

Measuring outcomes for TC clients: Higher Ground Drug Rehabilitation Trust

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper presents analysis of clinical outcome data collected as part of an 18-week, abstinence-based residential TC program, Higher Ground Drug Rehabilitation Trust (Higher Ground) in New Zealand. Lessons and implications for routine collection of clinical outcome data are identified.

Methods: Higher Ground collects longitudinal data on all consenting clients using a battery of validated psychometric tools, with repeated measures at up to nine points in time from first presentation through to 12-month post discharge follow up. Data analysis covered clients who entered Higher Ground between 1 July 2012 and 2 June 2015 (N=524).

Findings: Clients presented with histories of addiction which often had significant negative associations with their physical and psychological health, their relationships, work, accommodation and criminal behavior. By the time they exited the program, clinically and statistically significant improvements were seen across multiple indicators including: substance use and abstinence; symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety and stress; and a range of social indicators.

Limitations: Attrition in follow up research is a significant challenge, with people completing the TC program being more likely to participate than those who do not. This limits generalisability in post-discharge data. There was no control group, making causal attribution a challenge. Identifying suitable benchmarks from the literature is challenging because of the variety of outcome measures and research methodologies used.

Value: This study demonstrates the value, and practical challenges, of collecting high quality outcome data in a therapeutic community (TC) setting.

Data analysis

The following table, referred to in the article, presents a sample of indicators showing changes over time for selected ADOM and DASS measures.

Table 1: General Linear Model Testing for the Main effect of time only for ADOM & DASS measures

	Outcome Measures	First presentation	Admission	3 months	6 months	9 months	12 months	Significant Change over time by Independent Variable
	N % retrieved at follow up	360	519	249 48.0%	194 37.4%	140 26.9%	111 21.4%	
Use in last 28 days	Mean (& standard deviation) days of substance use	14.1 (10.6)	5.9 (8.5)	2.1 (6.1)	2.7 (6.7)	2.2 (6.3)	2.1 (5.8)	F(5,1557)=70.555, p<.001
	Significance (Fixed Effects Coefficients)	t=16.1, p<.001	t=5.7, p<.001	t=-0.2, p=.853	t=-0.9, p=.346	t=-0.6, p=.560	Ref	
	Proportion of respondents abstinent from any substance	19%	44%	82%	77%	79%	80%	F(5,1227)=51.001, p<.001
	Significance (Fixed Effects Coefficients)	t=10.8, p<.001	t=6.8, p<.001	t=-0.9, p=.357	t=-0.8, p=.410	t=-0.6, p=.542	Ref	
DASS (Binned) DASS 0=normal 1=mild 2=moderate 3=severe 4=extremely severe	Depression	3.7 (1.4)	2.6 (1.5)	1.7 (1.2)	1.7 (1.3)	1.7 (1.2)	1.4 (1)	F(8,2087)=76.408, p<.001
	Significance (Fixed Effects Coefficients)	t=19.3, p<.001	t=10.4, p<.001	t=2.9, p=.004	t=3.0, p=.003	t=2.4, p=.016	Ref	
	Anxiety	3.7 (1.6)	2.7 (1.6)	1.7 (1.2)	1.7 (1.2)	1.7 (1.2)	1.7 (1.2)	F(8,2164)=62.016, p<.001
	Significance (Fixed Effects Coefficients)	t=15.1, p<.001	t=7.9, p<.001	t=0.3, p=.733	t=-0.2, p=.867	t=0.1, p=.956	Ref	
	Stress	3.2 (1.4)	2.5 (1.4)	1.6 (1.1)	1.6 (1.1)	1.6 (1.1)	1.6 (1)	F(8,2248)=51.552, p<.001
	Significance (Fixed Effects Coefficients)	t=13.9, p<.001	t=8.4, p<.001	t=1.2, p=.218	t=0.8, p=.447	t=1.1, p=.256	Ref	

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