Tapping into the under-utilised resource:
Working with parents to improve youth AOD treatment outcomes

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Introduction

Sydney Drug Education and Counselling Centre (SDECC) adopts an innovative family-focused approach to treatment for young people with substance use disorders and co-occurring mental health issues, and provides intensive support for parents. SDECC's unique model of service delivery, outlined in the Volkov & Watson (2015) paper "Planting seeds of change in the drug affected family", provides separate treatment for young people and parents/carers. SDECC conceptualises treatment through the lenses of drug and alcohol, mental health, family systems and trauma informed practice.

Method

- Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS21) and Severity of Dependence (SDS) scores were examined for 121 young people (aged between 14-25 years) who attended 10 or more SDECC individual drug counselling sessions between April, 2014 and July, 2019.
- Participants were separated into two groups: 77 young people whose parents/carers did not engage in SDECC's parenting group and 44 young people whose parents/carers did engage.
- A thematic analysis of qualitative data from nine parents/carers attending parenting group was also completed.

Participants

77 young people **without** parents/carers in treatment

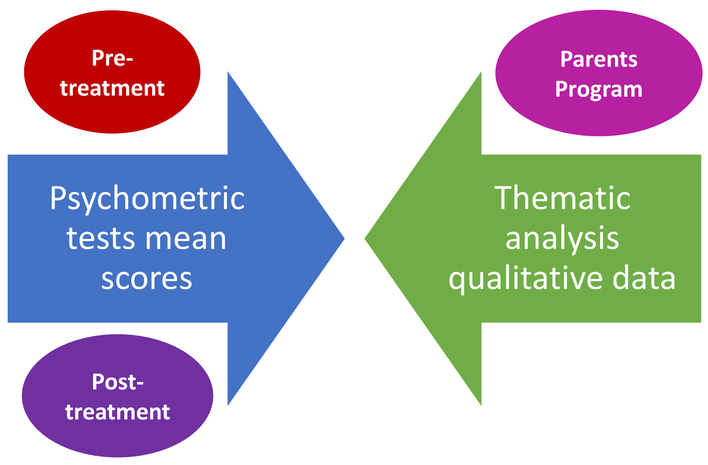
248 parents

44 young people **with** parents/carers in treatment

Measurement Tools

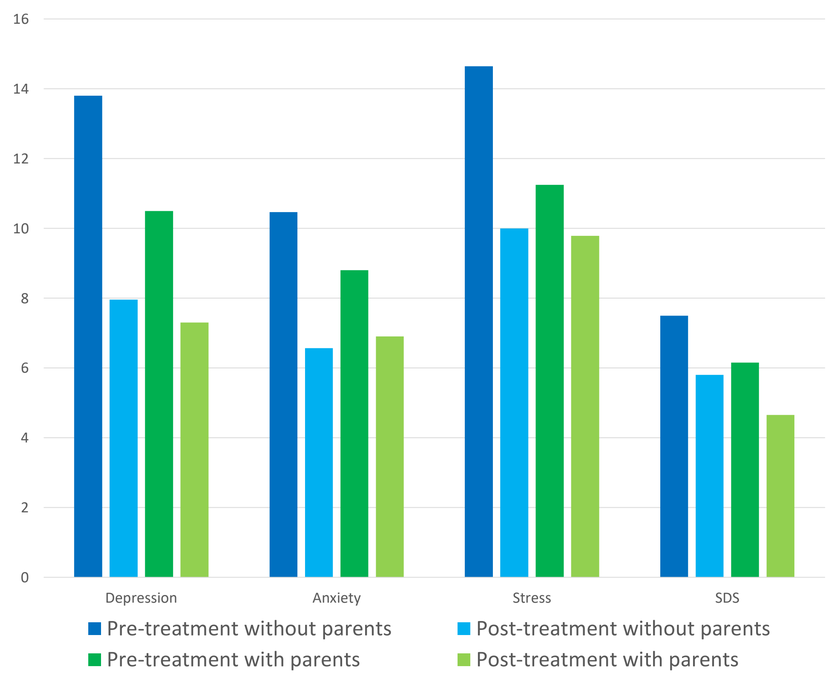
Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS21) + Severity of Dependence Scale (SDS)

Data Collection

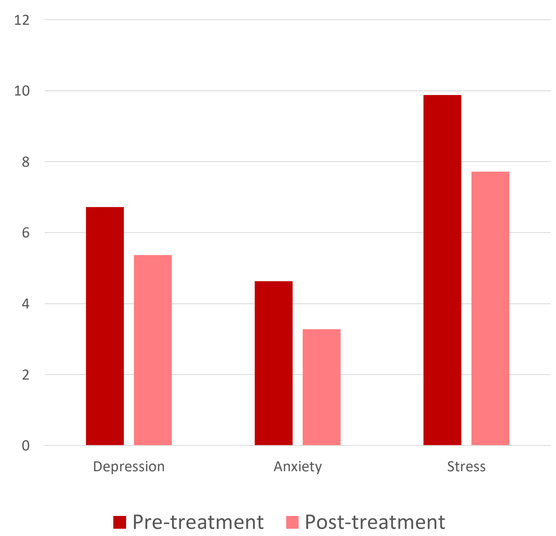


Results

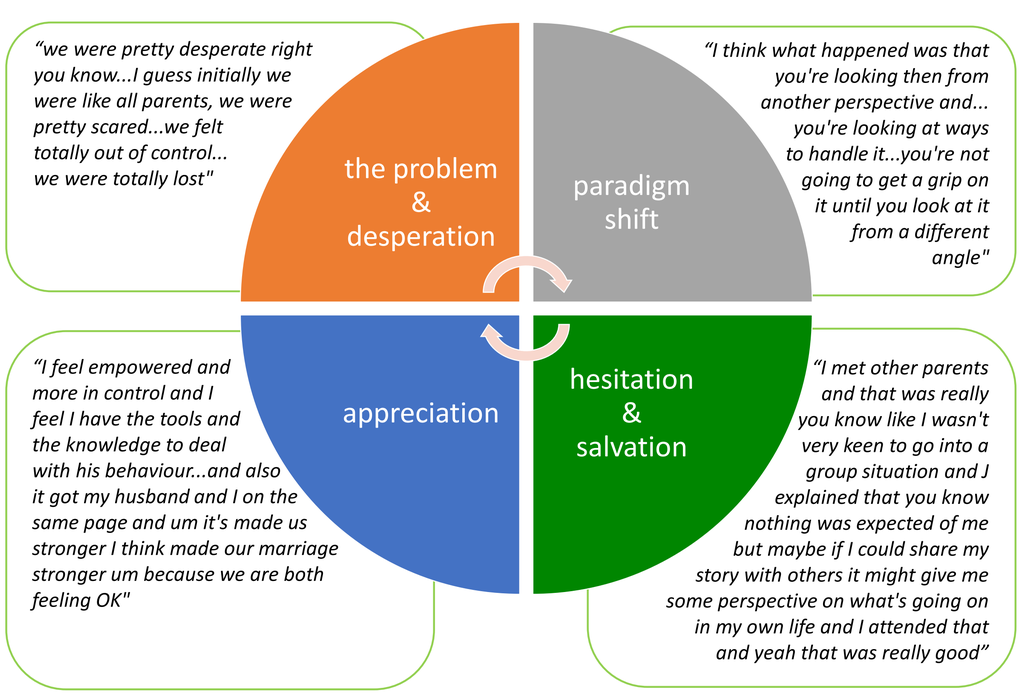
DASS21 & SDS Scores - Young People



DASS21 Scores - Parents/Carers



Thematic Analysis – Parents/Carers



Discussion

Downward trends suggest that counselling treatment relieves psychological distress and reduces psychological dependence for both groups of young people. The group of young people whose parents/carers attended the parent group reported pre and post-treatment scores that were lower for symptoms of depression and stress, and psychological dependence on a substance than the group whose parents/carers did not attend the parenting group. Lower scores indicate lower levels of psychological distress and dependence on a drug.

DASS21 scores and thematic analysis for parents/carers also indicate that SDECC's model of supporting parents may provide positive benefits to young people through improving psychological wellbeing of parents/carers and stabilisation of the family system.

SDECC is completing a literature review to identify benefits of treatment not currently measured, including family functioning and resilience.

References: Volkov, B., & Watson, S. (2015). *Planting seeds of change in the drug affected family. Retrieved from:* https://www.academia.edu/20178024/Planting_seeds_of_change_in_the_drug_affected_family_A_multidisciplinary_approach_working_with_young_people_and_SUD_

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