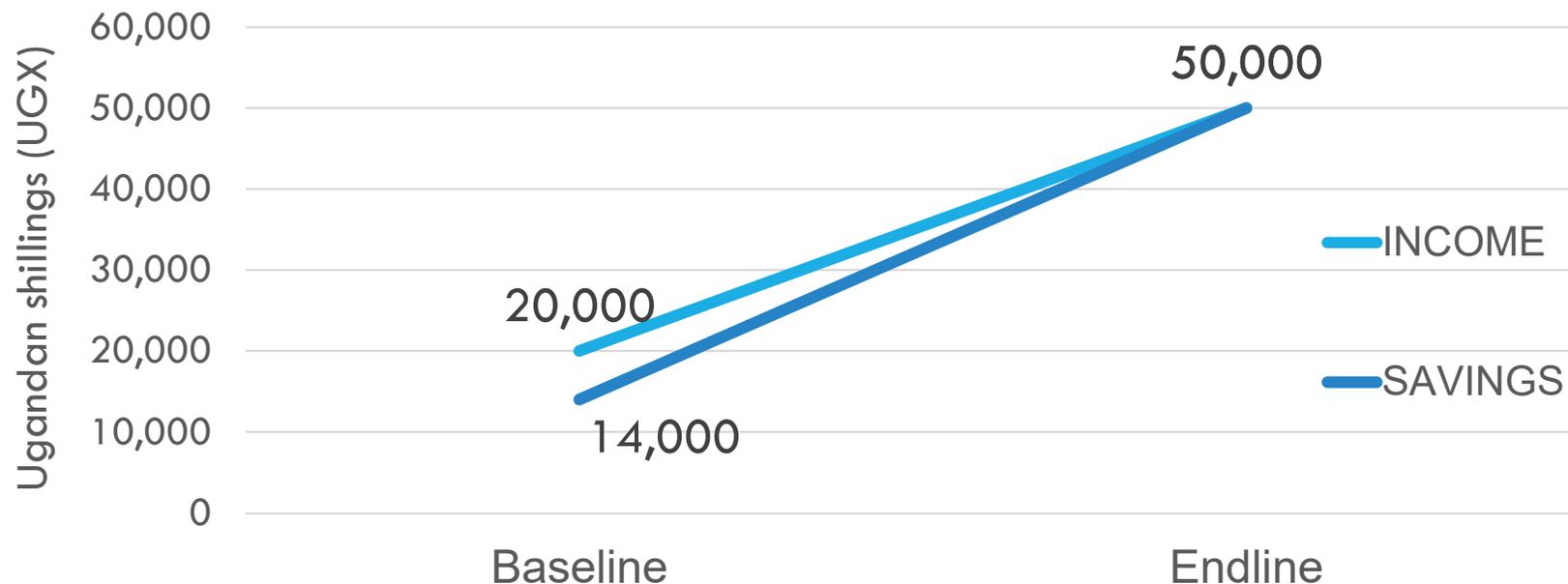
- Participants: HH with child reintegrating or HH identified as at risk of separation through community-level activities and quantitative household assessment (red flags)
- Longitudinal **quantitative economic vulnerability and index child and caregiver well-being data** from all households
- Longitudinal qualitative interviews with 80 purposively selected families (caregiver and index child)
- **Formative assessment of cash transfer** and VSLA interventions
- Costing exercise



Economic vulnerability indicators – at-risk HHs

- Median HH monthly income increased 150% ($p < 0.01$)
- Median HH savings increased over 250%

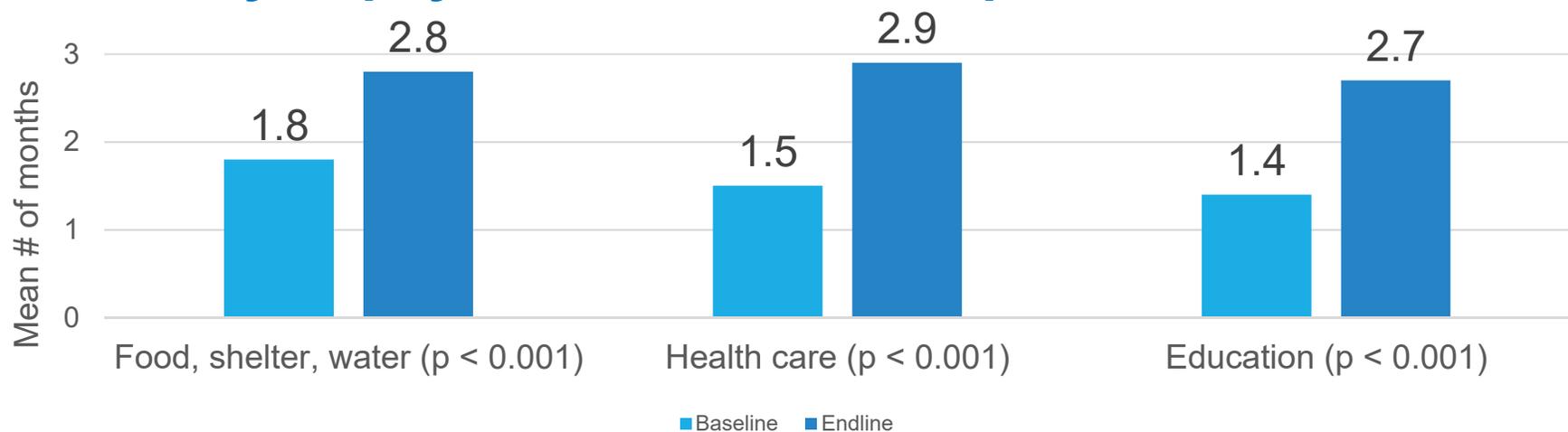
Changes in median HH income and savings over ~12 months



Economic vulnerability indicators – at-risk HHs

- Ability to pay for basic needs increased in all categories
- 2-3+ meals per day increased from 18% to 75% ($p < 0.001$)
- Purchase of household items increased from 9% to 53% ($p < 0.001$)
- Preparedness to handle financial shocks improved ($p < 0.001$)

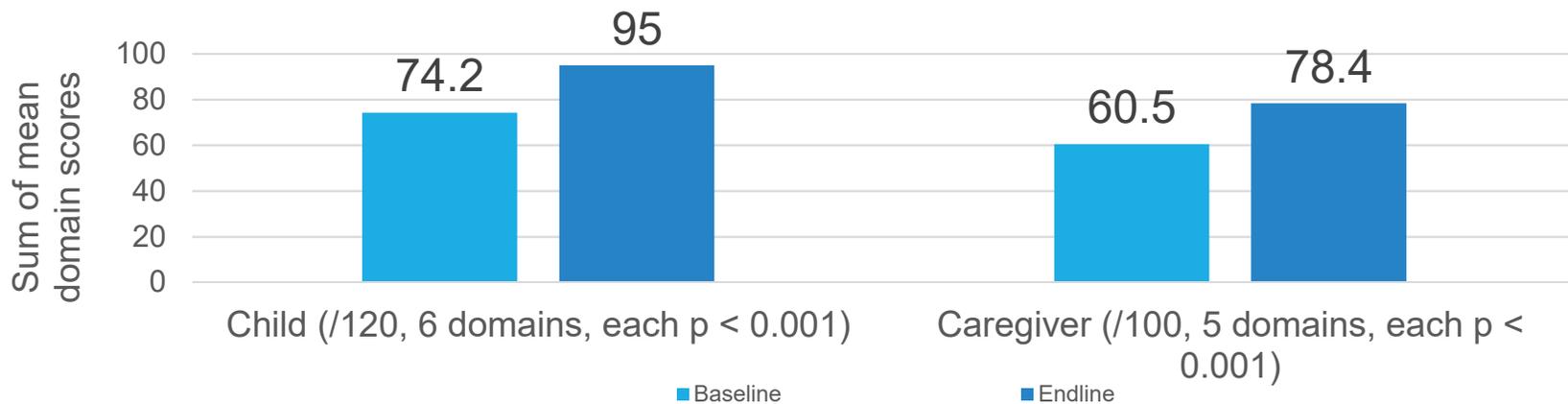
Ability to pay for basic needs in past three months



Child protection and well-being indicators – at risk HHs

- HHs with children living outside the home decreased from 8.8% (5) to 1.8% (1)
- HHs with all children 5/6-17 regularly attending school increased from 45.6% to 54.4%
- HHs reporting no use of harsh discipline increased from 33.3% to 47.4% ($p < 0.05$)

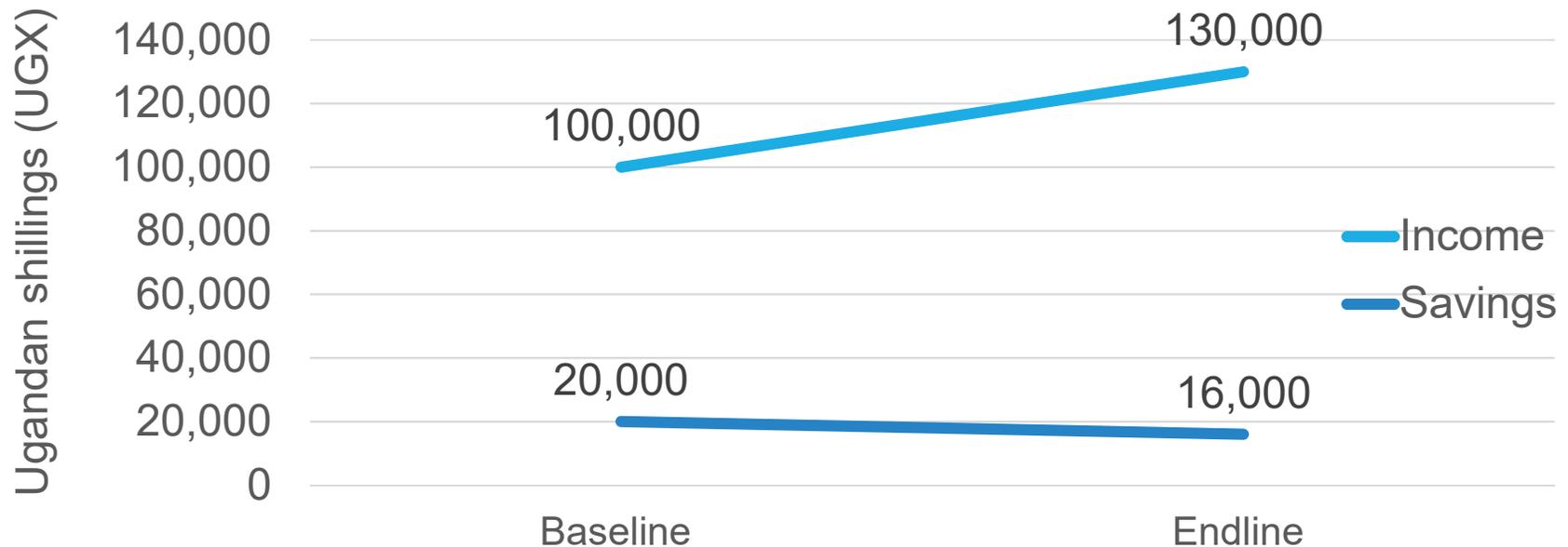
Child and caregiver integration status



Economic vulnerability indicators – reintegrating HHs

- Median HH monthly income increased 30%
- Median HH savings **decreased** 20%

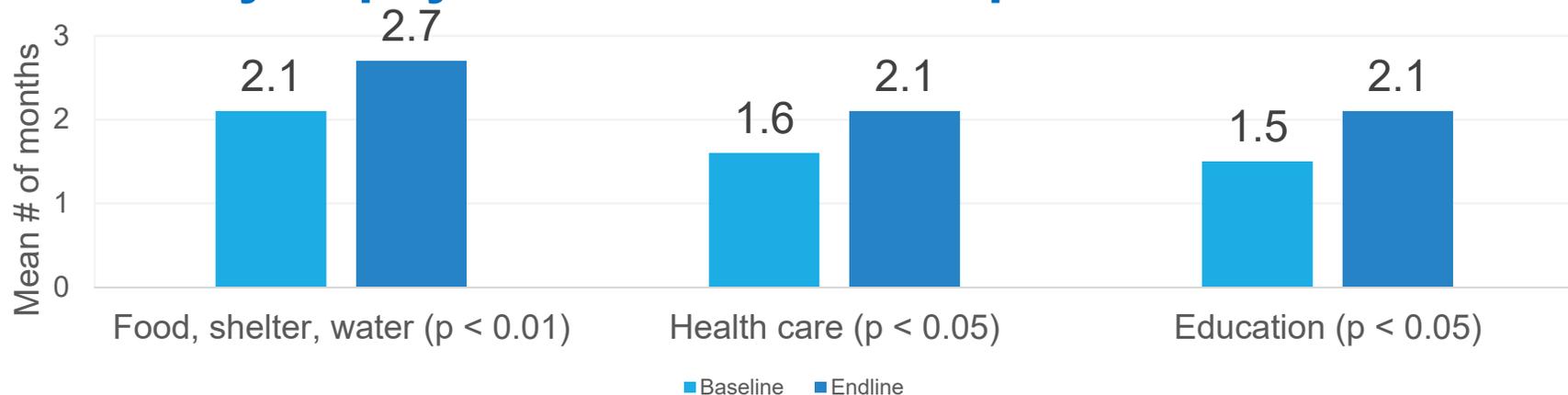
Changes in median income and savings over ~12 months



Economic vulnerability indicators – reintegrating HHs

- Ability to pay for basic needs increased in all categories
- 2-3+ meals increased from 54% to 85%
- Purchase of household items increased from 22% to 43.9% (p < 0.05)
- Preparedness to handle financial shocks improved

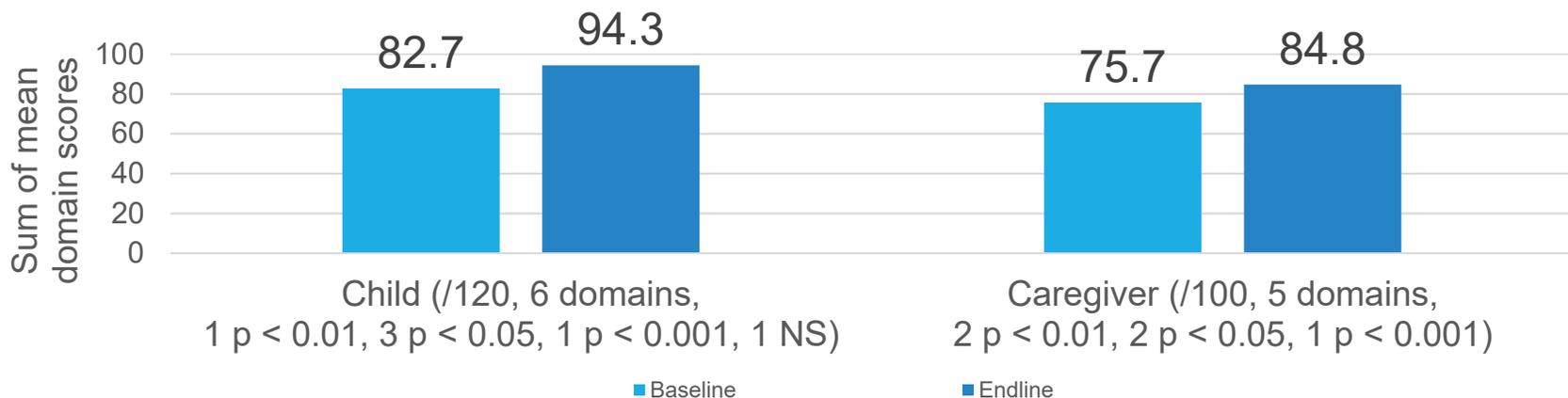
Ability to pay for basic needs in past three months



Child protection and well-being indicators – reintegrating HHs

- HHs with children living outside the home **increased** from 12.2% (5) to 14.6% (6)
- HHs with all children 5/6-17 regularly attending school **decreased** from 31.7% to 26.8%
- HHs reporting no use of harsh discipline increased from 4.9% to 46.3% ($p < 0.001$)

Child and caregiver integration status



Process assessment

- Use of CTs
 - Initial use typically on basic needs (food, shelter, primary education), some on debt repayment
 - Then, then some HHs could invest, save
 - CT less productive for HHs with no existing income-generating activity to leverage
- Improvements
 - Staff and recipients felt timeframe was too short and amount not quite enough
 - CT not enough to cover secondary school fees
 - CT not enough for large HHs, labor-constrained HHs

Discussion

- Cash transfers are a promising intervention.
- “FS + CT-only” HHs showed increases in income, ability to pay for basic needs, meals consumed, purchase of household items and investment in business, resilience to financial shocks, no use of harsh discipline and child and caregiver integration.
- Reintegrating HHs showed a decrease in savings, proportion of HHs with all children in school and an increase in households with children living outside the home for not good reasons.
- Study is limited by a lack of a counterfactual; we cannot say whether or how changes might have occurred in the absence of the intervention.

Endnotes

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About ASPIRES and ASPIRES Family Care

ASPIRES, supported by PEPFAR and USAID and managed by FHI 360, supports gender-sensitive programming, research and learning to improve the economic security of highly vulnerable individuals, families and children. ASPIRES provides technical assistance to US Government agencies and their implementing partners to advance and scale up high-quality interventions in the areas of consumption support, money management, and income promotion. It also designs and implements rigorous research to evaluate programs and inform a new understanding of best practices in ES for vulnerable populations. Please visit <https://www.marketlinks.org/aspires>.

With funding from USAID's Displaced Children and Orphans Fund (DCOF), ASPIRES' Family Care project is tackling the topics of how ES interventions can help separated children return to and remain in their families. It is also exploring how ES can help highly vulnerable families stay together. It will draw on evidence from two projects it funded and is conducting evaluation research on in Uganda, as well as learning from other projects addressing family preservation and reintegration, to develop programming guidance that will help projects match specific families with ES interventions that improve their economic circumstances and support family stability.

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