

Can Religious Leader Messages Influence Human Trafficking Awareness and Stigma?

Evidence from a randomised survey experiment with 1,020 adults in Tanga Region, Tanzania

Salma Emmanuel · Makerere University Business School

with Dylan Groves (Lafayette College), Beatrice Montano (University of Illinois), and Selestine Makoba (TZ Anti-Trafficking Secretariat)

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Trafficking is a major problem in East Africa

Tanzania is a source, transit, and destination country for trafficking.

The most common pattern: a recruiter visits a rural community and offers a family work for their child that ends in exploitation.

Tanzania's national action plan notes that “**data-based evidence is lacking.**”

Religious leaders are a trusted voice

80%

trust religious leaders “a lot” to give good advice

70%

attend religious services at least weekly

Can they influence...

1

Awareness of, and resistance to, trafficking?

2

Stigma against trafficking survivors?

For comparison, 46% trust radio presenters “a lot.”

Research design: a 2×2 survey experiment

1,020 adults in 17 villages. Each respondent randomly assigned to hear each message, independently, stratified by village.



**Ustadh Ayubu Mzee
Mohamedi**
crafted and recorded both
messages in Swahili, each just
under 3 minutes

		Awareness message	
		Not heard	Heard
Anti-stigma message	Not heard	Control n = 239	Awareness n = 244
	Heard	Anti-stigma n = 252	Both n = 285

Awareness message
Children are a trust (amana);
trafficking is oppression (dhulma).
Before accepting an offer: can you
meet the employer, are you being
rushed, is the money unusually
large?

Anti-stigma message
No soul bears another’s burden.
Welcome a returning daughter
home; do not spread suspicion
about her.

Outcome measurement

Awareness and response to trafficking

Caution: Advice on an unfamiliar man's offer of city work for a daughter

Open-ended: why they gave that advice, coded for the risk factors they raised

Four job offers with randomly varied warning signs: **can they tell safe from risky?**

Knowledge: is this scenario trafficking?

Stigma toward survivors

Own stigma toward a girl who was deceived and came home: Blame, respect, and social distance

Asked before and after the anti-stigma message

Perceived stigma: what they expect their neighbours to think

Downstream action

Willingness to warn someone, talk with children and family, raise it at a village meeting, contact an official, report a trafficker

Behavioural: whether they recorded a message for their community when offered the chance

Part 1

Descriptive findings

What people know and believe, before any message

Most recognise trafficking; reports cluster near the border

92%

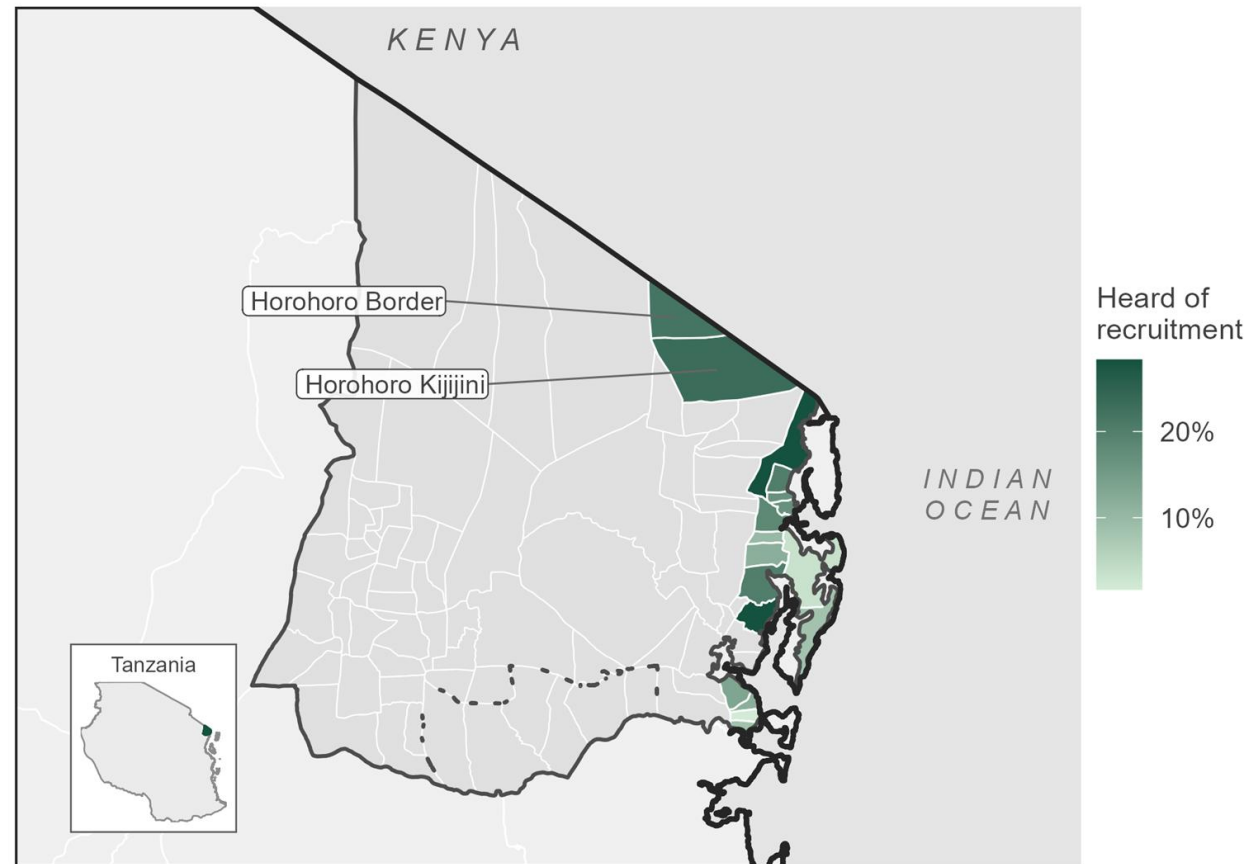
correctly identified a trafficking scenario
as trafficking

15%

had heard of a family nearby
approached about work for their
daughter elsewhere

6%

had heard of a girl from the area who
ended up in work she could not leave



Two in three would advise taking a stranger's job offer

And most hold **stigmatising views** of survivors. Respondents who did not hear the relevant message.

A job offer for a daughter

Would advise a family to let their daughter take city work offered by an unfamiliar man



A girl who was deceived and came home

Agrees she "should have known better than to go"



Less willing to hire her than another girl



Says she could not still marry well



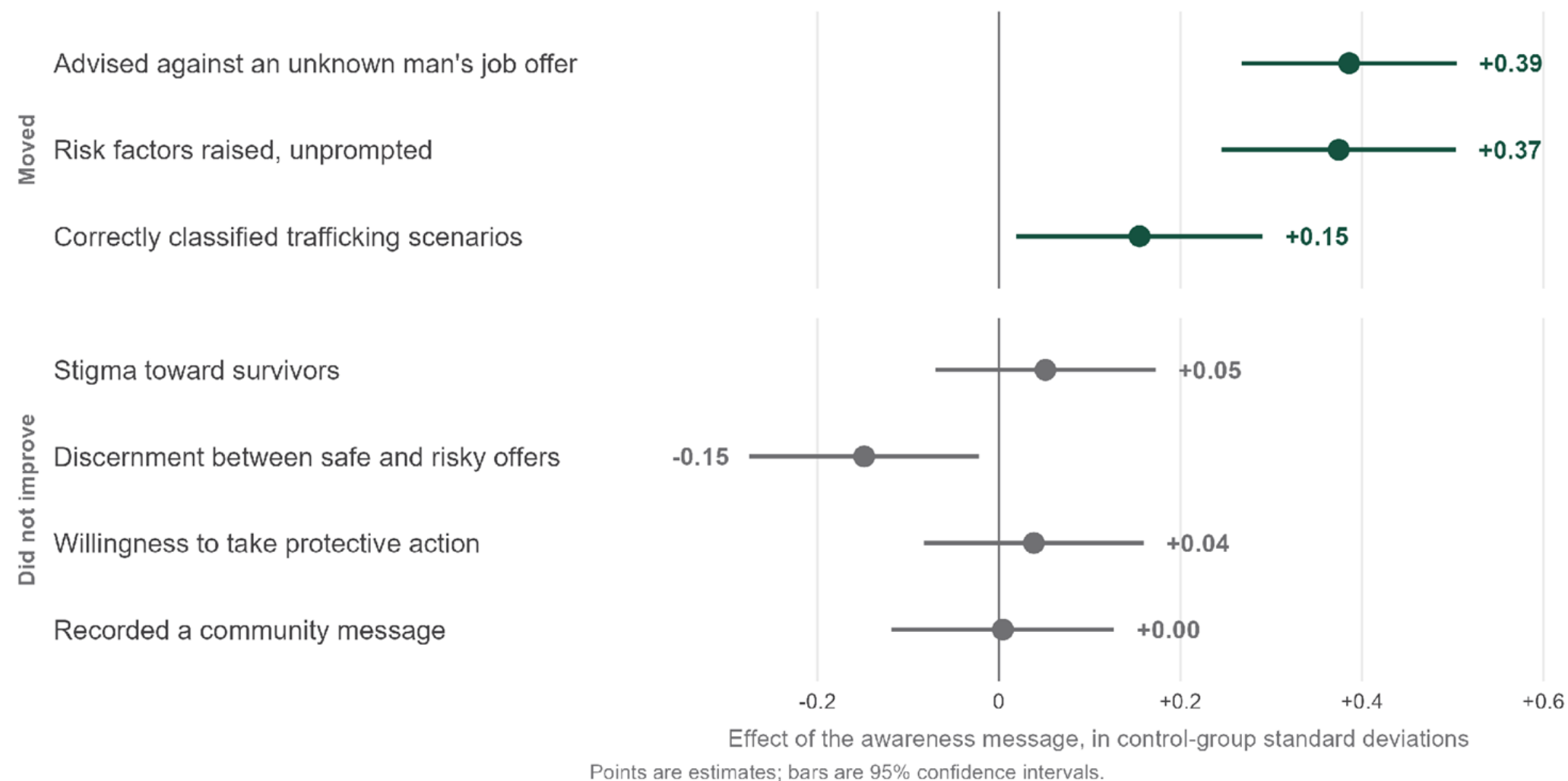
Part 2

Effect of the awareness message

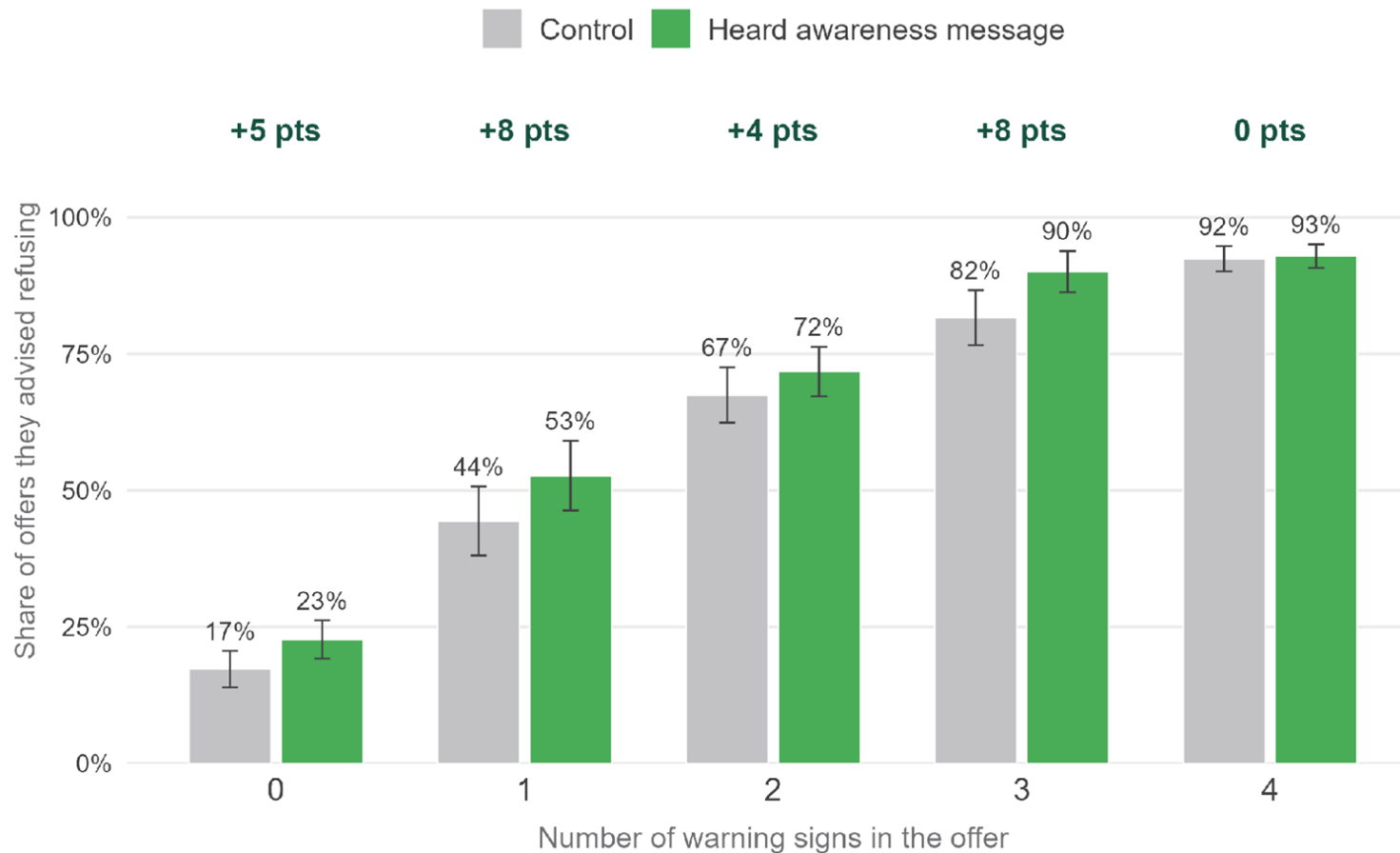
Did it raise awareness and resistance, and did it increase stigma?

The awareness message raised caution without increasing stigma

But it **did not improve discernment** between offers, or willingness to take action.



It did not help people tell safe offers from dangerous ones



The task

Each respondent judged four job offers for a daughter. Each offer carried between zero and four warning signs:

cannot meet the employer · pressure to decide fast · unusually high pay · no known contact there

The bars show the share of offers they advised the family to refuse.

Our reading

The message taught people to **ask about danger**, not to respond more strongly to it once it is shown. They raised verification unprompted, but **did not react more strongly to warning signs** once given.

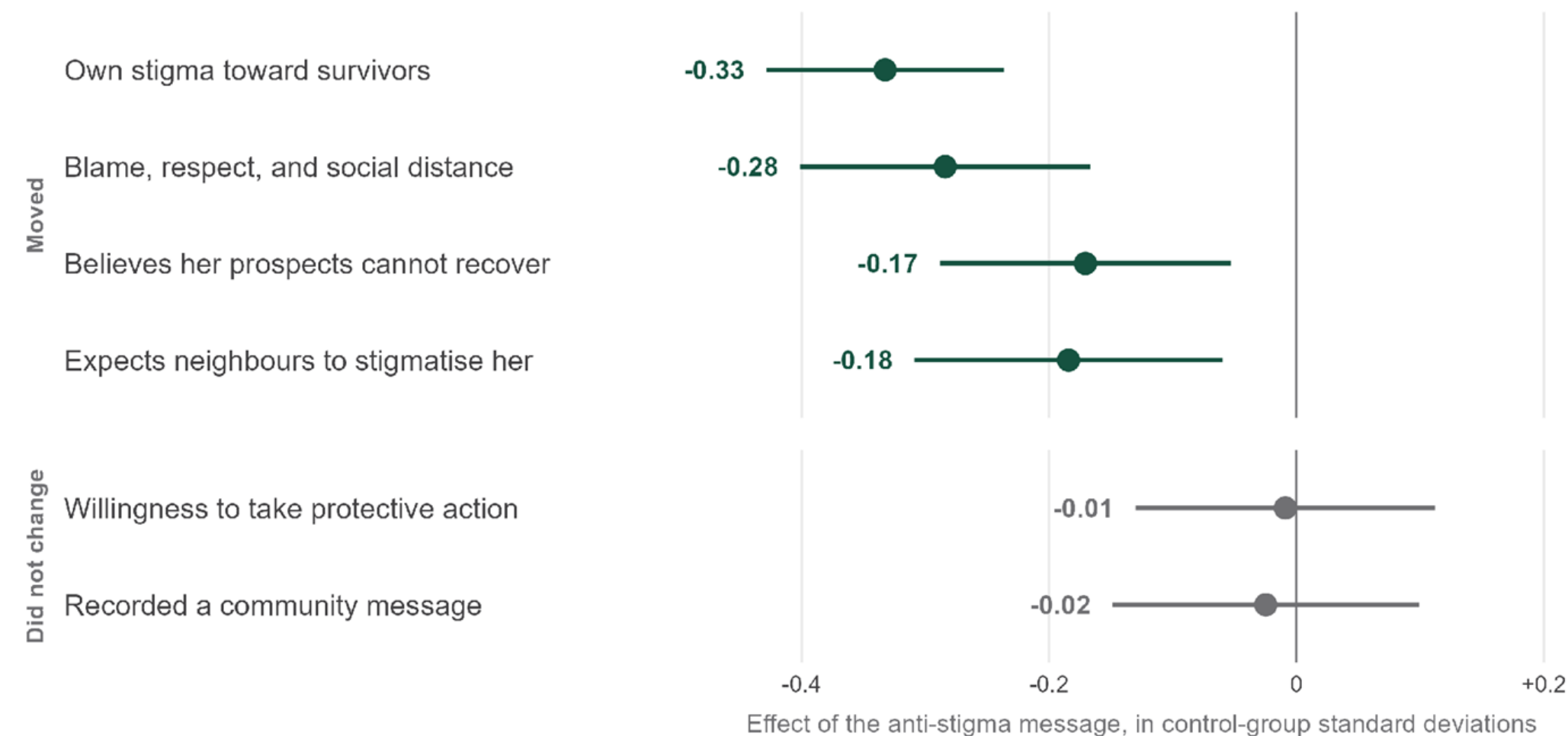
Part 3

Effect of the anti-stigma message

Can a religious leader counteract stigma toward survivors?

The anti-stigma message substantially reduced stigma

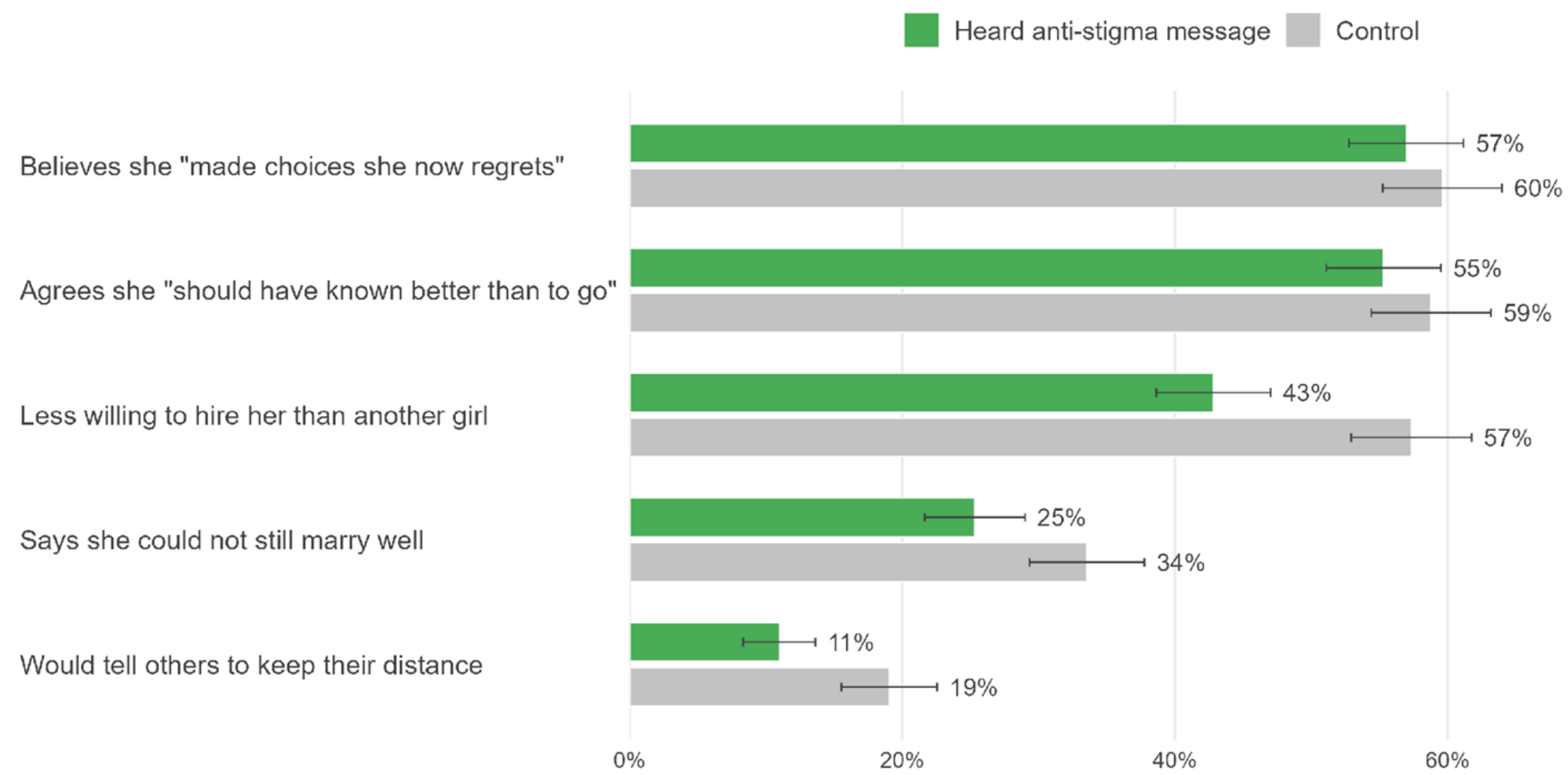
Including what people expect their neighbours to think. It did not change willingness to act.



Points are estimates; bars are 95% confidence intervals.

The largest shifts were in willingness to hire and to marry

Share holding each view about a girl who was deceived and came home.



Next steps

1

Code the open-ended responses

959 respondents consented to having their reasoning recorded. Insights into *why* attitudes/intentions changed

2

Craft messages that teach discernment

Message did not focus on importance of discerning good from bad offers. Crafting could improve discernment.

Religious leaders clearly have influence. Two ways to take it to scale:

Religious-leader counselling

Leaders trained to speak with families directly, face to face.

Religious radio messaging

Reaches whole communities at almost no marginal cost, and can be repeated.

Asanteni sana

Thank you

The team

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