

Health promotion through expressive body work in group: intervention on alexithymia and anxiety

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Aims

The aim of this study was to analyse the importance of group intervention, using expressive and body techniques, on the promotion of health.

Health promotion is considered here as maintaining/decreasing levels of anxiety and increasing identification and expression of emotions (reducing alexithymia), reinforcing the latter characteristics

Introduction

Relevant literature shows the positive effect of group intervention in many areas of health, such as eating disorders, cardiac rehabilitation, cancer recovery and psychiatric disorders.

Furthermore, group intervention, applied to body work and general expressive techniques, tend to show very positive results on the self reported state of participants.

Interventions using expressive group work tend to have particularly positive results in the expression of emotions and general well being, contributing to a better health perception.

Methods

The program consisted of 10 weekly sessions carried out with 18 employees, aged between 20-40, from a company in Barcelona, selected as representative sample of a healthy population. Two groups of 9 people were created and the intervention was exactly the same in both of them.

The 90-minute sessions focused on movement, verbal and non verbal expression, shared sensorial experiences, relaxation methods and other general expressive techniques. Each session was followed by a group discussion.

Anxiety and Alexithymia, measured by TAS-20 (Toronto Alexithymia Scale) and STAI (State Trait Anxiety Scale) were assessed before and after the intervention.

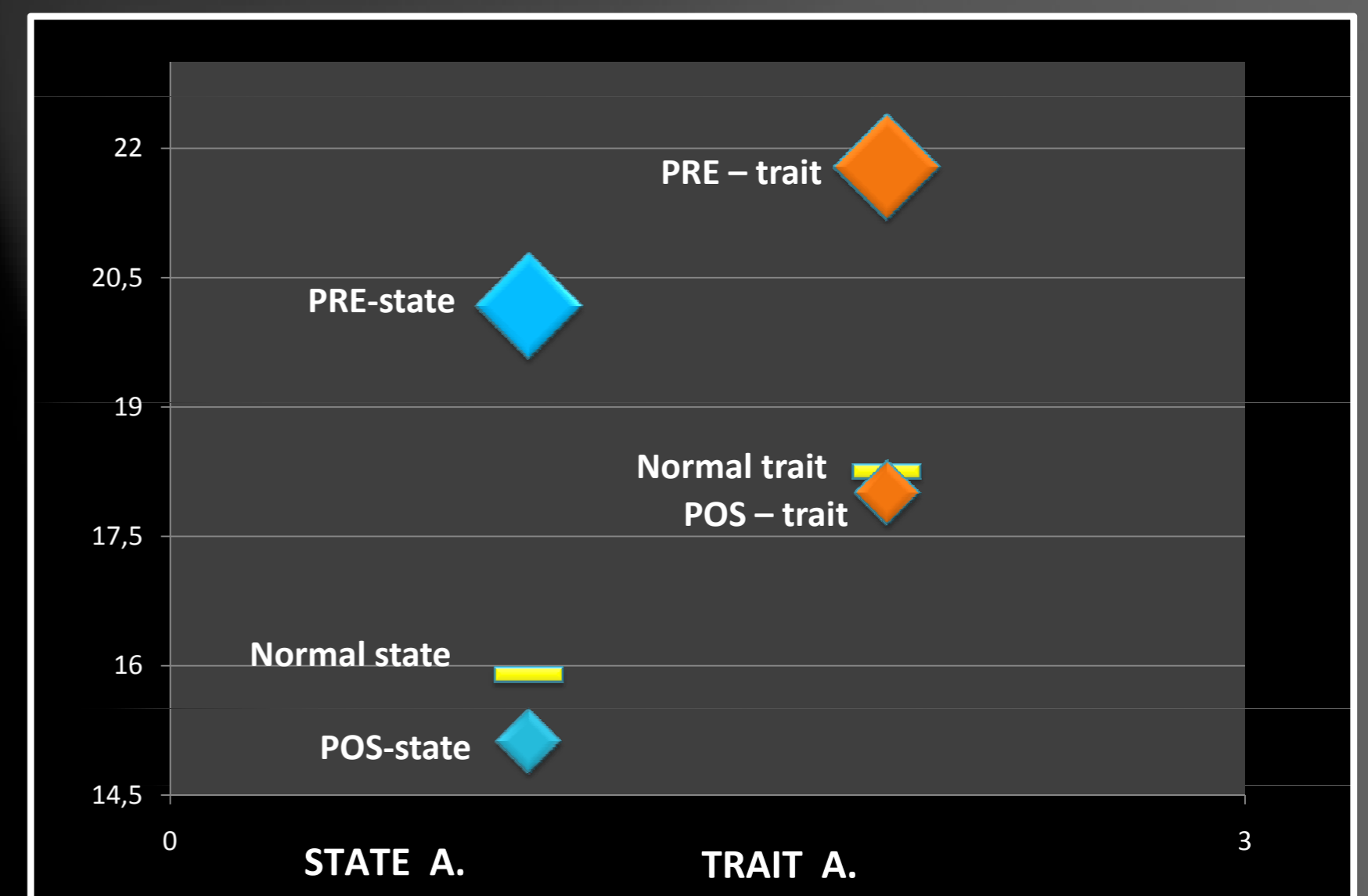
Key Results

Results showed a decrease in the state and trait anxiety levels. Though not a significant decrease, participants's levels changed from one level considered above average by the literature in this area, to a level below average.

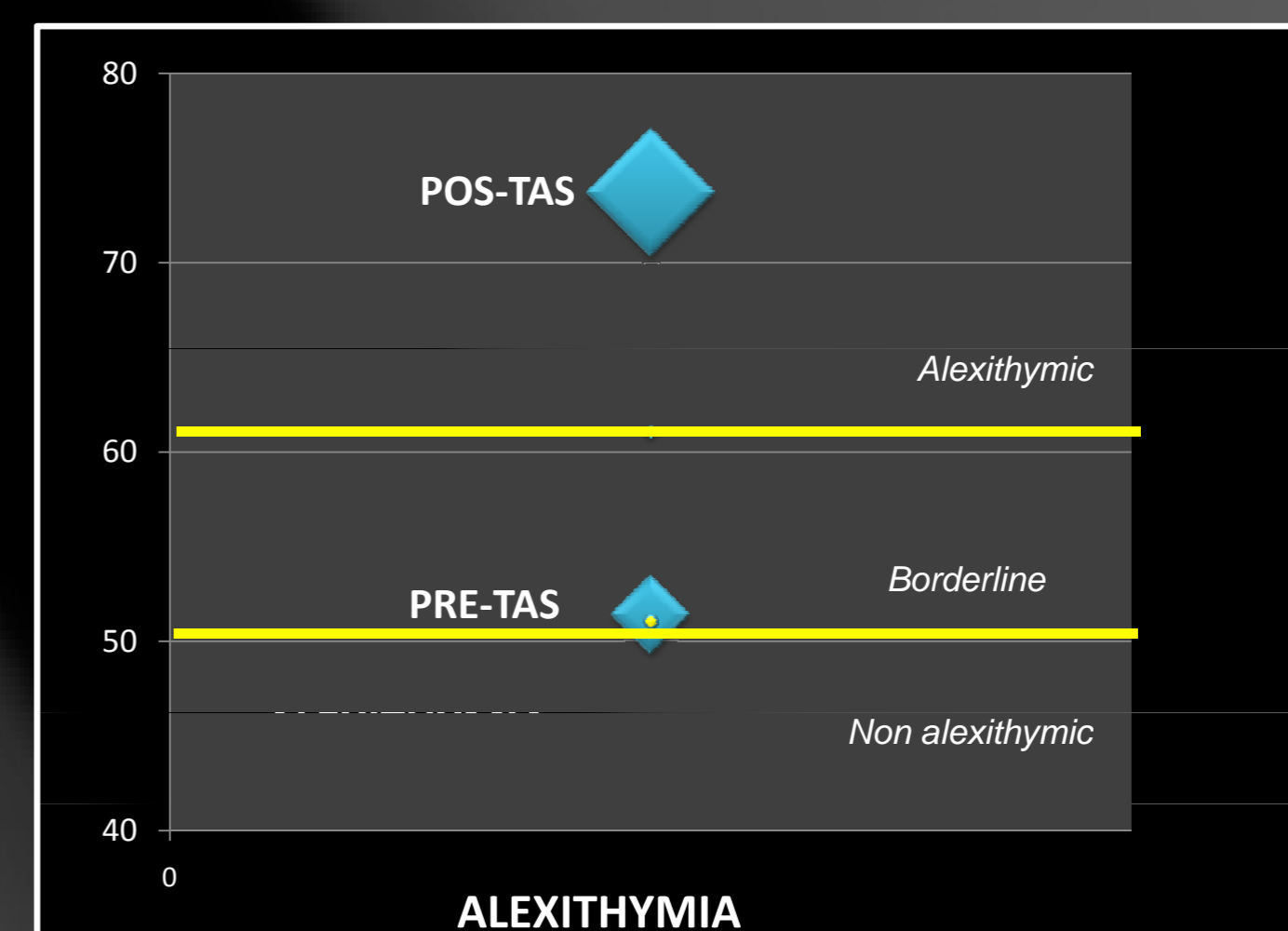
The opposite happens with alexithymia, showing a significant increase ($p < 0,001$) between the pre and pos intervention results.

It can be said that the intervention had the expected positive results on anxiety levels and the contrary effect on the ability to express and identify emotions (alexithymia).

STATE-TRAIT RESULTS IN PRE AND POS INTERVENTION



ALEXITHYMIA RESULTS IN PRE AND POS INTERVENTION



Discussion

Group intervention using body and expression techniques appears to reduce state and trait anxiety perception. As a result, it can be expected a potential for this kind of intervention to have positive health effects on the standard population.

On the other hand, alexithymia levels increased, suggesting that participants decreased their ability to express and identify emotions.

This can be explained with the activity itself: by experiencing activities that demand a deeper expression and analysis of emotions, participants became more conscious of its difficulty, reporting it on final evaluations.

In addition, because the participants were colleagues, they tended to hide their emotions from each other, which could also have inhibited self expression.

It should also be mentioned that this kind of intervention, using body and expressive methods, may need more time to reveal its effects. Therefore a longer intervention period would be recommended in future studies.

To summarise, it can be concluded that this is a field of study where much more work can be done to establish the benefits of expressive body work in groups and on society's health in general.