

Combatting COVID: Establishing the effectiveness of an integrative group therapy programme to reduce patients' generalised and COVID-19 specific anxiety

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Hypothesis:

Post-group scores on the Beck's Anxiety Inventory (BAI) and Coronavirus Anxiety Scale (CAS) will be significantly lower than the pre-group scores

Introduction:

- The Coronavirus-19 (COVID-19) pandemic has been, and continues, as a global health emergency with far reaching psychological, social and economic implications. These adverse effects have been observed in inpatient psychiatric settings (Brown, Keene, Hooper & O'Brien, 2020).
- A new terminology "**Coronaphobia**" has been developed to encompass the physiological, cognitive and behaviour impacts of the current pandemic. From working with patients during this pandemic at both a therapeutic and clinical level, it became apparent to the Psychology department that COVID-19 has directly impacted inpatients' psychological wellbeing.
- This current service evaluation was to develop and implement an **integrative psychoeducation group programme** to support individuals to manage the psychological challenges linked to COVID-19 anxiety. Also, it was developed as a patient skill-based resource for general anxiety symptoms.
- This programme centred on methods from evidenced-based psychological therapies including Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) (Hunot, Churchill, Silva De Lima, Texeira, 2007), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) (Wetherell, Afari Stoddard, Ruberg, Sorrell & Patterson, 2012), Dialectical Behavioural Therapy (DBT) (Lothes, Mochrie & St. John, 2014), and Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) (Tabatabaei & Bolghan-Abadi, 2020).

Methodology:

Sampling: Offered to 30 inpatients at a high dependency inpatient rehabilitation hospital for mental health and personality disorders. Four patients completed the group programme.

Procedure: Initial letter sent to patients for topic ideas and group name. Bespoke 10-week programme was developed and facilitated by Psychology department with applications from four evidenced based psychological modalities (**CBT, DBT, ACT, SFBT**) alongside total communication and adult learning style principles.

The programme material was delivered using workbooks, flipcharts group discussion and homework exercises. A mindfulness exercise concluded each session.

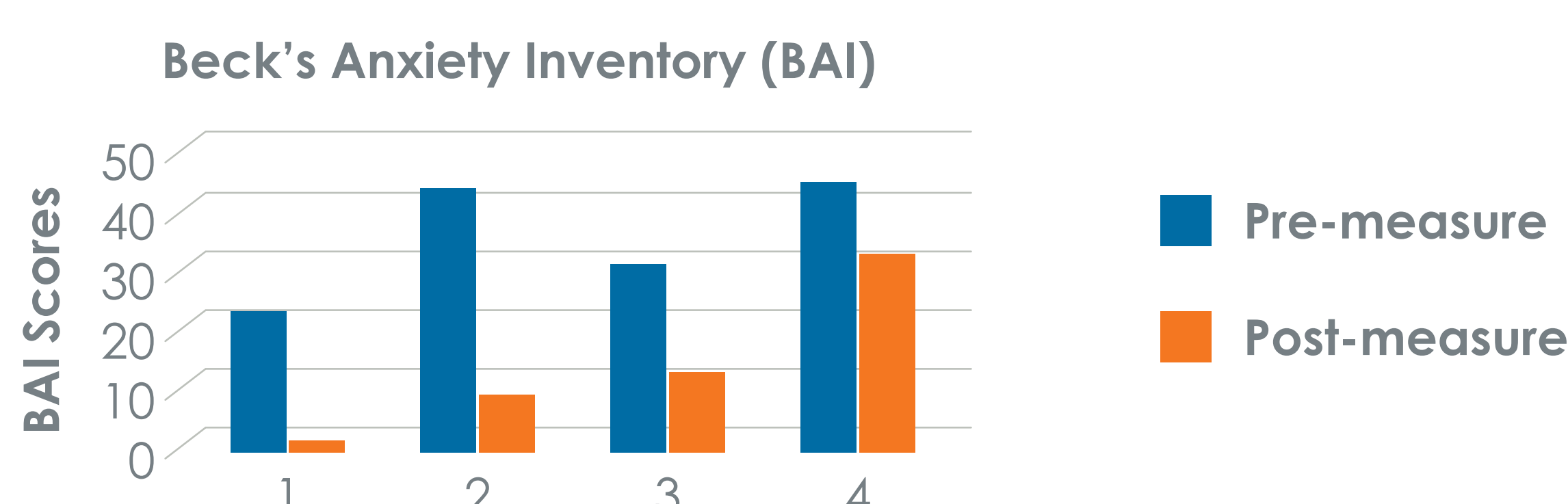
Participants were encouraged to develop their own **Stress Resiliency Action Plan (SRAP)** for future reference. To aid understanding and memory at the end of each group session, participants were asked to think of and agree upon a sentence which summarised the learning from that session and this became the week's "take home" message.

Measures: Standardised and clinically evidenced assessments. Becks Anxiety Inventory (BAI) and Coronavirus Anxiety Scale (CAS).

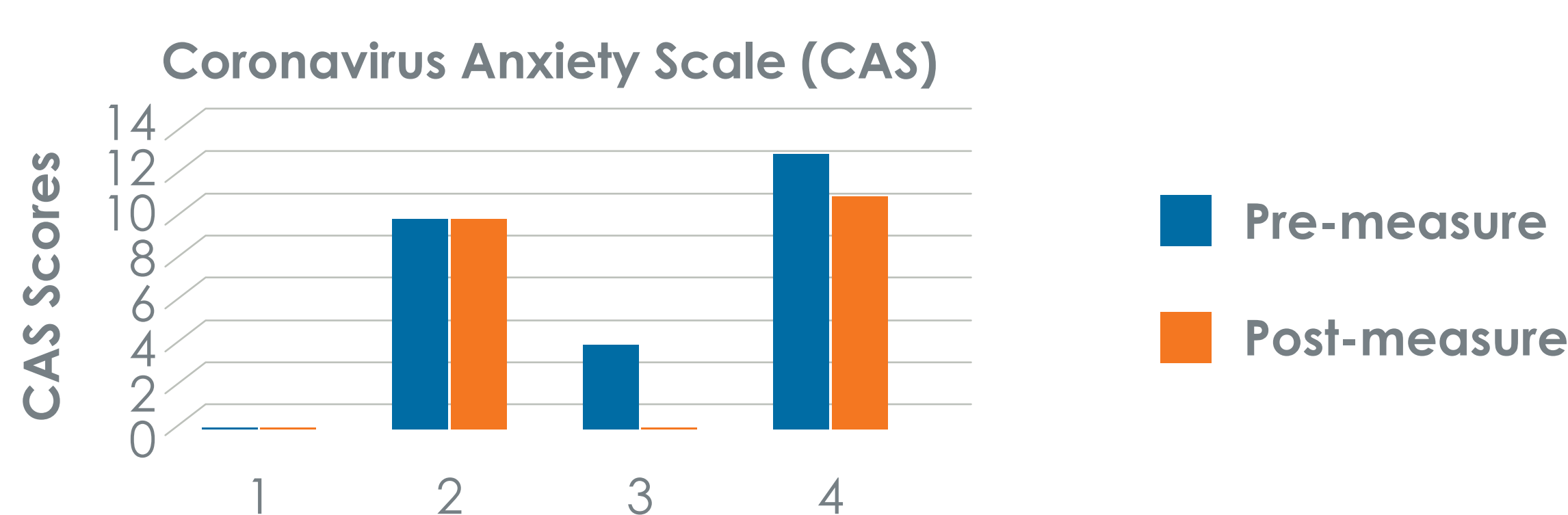
Data analysis: Wilcoxon signed rank test, as compares non-parametric data in repeated design analysis.

Results:

BAI: There was a significant difference in the pre and post scores, $z = 0, p < .05$. The results indicated that post-measure scores for this psychometric assessment was significantly lower to pre-measure scores.



CAS: There was a significant difference in the pre and post scores, $z = 2, p < .05$. The results indicated that post-measure scores for this psychometric assessment was significantly lower to pre-measure scores.



Qualitative feedback: 3 out of 4 patients indicated that the group had been helpful regarding anxiety related to COVID-19



Discussion:

- The results from this service evaluation conclude that an integrative group programme **was effective in reducing self-reported anxiety and COVID-19 specific anxiety**. Post intervention scores for a generalised and COVID-19 specific anxiety were significantly lower than pre-intervention scores.
- This is a positive outcome for service delivery, especially within the current context of people's ongoing stress difficulties and loss during a global pandemic. For inpatients with existing complex cognitive, personality and mental health challenges, the impact of COVID-19 can be particularly overwhelming and debilitating.
- This evaluation has provided **supportive evidence** that targeted integrative therapies support the needs of individuals with complex mental health needs and challenges (Zarbo, Tasca, Cattafi, 2016).
- Moreover, the results of this service evaluation support the application of a group therapy programme in the treatment of anxiety for inpatient settings (Wolgensinger, 2015). The findings of this evaluation are further supported by a Meta-Analytic research (Kosters; Burlingame; Nachtigall & Stauss, 2006).
- An identified limitation of this evaluation was that this programme was conducted at the time of COVID-19 restrictions easing across the UK. A future direction of this research would be the implementation of this programme in larger sample sizes or different clinical populations.

Conclusion:

- Psychology department noticed changes in patients' Psychological wellbeing and negative emotional responses to COVID-19
- Integrative psychoeducation group programme developed to support anxiety reduction
- Post intervention scores indicate significant reduction in COVID-19 specific and generalised anxiety following 10-week group programme
- Future directions emphasised this integrative group programme with bigger sample sizes and different clinical populations