



The Advanced Breast Cancer Group: Helping to improve psychological wellbeing and reduce distress

Women who join the Group are asked to complete a comprehensive set of questionnaires, asking them about their recent experience of living with secondary breast cancer, when they first join and every six months thereafter. These questionnaires enquire about mood, social & family relationships, distress levels, financial hardship, quality of life & physical symptoms such as pain & fatigue. Individual's responses are combined to form an overall picture or snapshot of the group's physical, emotional and cognitive experience. Each year this data is analysed in order to track women's progress over time and to indicate how helpful the group has been in regard to improving wellbeing and reducing distress.

Outcomes after 1 Year of Membership

Between 2001 & 2009, 31 women completed two questionnaires – the Affects Balance Scale (ABS) and the Impact of Event Scale (IES) – at *baseline* (prior to group membership) and at *12 months* membership. ABS results showed that after 12 months in the group there was a significant reduction in negative feelings (i.e., sadness, guilt, anxiety & hostility) and an improvement in positive emotion (i.e., joy, contentment & affection). An exception to this improvement was results for vigour (i.e., energy, liveliness & activity) which were very low at baseline and at 12 months, compared to a random sample of individuals in the community without cancer. See Figure 1 for ABS results.

Analysis of the IES, which tests whether women tend to avoid thinking about the effects of the illness (i.e., Avoidance) or can't help themselves thinking about it (i.e., Intrusion), has shown that after 12 months in the group there is a significant reduction in Intrusive and Avoidant stress response symptoms. While women in our group show a high incidence of both types of stress responses compared to individuals without cancer, our group members experience many more Intrusive thoughts than Avoidant thoughts. This tendency to respond to stress 'head-on' may have been a trigger for women joining the group to share their experiences of secondary breast cancer. See Figure 2 for IES results.

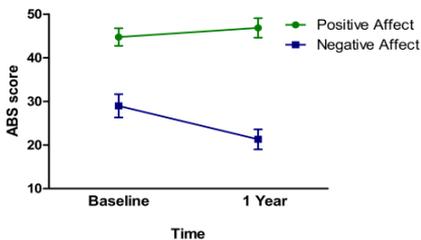
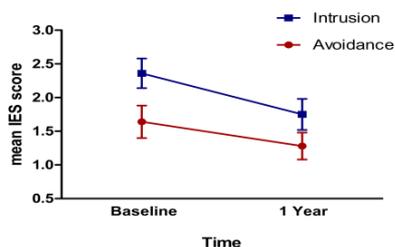


Figure 1. ABS Positive and negative affect (feelings) at baseline and 1 Year.

Figure 2. IES Intrusive & Avoidant stress symptoms at baseline and 1 Year.



Outcomes after 2 Years of Membership

A smaller number of women (16) have now completed these questionnaires over 2 years. Analysis of outcomes after two years in the group has shown that in general, benefits gained after 12 months in the group have been maintained or in some instances further improved. On the ABS, we found a significant reduction in negative affect at 12 months compared to baseline and a further reduction in negative affect from 12 months to 2 years. We found significant improvement in positive affect at 12 months compared to baseline but it leveled out over the second year compared to the first. See Figure 3.

Analysis of IES outcomes after 2 years in the group showed significant improvement in Intrusive and Avoidant stress responses at 12 months, and these improvements were maintained in the second year. Women continue to experience significantly more Intrusive thoughts than Avoidant thoughts, which we think is not surprising, since women who join the group are unlikely to be highly Avoidant.

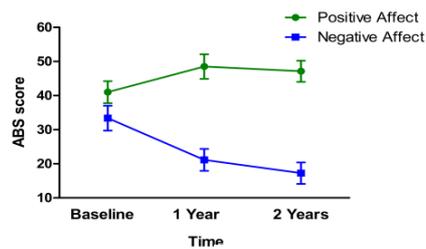
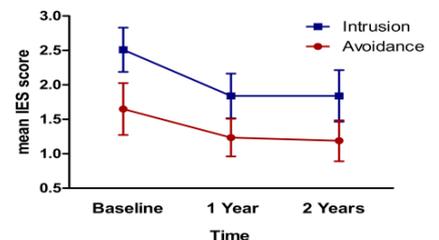


Figure 3. ABS Positive and negative affect (feelings) at baseline, 1 Year and 2 Years.

Figure 4. IES Intrusive & Avoidant stress symptoms at baseline, 1 Year and 2 Years.



Not enough women have completed the other questionnaires to enable us to present a reliable report on progress over time. We would like to thank group members for the time taken to fill out the questionnaires and to assure them that their responses are valuable to our service and are treated with the utmost confidentiality and care.