

Changing the game for girls: results from a longitudinal study of a soccer based HIV and SGBV prevention programme for adolescent girls in South Africa

Sanders BF¹, Barkley CK¹, Advani N¹, Banciu RL¹, Das M², Cooper A³, Moolman B³

¹ Grassroot Soccer ² International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) ³ Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC)

BACKGROUND

Grassroot Soccer’s (GRS) SKILLZ Street Plus (SSP) programme was designed to address the factors which place adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) at risk for HIV and sexual and gender based violence (SGBV). By the age of 18, more than a third of South Africa’s women experience some form of violence. At the same time, they are at a much higher risk of HIV infection than men, with AGYW age 15-24 accounting for 60% of all new infections among young people. Gender inequality and intimate partner violence have been linked to increased risk of HIV.

INTERVENTION OVERVIEW

SSP combines **girls soccer** with **educational activities** meant to empower them to form gender-equitable attitudes and negotiate healthy relationships; respond to violence in their lives and gain knowledge of sexual and reproductive health and rights, thus reducing the chances of risky relationships, SGBV and HIV infection. SSP is a 14-session, 28-hour intervention which uses a network of female coaches (peer educators) to deliver the curriculum, mentor the girls and facilitate the soccer-based life skills activities. Among the **strategies** that form part of SSP are:

- Build connections with trusted female mentors
- All-girls soccer league: non-elite soccer matches
- All-girls curriculum based-sessions
- Mixed-sex activities within a follow-up GRS curriculum
- Women’s tournaments: soccer and public health events that bring local health service providers to a non-medical setting.



Girls in SSP programme in Khayelitsha, South Africa

METHODS

A **mixed methods longitudinal study** was designed to asses the success of the project goal. Over 18 months, between 2014 and 2016, baseline and endline data was collected through questionnaires administered to girls in two intermediate and two secondary schools in Soweto (n= 146). Items in the questionnaires came from a range of scales, including self-efficacy (19 items) and sport benefit (16 items). Monitoring data was collected throughout the project, including attendance, uptake of HIV testing and disclosure of experiences requiring follow-up. Qualitative data came from rapid ethnographies, focus group discussions with coach mentors, female participants, and male participants in mixed-sex GRS programmes (n=6), and in-depth semi-structured interviews (n=19) with male and female participants. In addition, GRS staff (n= 5) was interviewed, to assess quality of the programme.

RESULTS

Profile of survey respondents:

- Mean age: 13.6 years
- 45% of the households headed by mothers
- 64% of the girls reported both parents were alive
- 39% reported living with only the mother; 34% with both parents 20% - others; 7% living with fathers
- 25% of the mothers and 37% of the fathers are illiterate.



RESULTS (CONTINUED)

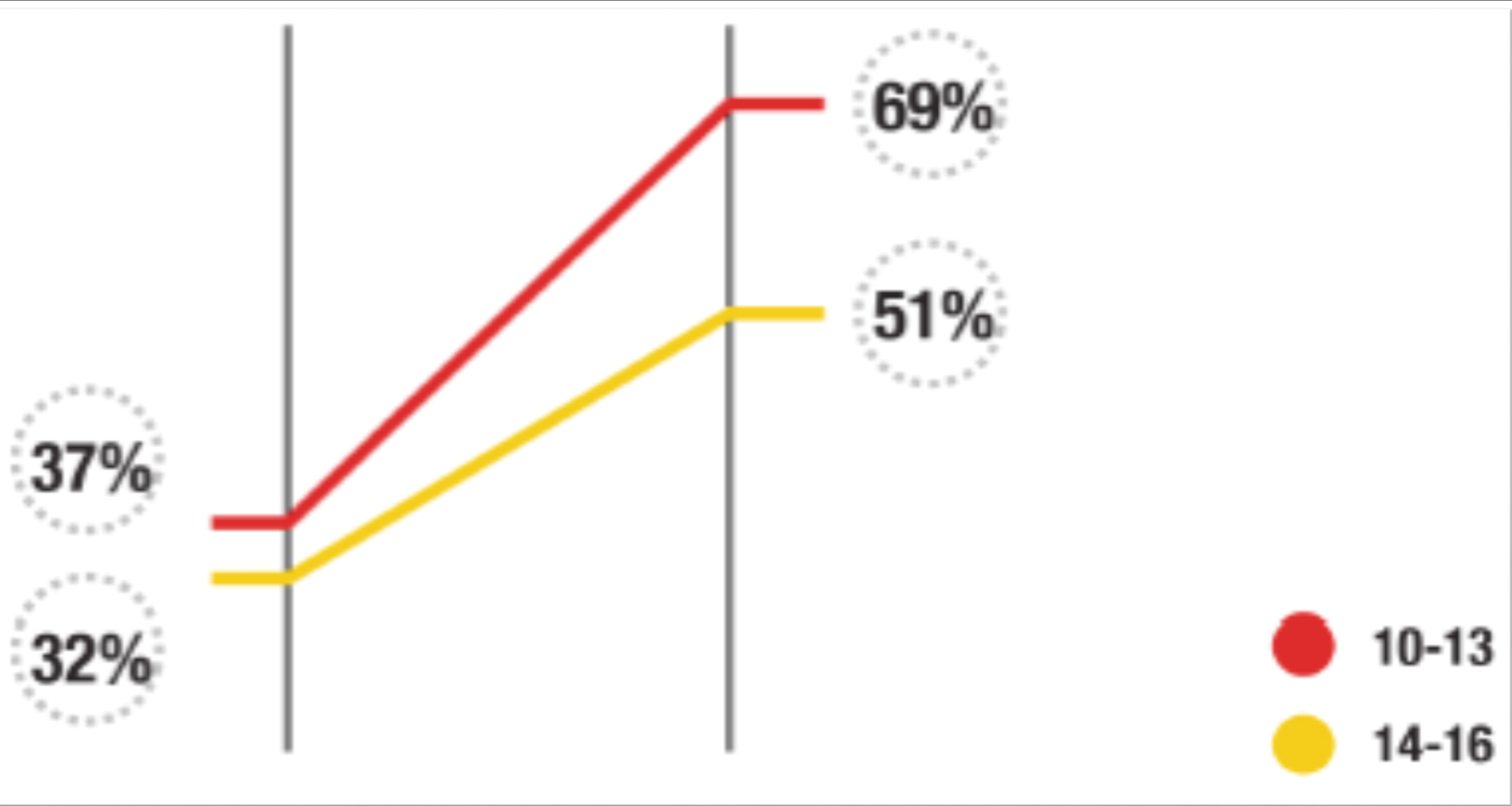


Figure 1: Changes in percent of female participants who do not justify violence, from May 2014-February 2016

- Statistically significant results were seen in the following areas:
- Increased ability to disclose and have discussions about relationships and violence; disclosure of violence doubled from baseline to endline
 - Increased awareness of available health, HIV and violence support services
 - Increase in the utilization of HIV counselling and testing services (ever tested for HIV and tested for HIV in the past 3 months) from 12.3% to 43.9% and from 4.8% to 27.4% respectively
 - Girls reported greater confidence, self-efficacy and improved decision making, which all may explain certain choices to leave violent relationships which was disclosed in the qualitative work.
- Additional positive results show that:
- Less girls justify violence against women and girls
 - Girls see trust and support as more important in a relationship than receiving gifts
 - Some girls reported that they chose to leave physically and emotionally abusive relationships, although the study could not clearly indicate SSP as the reason for them choosing to leave violent relationships
 - Longer exposure leads to greater perceived benefits of sport and girls perceive sport as beneficial in their lives.

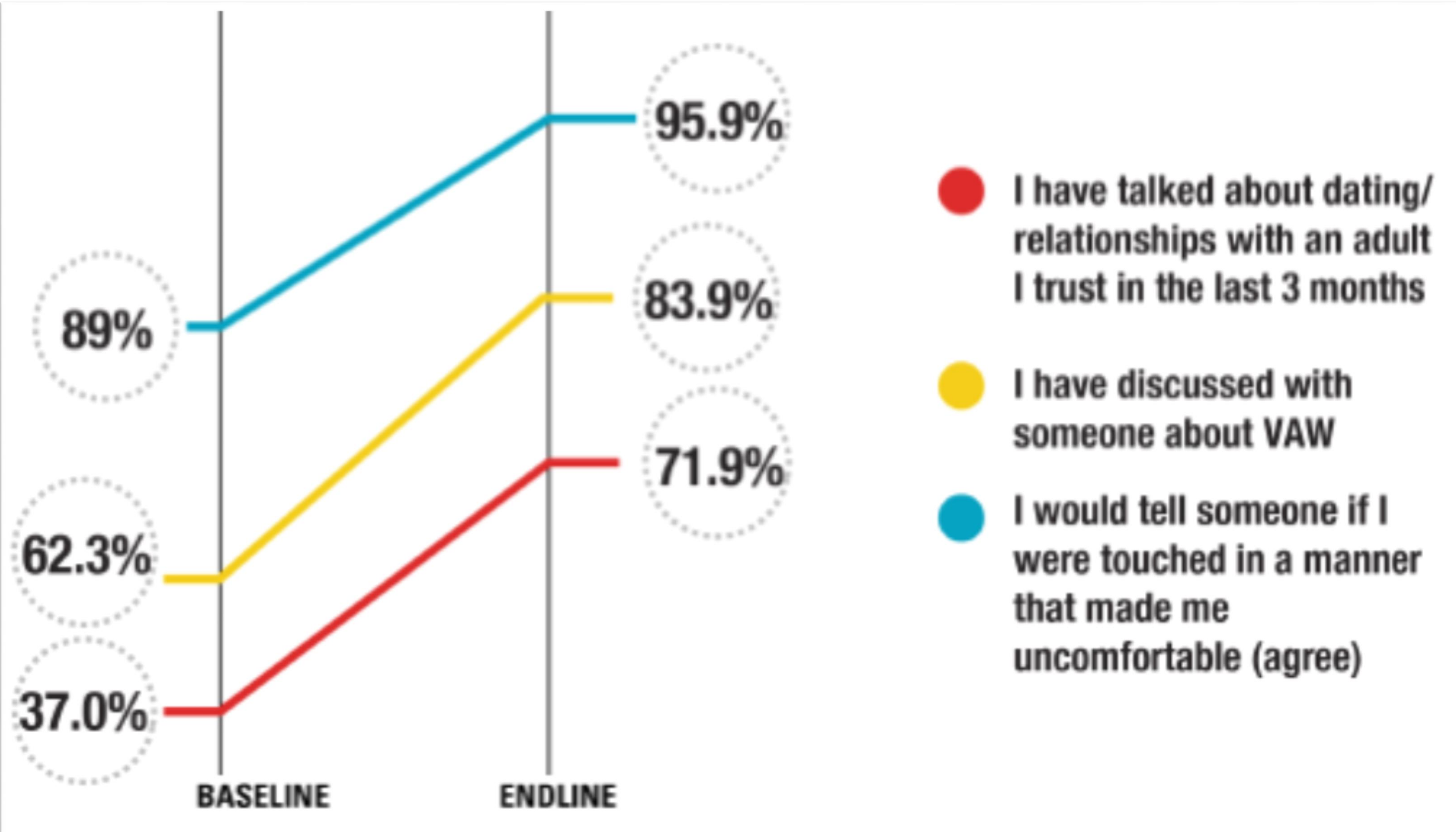


Figure 2: Change in GRS participants’ ability to disclose and have discussions around relationships and violence (VAW = Violence Against Women)

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The evaluation’s results are encouraging, showing that the SSP intervention has the potential to empower girls to pursue healthy and gender equitable partnerships and leave violent relationships which put them at higher risk of HIV. It highlights the important role that families, friends and other support systems play, including schools, police and clinical services. GRS will use these encouraging findings to develop a more robust programme that tackles violence at multiple levels.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study was conducted with the financial support of the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women (UNTF). We also acknowledge the contribution of Human Sciences Research Council and International Centre for Research on Women, as well as the Project Coordinator and other GRS staff for their support.