

**Online group therapy for
stress reduction technique
–
An Implementation Research
in a hospital setting**

Reut Ron & Anat Laronne

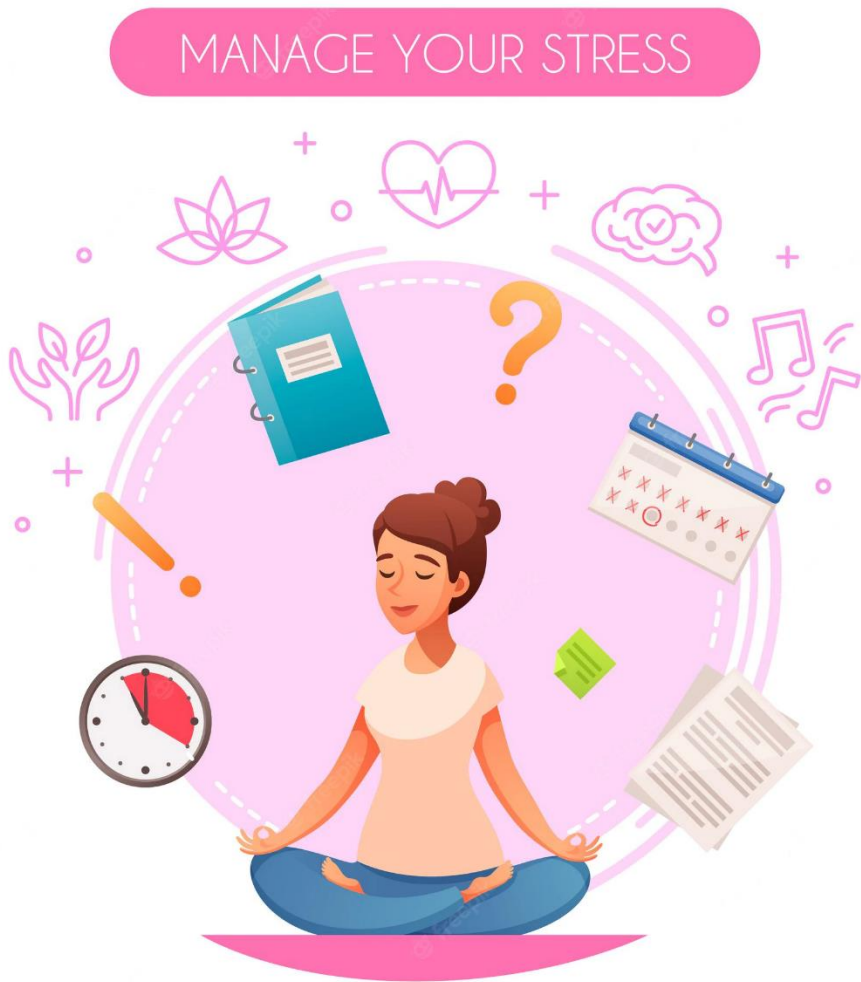


Assuta Medical Centers

- Israel's largest and leading private medical services network
- Comprising eleven clinics and hospitals across Israel
- Providing innovative surgeries and diagnostic procedures in all fields of medicine
- An HPH member since 2016



Background



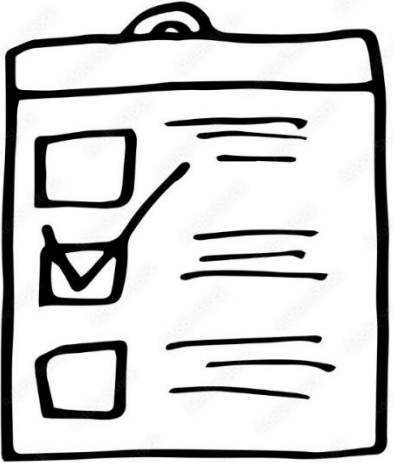
- Behavioral stress management (BSM) is a psychological treatment, found to improve mental health and improve health outcomes
- Online group therapy (OGT) is a relatively new modality for BSM, and its effectiveness is unknown

Background and Objectives

- For the last ten years, Assuta Medical Centers have been providing face-to-face psychological support services for chronic patients
- Group therapy has 4 sessions at weekly Intervals, to learn and practice progressive muscle relaxation, breathing therapies, and guided imagery
- The COVID-19 pandemic led to the diversion to online modality, and alongside this change, a mixed methods study was conducted

Methodology

A mixed-methods cohort study:



A – Patients

(03/2020 – 08/2021)

N = 77

An online questionnaire before and
after the intervention



B – Psychologists

N = 7

Group facilitators were interviewed
in two focus groups

Study population



52 patients in 13
oncology groups



19 patients in 5
IVF groups

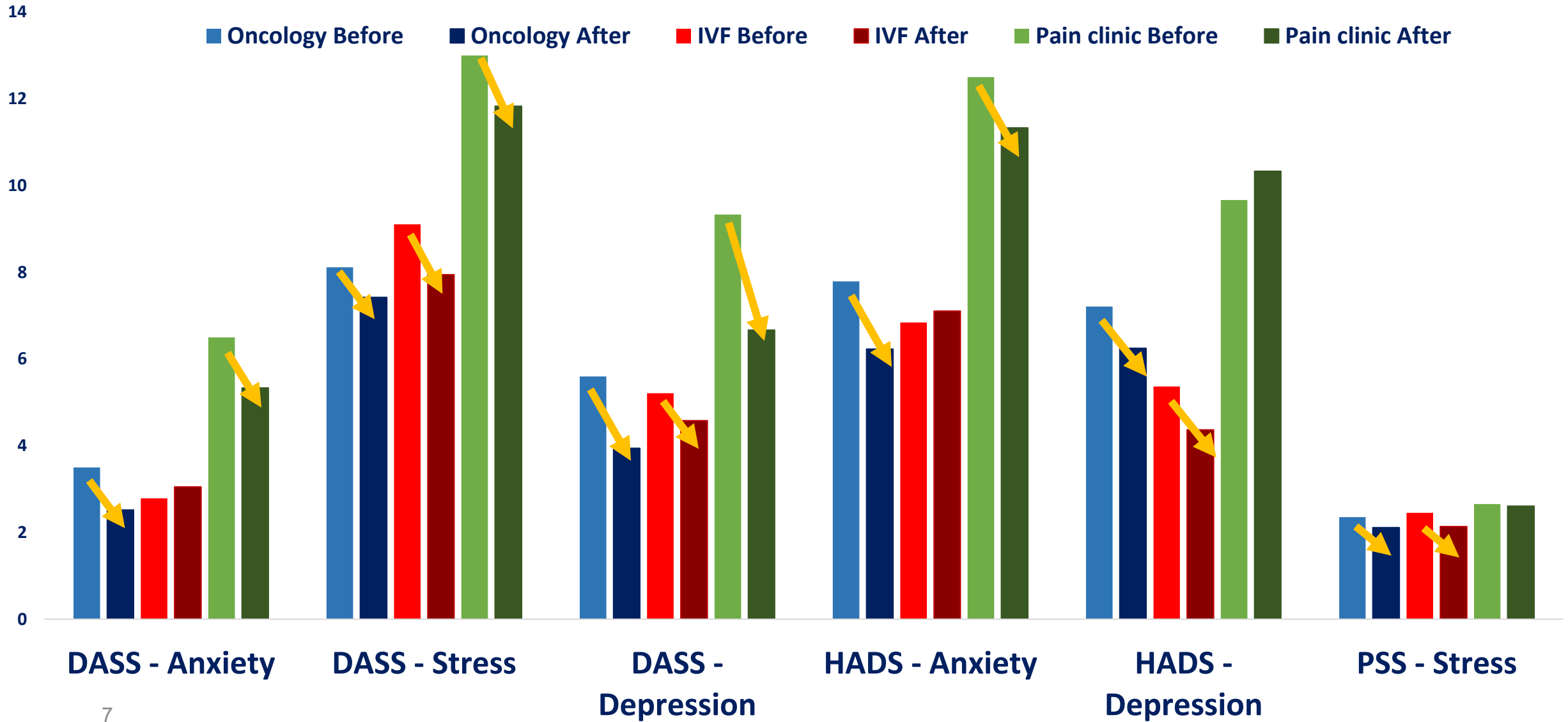


6 patients in 2
pain clinic groups

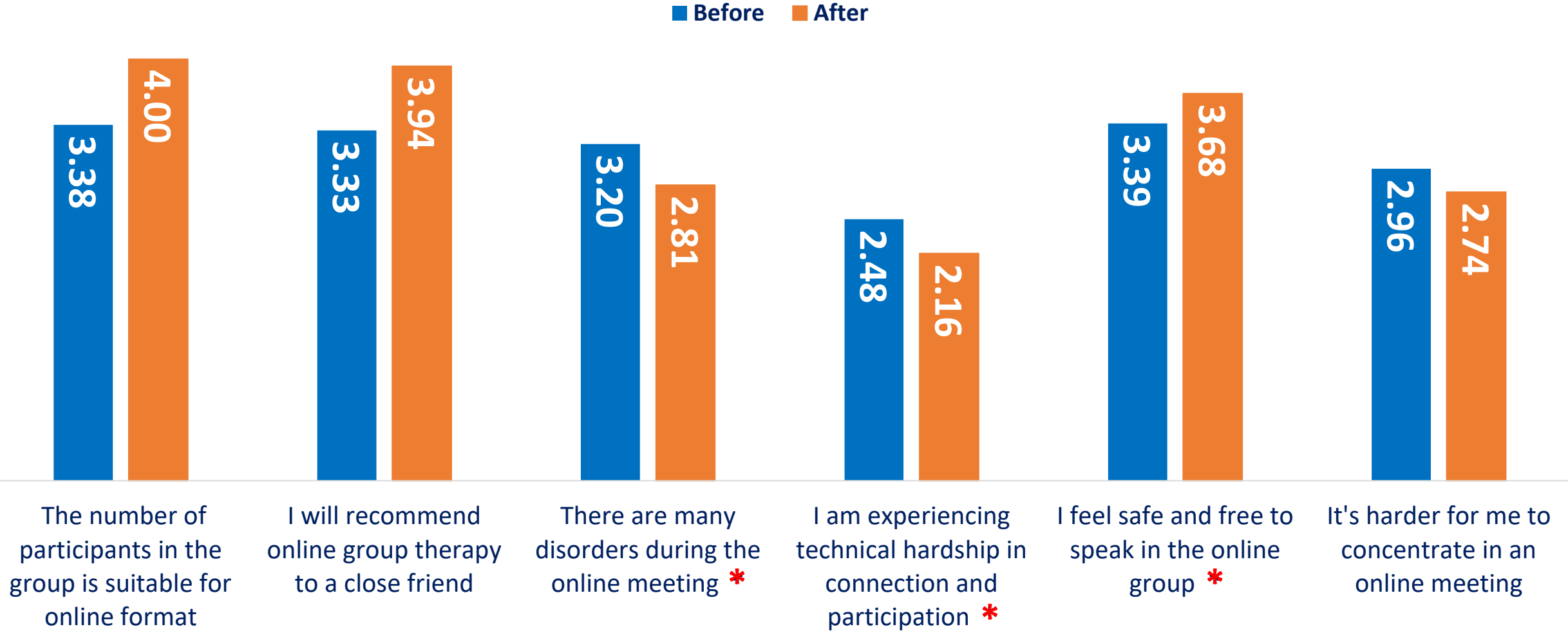
- Median age 47 years (27-83)
- 98.7% were women
- 69% lived with a spouse
- 63% worked full-time

Results

Average final score before and after the intervention



Patients' perceptions on OGT selected questions



Results - Psychologists' experience

Sense of alienation,
level of commitment
and dropout

Technological issues

Lack of physical
presence

Cultural issues

Required changes in
the content and
training mode

Required changes
in group's size

Setting issues

Increasing accessibility
to treatment

Practice the methods in
their natural home
environment

More exposure to
participants' facial
expressions

Conclusions

- ✓ Online BSM group interventions are **effective for reducing stress, anxiety and depression** for people suffering from medical conditions
- ✓ It contributes differently to **different populations**, and may require specific adjustments accordingly
- ✓ Participants' **positive attitudes** toward the online group therapy has been improved over time

Practical Considerations and Tips

- ✓ Prepare in advance – adapt the content of the meeting, the training aids and group size to the online platform
- ✓ Setting and cultural issues are important – Facilitators should dedicate time to clarify the setting challenges and participants' responsibility for privacy. Culture norms need to be acknowledged
- ✓ Digital literacy and technological skills may be improved by adding an extra pre-intervention meeting and adding a co-facilitator

