

Strategies for Coping with Sexual Trauma: piloting a psycho-educational group course

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Background

- NICE Guidance (2005) for PTSD treatment states 'sufferers receive information about common reactions to traumatic events, including the symptoms of PTSD'
- Saint Mary's SARC offers psycho-education in trauma responses and coping strategies through individual counselling, and wished to increase client choice through offering a group format
- Pre-trial therapy guidance advises against the description of an assault in order to preserve evidence for criminal investigations
- A structured, manualised course was developed and piloted by the authors for use with clients for whom the criminal justice process is ongoing
- Protocols were devised to minimise the risk of clients making disclosures or discussing evidence

'It showed how I can go from stressed to calm quickly'

Demographics	
Gender	100% Female
Age	32-41 (range) 34 (ave.)
Life stage assault took place	>18 (80%) <18 (20%)
Length of time since assault	>12 months ago (80%) <12 months ago (20%)

Method

- The intervention was piloted to 9 participants . 5 of these attended all four 1.5 hour sessions.
- Standardised measures (CORE-10 and IES-R) were administered pre and post intervention.
- Participants evaluated the course through open questions enabling free text responses.
- This work formed part of a service evaluation.

I feel less scared and anxious, I feel I can concentrate on my tasks better, I'm sad it (the course) has come to an end'

Findings

- Participants experienced a reliable improvement approaching clinical significance in both psychological distress (Core-10) and in trauma symptoms (IES-R).

Measure	Pre-intervention score (ave.)	Post-intervention score (ave.)
Core-10	25	15
IES-R	58	39

Course content

Clients repeated practice in mindfulness, guided safe place visualisation, diaphragmatic breathing, muscular tension and relaxation, grounding exercises and sleep hygiene.

Experience of completing evaluation forms

- All participants preferred Core-10, but the majority did not mind doing both questionnaires (n=4)
- Two clients said they didn't understand a couple of the IES-R questions
- Majority of participants (n=4) said they did not mind completing the evaluation forms.

'I am starting to trust myself and others around me. Most of all I feel hopeful'

Key points

- Participants experienced reduced levels of psychological distress and trauma symptoms
- The intervention complies with pre-trial therapy guidance
- A successful pilot; intervention will be re-run with larger participant numbers and will include longer follow up to assess impact over time