

Service evaluation of an emotional eating group intervention pilot for Adult Weight Management programme in the UK

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Introduction

Emotional eating is a prevalent concept among people living with obesity, and it is also related to some other mental health issues¹. Morelife UK provides weight management services across the UK and supports clients with individual therapy sessions to help them with their weight management journey. Group intervention is a valuable supportive environment for participants, with the benefits of learning new skills, gaining new perspectives, and being anonymous². Morelife provides a specialist programme to people living with complex obesity with a BMI>35. Health professionals refer clients to this programme.

Methods

Morelife clinicians (Psychologists, Dietitians) and therapists created the Emotional Eating Pilot Programme consisting of 8 weekly sessions with 6-8 participants based on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and Mindfulness. Each session is 90 minutes to enable group discussion. The programme is offered to clients who are struggling with emotional eating and scoring high on PHQ and GAD-7 and is facilitated by a therapist.

Measurements

The questionnaires below are used to see the changes in emotional appetite, emotion regulation, depression and anxiety in participants.

The Emotional Appetite Questionnaire (EMAQ)

Has 22 items and focuses on positive and negative emotions. The EMAQ was shown to have construct validity, and emotional eating was significantly correlated with BMI³.

Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS 18)

Short form of DERS questionnaire to understand emotion-related constructs and treatment progress⁴.

Generalised Anxiety Disorder Assessment (GAD-7)

A self-reported questionnaire to screen the severity of generalised anxiety disorder includes 7 items⁵.

Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9)

A self-reported instrument to monitor the severity of depression and response to treatment⁶.

Results

This pilot had 5 cohorts and 21 completers in total. Analysis showed that the programme helped participants significantly reduce their positive (Z=-2.094, p<0.5) and negative (Z=-2.200, p<0.5) emotional appetite, reducing depression (Z=-2.658, p.0.5) and anxiety (Z=-2.360, p<0.5), emotion dysregulation scores (Z=-2.278, p<0.5). Clients were not required to be weighed, however those who reported their weights lose %3.7 of their body weight and an average of 9.15kg at the end of the programme.

Please see the table below for mean, standard deviation and within group test results.

Mean, standard deviation and within group test results.

Variable	Pre Group	Post Group	Within Groups Test
PHQ	12.10 (5.55)	7.58 (5.67)	Z=-2.658, p.0.5
GAD-7	10.42 (5.90)	6.89 (5.62)	Z=-2.360, p<0.5
DERS	51 (14.49)	42.38 (10.12)	Z=-2.278, p<0.5
EMAQ Positive	3.85 (1.71)	3.05 (1.67)	Z=-2.094, p<0.5
EMSQ Negative	6.52 (1.69)	5.58 (1.98)	Z=-2.200, p<0.5

Conclusion

This pilot programme outcomes show that the Emotional Eating Group programme is an efficient tool to help clients reduce their emotional eating significantly where, improving depression, anxiety and emotion regulation. The weight loss data is limited as the main intention was to focus on the psychological impacts of this programme. However, the current weight loss results of the study indicate that weight loss is a by product of this intervention.

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