



Women's experience of meaningful change following domestic abuse: a longitudinal qualitative study nested in a trial of a specialist psychological advocacy intervention (the PATH trial)

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PATH Trial



PATH



A pragmatic randomised controlled trial of a psychological intervention delivered to women by Specialist Psychological Advocates (SPAs) in two domestic violence agencies in the UK

Significant and clinically relevant difference between groups at one year for psychological distress (CORE-OM) and depression (PHQ9)

Expression
of anger and
other
emotions

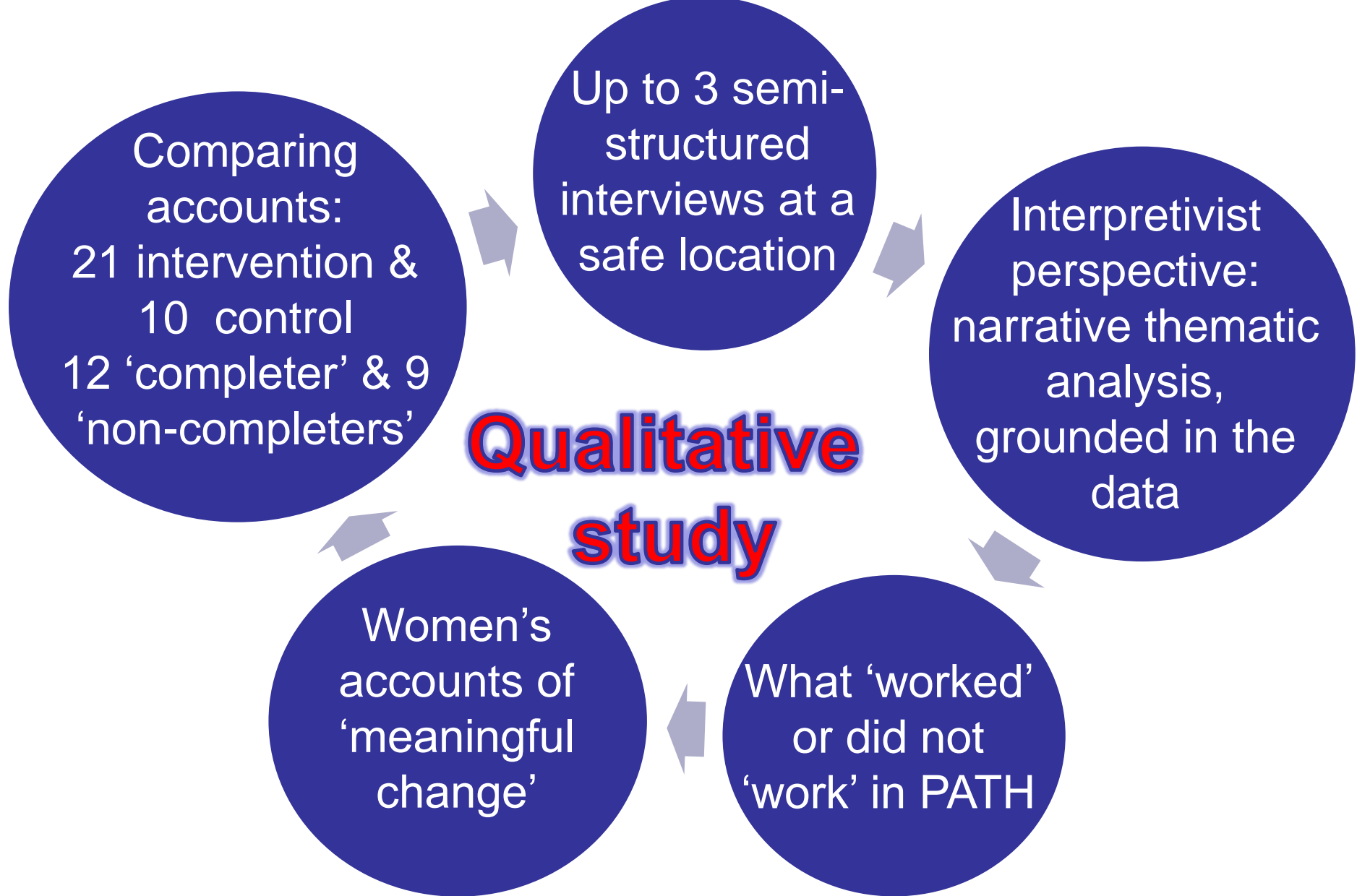
Hand-outs,
homework,
qu'aies,
exercises

Writing
thoughts and
feelings in a
letter, diary,
putting them
in a box

PATH Intervention **[10 sessions]**

Self-nurture

Empty
chair work,
role play




Filled a gap in the availability of psychological – emotional support, highlighted as a significant lack in usual advocacy group

Importance of delivery by DVA specialist advocates with a specific focus on DVA in tandem with practical support



PATH Intervention
Women's narratives



Evidence of integration
into life at one year

Benefits of PATH

Relationship with SPA

- Trusted friend but confidential
- Really understood DVA
- Challenging ingrained automatic responses eg: self-blame
 - Modelling



Educational and cognitive

- Learning about DVA
- PATH techniques and choices

Emotional

- First disclosure of current and historic abuse
 - Exploring long-repressed emotions
 - Intense and emotionally painful but worth it



PATH completer (2nd Interview)

'A (advocate) is brilliant, she's absolutely brilliant, I can talk about I can talk about stuff and it's okay.....'

'You feel like you've done something wrong, that's why he hurt me because I did something really bad, so therefore I must be a bad person in some way. The realisation of actually you're not bad, it wasn't your fault it happened. It's like to just come to that point ... we've had quite a lot of intense sessions and stuff, um, but to get to that point where you feel good about yourself is just amazing'



More resilient,
improved
concentration,
better sleep

More able to
express
emotions >
suppression,
alcohol

Better
communication
and improved
relationships
with family

More
comfortable
talking about
themselves >
prioritising
others

Markers of Change

Practising new
behaviours eg:
not answering
texts from
perpetrator

Use of
handouts,
techniques,
recommending
to others

Increased
confidence to
go out into the
world socially
or return to
work

Reasons for stopping PATH

Emotional

- Too overwhelming, feeling too vulnerable
- Too many other issues to cope with
- Lack of support between sessions



Psychological

- Desire to move on
- Desire to focus on the future NOT the past

Lack of continuity of SPA

- Maternity leave, sickness, changing jobs
- Moving house, loss of mobile phone
- Poor communication

Non-completer (2nd interview)

'I found it really traumatic, really hard to deal with... I found it very erm, depressing, I didn't find it uplifting, I found it a real downer... I know that some people really like to dwell and talk about what's made them sad. I like to talk about it, get it done, shut the envelope, goodbye, post it, gone.'



Mediating Factors for positive adherence and outcomes from PATH

Situation



Psychology



Service

- Exposure to abuse
- Demographic: Age, parenting status

- Psycho-social 'readiness'
- Preferred level of engagement

- Assessment / Tailoring / optimum no. of sessions
- Continuity of advocate

Ending sessions

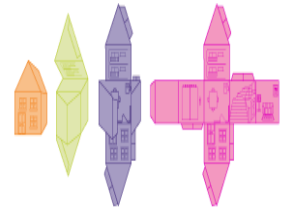


‘She said to me, um, we’re going to say goodbye to each other ... think about something that you’d like to bring to me and I’m going to bring something to you... So, um, I brought her, I brought a big bar of chocolate and some Red Bull ... she said to me “Okay” so I said “well, the chocolate is for the feel good and the Red Bull is because you’ve given me back energy, I’ve got myself back”. So for me, that was it, what the sessions gave me ... it was good, I bought her a couple of cans of Red Bull and a big bar of chocolate’



🌟 PATH Team (funded by NIHR 'PROVIDE' programme grant)

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