You’re Not Alone: An Evaluation of the Mental Health Outcomes of Therapy Groups for Abused Women

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• The abuse of women by intimate partners is considered an international crisis.
• In Canada, the General Social Survey on Victimization (AuCoin, 2005) estimated that 7% of Canadian women were victimized by an intimate partner in past 5 years.
  – 27% were beaten, 25% choked, 44% were injured, 13% sought medical help.
  – 34% of abused women feared for their lives.

Since 1986, the Calgary Counselling Centre has offered the “You’re Not Alone” therapy group.
• The groups are informed by a narrative Australian therapist Alan Jenkins (1991) and Allan Wade’s theories of resistance to violence (Wade, 1997).

Group Goals
• Recognize & understand abuse dynamics;
• Take responsibility for her choices;
• Start to trust her decision-making skills;
• Gain confidence in her ability to form healthy, abuse-free relationships.

• Michael A. Rothery, PhD research team member
• Thanks to the You’re Not Alone group leaders and Calgary Counselling Centre research staff.
• Thanks to the You’re Not Alone group members.
This presentation describes the group format, the demographic characteristics of 397 women; 214 who completed group & a comparison of 165 who dropped out.

How did the 214 group members fare at posttest as compared to pretest?

Groups are conducted for 14-weeks totaling 30 hours, weekly 2-hour sessions (first and last are 3-hour)

Groups typically 6 to 12 women

A female-male team facilitates the groups.

The groups have both an unstructured psychotherapeutic & a structured psycho-educational component.

While a group “manual” is available, the leaders have the flexibility to shift topics given the need.

Topics include:
- Understanding male violence towards women
- Family of origin work
- Identifying future ideal relationships & red flags

Research Design

The study employs a two-group comparison (completers versus non-completers) and one-group pre-test, post-test design.

As with most research conducted in the community, it was not feasible to include a comparison group.

The measures reflect the objectives of the You’re Not Alone program. They include:

Pretest Only
- Abuse of Partner Scales: Physical and Non-physical (Hudson, 1992)
- Partner Abuse Scales: Physical and Non-Physical (Hudson, 1992)
- The Trauma Symptom Checklist-40 (Kraus & Brians, 1992)

Pretest/Posttest
- Outcome Questionnaire (OQ-45.2) (Lambert et al., 1996)
- Rosenberg Self-Esteem
- Index of Clinical Stress (Hudson, 1992)
- Generalized Contentment Scale (Hudson, 1992)

Research Participants

379 women referred from 1995 to the present.

Age: 37.5 years (range of 18 to 65)

Partner’s age: 39.9 years (range of 19 to 68)

Relationship length: 10.1 years (range .33 to 45)

Average income: Only 9.4% had an income of higher than $35,000 per year.

First Language: English 97.4%

The majority of the women (79.8%) had children: most had one or two (45.4%):
- 12.7% had only adult offspring
Referral Sources/Marital Status

- Counsellors/medical: 45.7%
- Self-referred/sent by family or friends: 43.5%
- Legal sources: 5.6%
- Child welfare: 5.4%
- Marital status at start of group:
  - Separated/Divorced: 111 (45.5%)
  - Married: 57 (23.4%)
  - Single/Widowed: 53 (21.7%)
  - Common-law: 34 (9.4%)

Previous Counselling:

- 220 (91.3%)
  - Psychiatric history (N=49): 29.4%
    - Depression/Suicidal ideation: 46.4%
    - Childhood Sexual Abuse: 14.3%
    - Substance/sexual addiction: 10.7%
    - Coping with divorce: 7.1%
    - Other: 21.5%
  - Medical Problems: 29.6%
  - Abuse in Family of Origin: 149 (62.6%)
  - Police Intervention: 92 (38.5%)
  - Legal Orders: 77 (32%)

Completers vs. Non-Completers

- Answering the posttest used to determine group completion (an under-estimate).
- 214 (56.5%) completed the posttest.
- Demographic differences between completers and non-completers:
  - Income: women with higher income were more likely to complete than women with lower incomes. Pearson's Chi^2 = 16.9, p = .000. Cramer's V = .28
  - Having a psychiatric history: Chi^2 = 4.9, p = .03. phi = .15

Scores at Pretest

- Of the measures with clinical cut-offs, before the group the women self-reported scores that fell in the clinical range in: depression and OQ-45.
- TSCL-40 scores: No clinical cut-off for scale, but compared to norm groups, scores more dysfunctional.

Pretest/Posttest Results

All were statistically improved. The OQ-45 and Depression scales moved to below the clinical cutoffs.
Discussion

The women who completed YNA made substantial improvements in all mental health symptoms.

That the two subscales with clinical cut-off scores both also moved from the clinical to the non-clinical range is especially important.

The women who completed group had generally more functioning scores than those who did not. This suggests finding better ways to engage women ensuring they are ready for group.

The group completion rate of 56% is disappointing but with high rates of PTSD symptoms at the start of the YNA program, perhaps not surprising.

In a review of 55 outcomes studies on interventions for PTSD, dropout rates were at about 50% (Schorr, 2000).

Agency could address trauma more directly before group or women could continue contact with their primary therapist during the group.

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