

CARING FOR THE CARERS: SUPPORTING PARENTS AND PARTNERS OF THOSE WITH ALCOHOL OR OTHER DRUG DISORDERS

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Introduction: Alcohol and other drug (AOD) use disorders place considerable strains on family members and partners resulting in stress-related psychological symptoms.

Audience: Service providers.

Aims: To evaluate the changes in psychosocial measures of wellbeing among those using Holyoake's partner and parent "Seasons of Change" program.

Program: The program offers both individual and group sessions including sections on boundaries, communication, grief/loss, self-esteem, family dynamics, relationships and coping behaviours.

Method: Using a pre-post design, changes in wellbeing were assessed with; Kessler's K-10, the Personal Wellbeing Index, Lubben Social Network Scale, Robin's Global Self-Esteem measure and Kessler's days out of role due to AOD consumption by others. An independent researcher collected six-month outcomes by telephone.

Results: 65 partners or parents were recruited: 46 (71%) were female with a median age of 53 years (IQR 39-51). Participants received a median of 5.5 sessions (IQR 1-15). We followed-up 44 (68%) people at six months. Significant improvements were found between baseline and six months for mental health (K-10 mean 22.4 versus 16.9), wellbeing (mean 63.5 versus 76.3), self-esteem (4.2 versus 5.1) and days partially out of role (mean 4.0 versus 1.3 days). Non-significant changes were seen for other measures.

Discussions and Conclusions: Clinically important improvements were found, with mean K-10 classification falling from "high" (i.e. 22-29 points) to "moderate" (i.e. 16-21 points) levels and wellbeing improving to within the norm for Australian adults (73.4 – 76.4). The major stressors incurred by parents and partners of AOD consumers can be alleviated with a structured treatment program.

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