

**Impacts of an abbreviated personal agency training with refugee women and their male partners on economic empowerment, gender-based violence, and mental health: a randomized controlled trial in Rwanda**

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# Context



- Rates of gender-based violence (GBV) perpetrated by intimate partners are higher than the rates of wartime physical or sexual violence at the hands of non-partners (physical and sexual IPV estimated at 22%)
- For women in humanitarian settings, in addition to IPV, violence from non-partners remains a primary concern. For example, foraging for firewood in refugee camps has been identified as a prevalent risk factor for violence from non-partners
- Economic distress exacerbates violence and is viewed as a modifiable risk factor in humanitarian settings
- Protracted refugees in Rwanda, despite having a right to work, tend to struggle to integrate into the job market in the host community, thus experiencing economic distress and accompanying levels of IPV

# Background Literature

- Agency-focused empowerment trainings, often referred to as personal-agency or personal-initiative trainings, have been demonstrated to improve women's personal and economic outcomes in populations not affected by conflict, but remain understudied amongst conflict-affected populations (Shankar- Kenya; Campos- Togo).
- The 'IMAGE intervention', tested a micro-finance program paired with participatory trainings on gender norms and power relations, self-esteem, communication called 'sisters for life' and showed a significant reduction in experiences of IPV (Kim- South Africa).
- A Save the Children program focused on personal and economic empowerment training paired with technical training enhanced economic well-being and reduced the risk of (mostly domestic) violence for adolescent girls (Gulesci- Bolivia).
- Integrated interventions that economically empower women and engage male partners may hold promise in conflict-affected populations (Green et al. 2015- poverty alleviation in Uganda).

# Objective

- To build the evidence base of integrated interventions that can economically empower women and impact rates of GBV in refugee camps
- This training is designed to increase personal awareness of one's thoughts, beliefs, and past actions and their impacts on future behaviors, effectively increasing one's personal agency, defined as the ability to make decisions and take purposeful action.
- To the partner component we added clean cookstove adoption, gender roles and gender box, positive communication (explicitly talking about violence)

We aim to see if in a humanitarian context it can:

- Reduce GBV (IPV and NPV)
- Increase economic well-being
- Improve mental health

# 2-day SEE Change Intervention

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>Introduce the training, create a community agreement.</b>
<b>Think-Feel-Do</b>	Explore the relationships between how we think, how we feel and what we do. Have individuals understand the importance of self-awareness and the ability to modulate thought.
<b>Sex and Gender</b>	Explain the distinctions between one's biological sex and the societal norms related to gender. Have participants explore how the lives and work of women differ from those of men in the community.
<b>Myself-My Friend</b>	Give participants the opportunity to think about themselves as their friend and understand that by caring for themselves, they will be better able to care for others and do the things they want in their lives.
<b>Tree of Life</b>	Individuals review their life, with the roots of the tree representing their history, the trunk representing today, the fruits representing their accomplishments, and the buds representing their dreams they have for their future. This serves as the starting point for where they want to go in the future.
<b>Limiting Beliefs and Reframes</b>	Explore the concept of limiting beliefs – beliefs that we have that make us doubt ourselves or what we are capable of. These are beliefs that we have the power to change. A reframe is a substitute to the limiting belief that acknowledges our positive potential.

# 2-day Intervention

## Core Beliefs

Six core beliefs and potential limiting beliefs that people may have related to these Core Beliefs are explored.

1. Self-responsibility
2. Self-esteem
3. Trust in a higher purpose
4. Positive attitude
5. Continual growth through life.
6. Owning your power+ positive power

## Personal Behavior Change

A five-step process to identify a small next step towards one's goals. This includes

1. Awareness: What is my current behavior, and what is the specific challenge I face?
2. Meaning: Why is it important to me to change this specific behavior?
3. Vision: How would I like to act or be?
4. Mind shift: How do I change how I think about this issue to help me move towards my vision.
5. Growth step: What is my next clearly stated next step to move forward to get to my vision?

# 2-day Intervention

<b>Letting Go</b>	Practice letting go of past hurts so that we can help make space for new thoughts and beliefs and address unhelpful fears we may hold. This process can be the beginning of letting go of those thoughts/memories of past hurts, so that we can start building stronger selves.
<b>Body Dialogue</b>	A movement exercise accompanied with a visualization to increase awareness of our bodies and things that impact good health, including food, drink, pollution, and the need to be aware of sources of poor health.
<b>Positive Communications</b>	A role play exercise to explore ways of communicating with others and practice effective communication.
<b>Closing</b>	Commitment to action

Source: <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/departments/international-health/research-and-practice/centers-and-research-groups/research-groups/the-self-empowerment-and-equity-for-change-initiative-see-change>

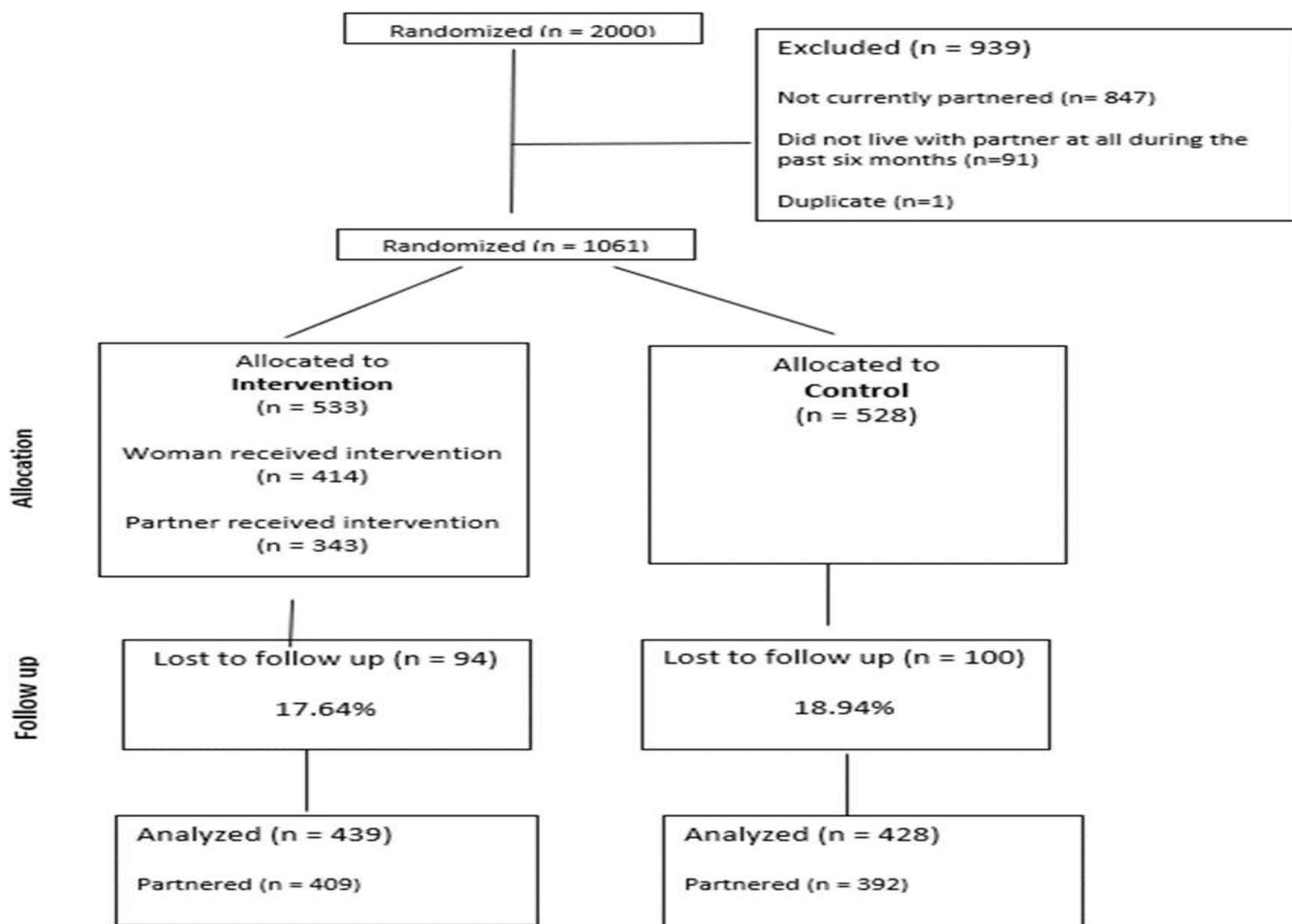
# Study Set-up



- Conducted screening survey of 2000 women ages 18-45, living in the camp, selected one per household
- Randomize into a treatment and control group (creates a counterfactual) prior to baseline
- 1061 women were eligible (partnered) of which 533 women were offered the intervention
- 2-day training to women and 1-day to their partner (worked with RWAMREC to adapt the agency intervention to men and added gender-box, gender roles, clean cooking adoption, and positive communications)
- Intervention was delivered by trained refugee men and women from within the camp

# RCT

- Random assignment implies that the distribution of both observable and unobservable characteristics in the treatment and control groups are statistically identical. The only difference is that some got the program while others did not.
- Comparing them gives you the true impact of the program
- Treatment and control groups do not differ systematically at the outset of the experiment.
- Any difference that arises between them can be attributed to the treatment/intervention.



# Key Outcome Indicators

Variable	Variable Construction and Source	Scaling	Hypothesized Direction	Source
<p><b>Physical and/or sexual IPV in the past six months</b></p> <p><b>And</b></p> <p><b>Emotional IPV</b></p>	<p>Any act of physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner in the past six months.</p> <p>Acts of physical violence included slapping, pushing, twisting her arm or pulling her hair etc..</p> <p>Acts of sexual violence included forced sex, respondent's performing sexual acts out of fear etc.</p> <p>Emotional IPV includes acts such as insulted, humiliated, scared or intimidated, threatened to harm etc.</p>	Binary		Items based on the WHO Violence Against Women Scale used in the WHO multi-country study

# Key Outcome Indicators

<b>Harassment in the past six months</b>	<p>Experiencing any acts of harassment in the past six months.</p> <p>Based on the following acts: catcalls (sounds like kissing sounds, lip smacking, whistles), unwanted attention, undesirable interaction, remarks or come on, crude or offensive jokes and attempts to humiliate, stranger entered home uninvited and made the respondent feel uncomfortable, unwanted touching, stroking or hugging, indecent exposure or ejaculation, or stalking.</p>	Binary		Self-reported
<b>Non-partner sexual or physical violence</b>	<p>Experiencing any acts of physical or sexual violence in the past six months from someone other than their partner.</p> <p>Acts of NPV include forced sex or sexual activities, unwanted forceful fondling or grabbing, threatened sexual violence or rape, attempted rape, attack with a weapon, kicked, dragged or beaten, slapped, twisted arm, hit, pushed, or shoved.</p>	Binary		Items based on the WHO multi-country study and pilot testing of instruments

# Key Outcome Indicators

<b>Women's engagement in income-generating activities</b>	Women's self-reported income generating activities i.e., that she was engaged in activities to earn money in the past six months at endline.	Binary		Self-reported
<b>Women's engagement in skill development</b>	If a woman self-reported starting to engage in learning a new skill in the past six months	Binary		Self-reported

# Key Outcome Indicators

<b>Probable depression and anxiety</b>	Anxiety and depression score generated based on responses to the Hopkins Symptom Checklist-25 (HSCCL-25). Responses were summed and standardized to obtain a mean score and converted into a binary variable with a standardized cut-off of 2 as suggested by the authors of the measure. Participants responded to the frequency of experiencing symptoms of anxiety (10-items) and depression (15 items) in the past one month.	Binary		Hopkins Symptom Checklist-25 (HSCCL)
<b>Probable PTSD</b>	Trauma score generated using the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire (HTQ), comprising 16 items assessing trauma-related symptoms experienced in the past one month. Responses were summed and standardized to obtain a mean score and a cut-off of 2 was used to create a binary variable.	Binary		Harvard Trauma Questionnaire (HTQ)

# Specification



- We conduct an unadjusted estimation on the following specification

$$Y_{it} = \alpha + \beta_1 T1_{it} + e_i$$

- We also conduct an ANCOVA with the following estimations:

$$\text{Spec 2} \rightarrow Y_{it} = \alpha + \beta_1 T1_{it} + \beta_2 X_{i(t-1)} + \beta_3 D_{i(t-1)} + Y_{i(t-1)} e_i$$

Where we adjust for baseline values of the outcome, age at baseline, woman's education, and experience of emotional IPV at baseline

- We conduct Gaussian and Poisson estimations with Log-linear GLM.

## Results – GBV outcomes

	Intervention Arm (n=439)		Control Arm (n=428)		Unadjusted		Adjusted <sup>#</sup>	
	No. of participants	Percentage	No. of participants	Percentage	IRR/ coefficient (95% CI)	P value	aIRR/ coefficient (95% CI)	P value
<b>IPV past six months</b>								
<b>Physical or sexual IPV</b>	53/409	12.96%	54/391	13.81%	0.94 (0.66 -1.33)	0.724	0.80 (0.58-1.09)	0.161
<b>Emotional IPV</b>	95/408	23.3%	85/391	21.7%	1.17 (0.88-1.56)	0.288	0.95 (0.73- 1.23)	0.688
<b>NPV past six Months</b>								
<b>Harassment</b>	47/439	10.71%	42/428	9.81%	1.09 (0.73-1.62)	0.665	1.09 (0.74-1.60)	0.668
<b>Physical or sexual NPV</b>	25/439	5.7%	35/428	8.18%	0.70 (0.42-1.14)	0.153	0.65 (0.39-1.07)	0.091*

## Results – Mental Health and Economic outcomes

	Intervention Arm (n=439)		Control Arm (n=428)		Unadjusted		Adjusted <sup>#</sup>	
	Number of participants	Mean (SD) or percentage	Number of participants	Mean (SD) or percentage	IRR/ coefficient (95% CI)	P value	aIRR/ coefficient (95% CI)	
<b>HSCL</b>	29/439	6.61%	16/428	3.74%	1.77 (0.97-3.21)	0.061*	1.79 (1.00-3.22)	0.050**
<b>HTQ</b>	27/439	6.15%	13/428	3.04%	2.02 (1.06-3.87)	0.033**	2.07 (1.10-3.91)	0.024**
<b>Income-generating activity in the past six months</b>	145/439	33.03%	116/428	27.10%	1.22 (0.99- 1.50)	0.05*	1.25 (1.04-1.50)	0.018**
<b>Engagement in skill learning</b>	268/407	65.85%	171/404	43.55%	1.56 (1.36-1.77)	0.000**	1.59 (1.39-1.82)	0.000**

## Outcomes amongst sub-groups

Outcome	N	IRR/adjusted coefficient (95% CI)	P value
Physical or sexual IPV amongst those who experienced any IPV at baseline	n=402	0.71 (0.49 to 1.01)	0.056*
Past month income amongst those working in the past 6 months <sup>#</sup>	n=254	1.34 (0.99 to 1.82)	0.059*

# Conclusion

- **Promising impacts on livelihoods and experience of violence are possible despite the abbreviated nature of this training.**
- Despite improvements in livelihoods and reduction in experience of violence, more concerted efforts are needed to prevent the increased risk of anxiety and depression found in conflict-affected populations.. **“It is possible that the gains women derived from increased economic security were offset by stressors associated with planning, launching, and maintaining a new business.** This interpretation would fit with Fernald et al.’s (2008) finding that second chance loans in South Africa were associated with increased perceived stress.” (Green et al., 2016)
- **Unclear why NPV decreases** despite no increase in clean cooking uptake.



**Thank you**