

Healing Through Helping



How Acts of Kindness and Volunteering can Promote Social Well-Being

David Cregg, Ph.D.

Betsy Davis Witt, Ph.D.

Patrick Smith, Ph.D.

South Texas Veterans

Health Care System

- World Health Organization, 1946: “Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and ***social well-being***, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”

CBT & Social Functioning

- Hofmann et al, 2014 meta-analysis on CBT for anxiety disorders
- Large ES for anxiety symptoms: **$g = 0.95$, 95% CI [0.80 – 1.10]**
- Small ES for social well-being: **$g = 0.24$, 95% CI [0.15 – 0.32]**

**Need for alternative
intervention?**

- **Acts of kindness** - actions that benefit others or make others happy, typically at some cost to oneself

Cregg & Cheavens, 2021

- N = 122 pts. with mild-to-severe depression symptoms
- Randomly assigned to 5-week intervention:
 - Acts of kindness (n = 40)
 - Social activities (n = 41)
 - Thought records (n = 41)

Results Summary

- Acts of kindness superior for DASS symptoms, life satisfaction
- Only acts of kindness showed significant improvement for **social connection**

Extending findings to Veterans with an SMI diagnosis

Healing Through Helping PRRC Group

- 8-session group based on acts of kindness and volunteerism
- Recruited Veterans with an SMI in the PRRC clinic

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Image Source: <https://www.naavets.org/>

Group Workbook

Stepping Stones – Psychosocial Rehabilitation & Recovery Center
South Texas Veterans Health Care System

Developed for the South Texas Veterans Health Care System by David Cregg, Ph.D.,
Betsy Davis, Ph.D., & Patrick Smith, Ph.D.

Based on material from Cregg, D. R., & Cheavens, J. S. (2021). *Healing through helping: An experimental investigation of kindness, social activities, and reappraisal as well-being interventions* [Manuscript in preparation].

Key Principles of Group

- All people have potential to make positive contributions
 - “No matter who you are, no matter what the past has held, you can make a profound impact on other people.”
- Not a contest – people differ in time & resources to help others
- Benefits to self de-emphasized. Focus shifted to others
 - EX: “Feeling good or happy may or may not happen, but you can be sure of impacting others’ lives in a positive way.”

Group Structure

Session 1: Welcome & Instructions for Acts of Kindness

Sessions 2 – 4: Performing Acts of Kindness


*Session 5 (optional): Benefits of Volunteering & Exploring Ideas

*Session 6 (optional): Making a Volunteer Action Plan

*Session 7 (optional): Reflecting on Experiences & Next Steps

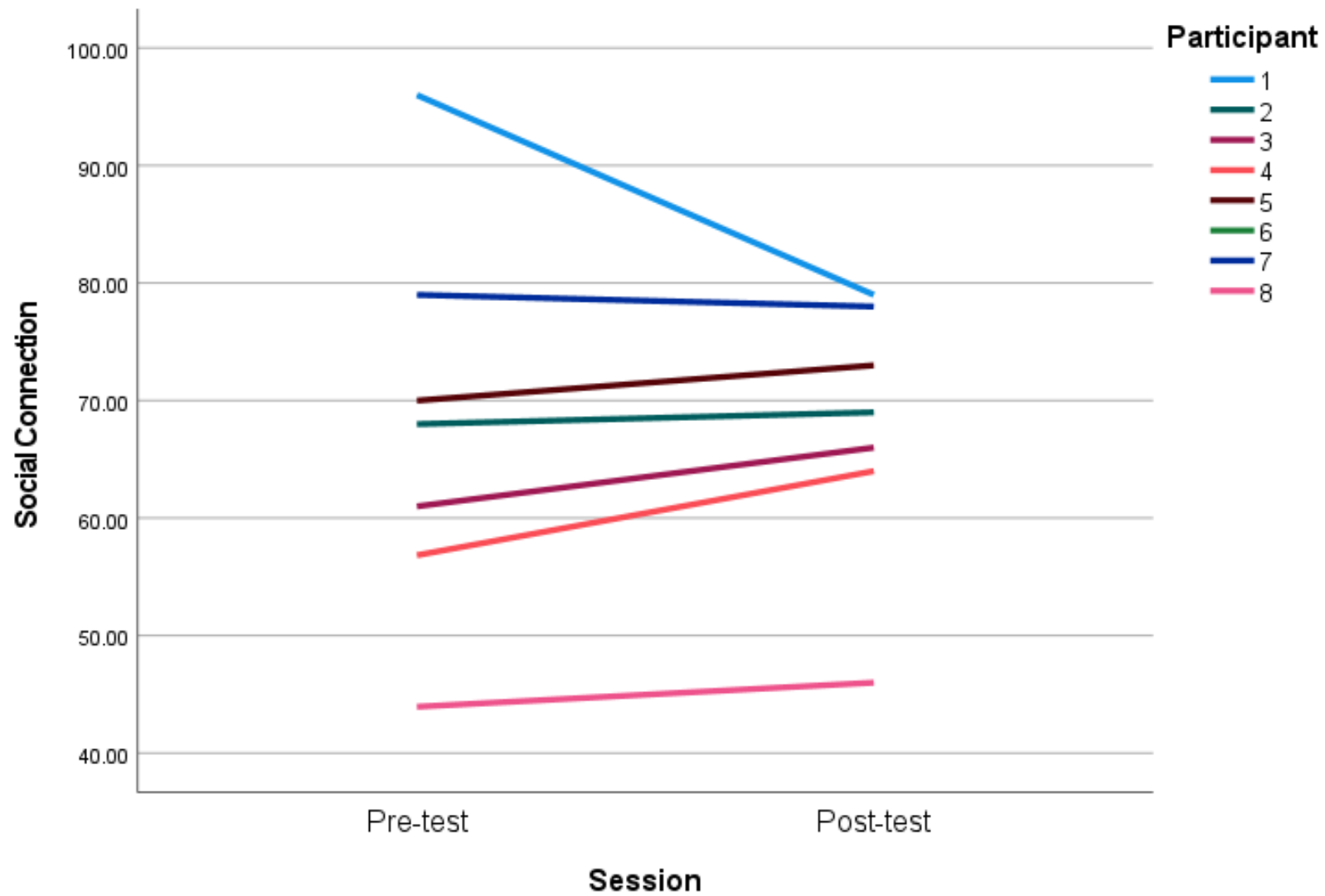
Session 8: Follow-up Discussion (3 weeks after Session 7)

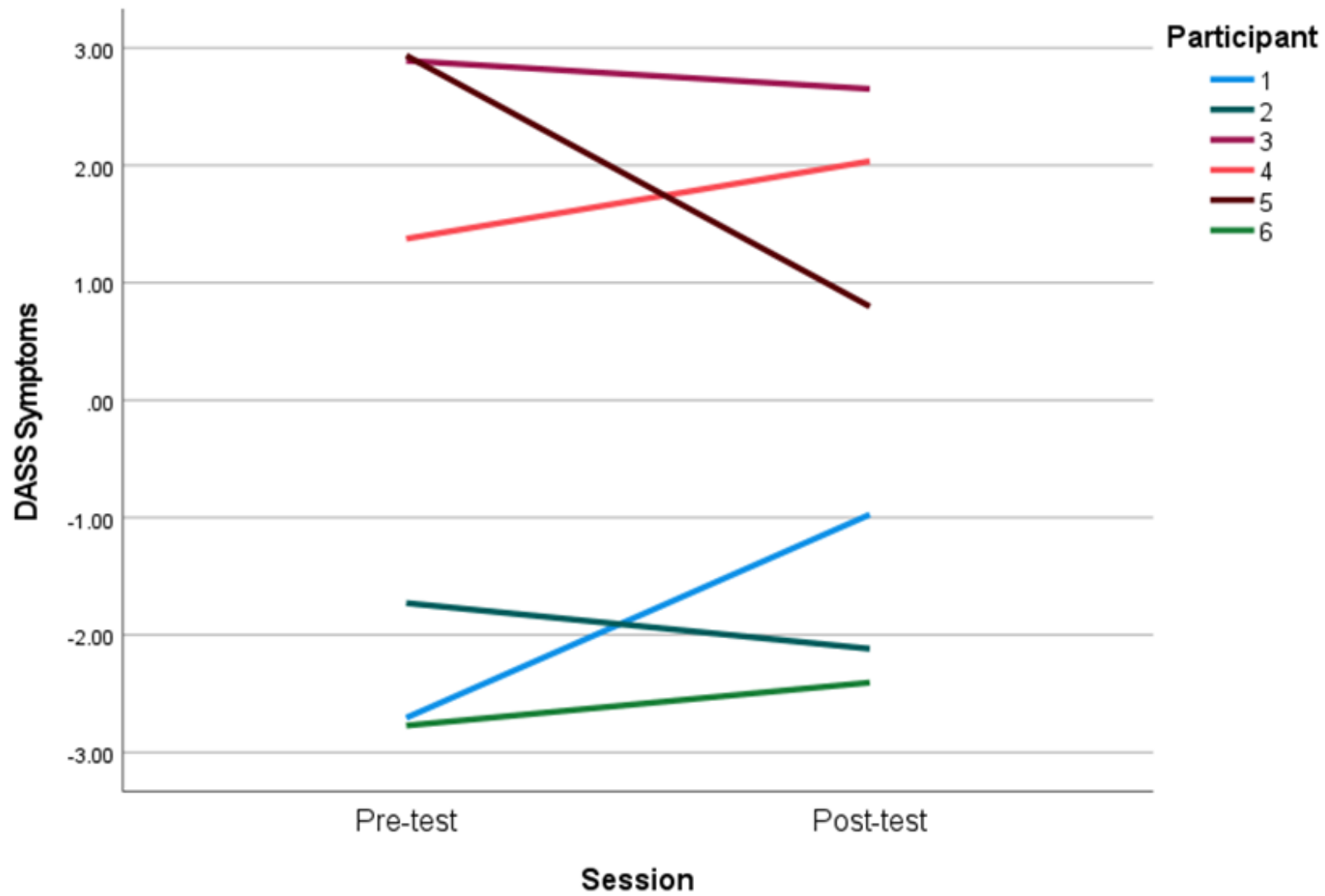
*Note: Sessions 5 – 7 are optional (but highly encouraged!) for individuals who are interested in trying out a volunteer activity.



Results

- All participants reported engagement in acts of kindness
 - EX: homeless outreach, baking food, assisting with transportation, texting words of encouragement
- Engagement in volunteering (e.g., community gardening, senior center)
- Qualitative reports that group reduced depression, enhanced sense of meaning





Thank You!

- Preceptor: Dr. Allyson Ruha
- Collaborators: Drs. Betsy Davis Witt & Patrick Smith
- Our Veterans!

Email: david.cregg@va.gov