PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT AND LIVING WELL WITH LONG COVID: Outcomes from groups focused on fatigue management and cognitive functioning ("brain fog“)

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BACKGROUND

There is increasing interest in the delivery of group psychological support for people experiencing Long Covid. The purpose of groups is often to introduce psychological concepts which may be helpful in managing symptoms, with the aim of living well with the condition

Groups focus on symptom management strategies and fostering self-compassion and interpersonal support (see reviews [1–5])

RESEARCH QUESTION & OBJECTIVE

Are psychological therapy groups helpful in supporting people with Long Covid to live well with the condition?

Evaluate changes in patient-reported outcomes pre and post attendance at 'Thinking Clearly' (TC) and/or 'Fatigue Management' (FM) groups

METHODS

Service Evaluation

- Data were accessed for groups run 23-24 (5xTC, 6xFM)
- Data collected routinely at start and end of each group cycle
- No ethical approval required

Group Format

All groups ran virtually across 23-24 | All group materials were informed by studies of rehabilitation and psychological support in Long Covid and post-viral conditions | Group content developed in collaboration with, and adjusted in response to, patient feedback

Thinking Clearly ("brain fog")

- 7-week group, with scheduled sessions on attention, memory, executive functions and the emotional impact of cognitive changes
- All sessions are 90 minutes and co-facilitated by Clinical Psychologist and Assistant /Trainee Psychologist
- Participants referred into group by MDT with approval by psychology, with cognitive symptoms identified as prominent feature of presentation

Fatigue Management

- 7-week group, with scheduled sessions on fatigue experiences, pacing/planning/prioritising, energy conservation, mindfulness, sleep, values, and planning for the future
- All sessions are 90 minutes and co-facilitated by Clinical Psychologist and Assistant/Trainee Psychologist
- Participants referred into group by MDT with approval by psychology, with fatigue symptoms identified as prominent feature of presentation

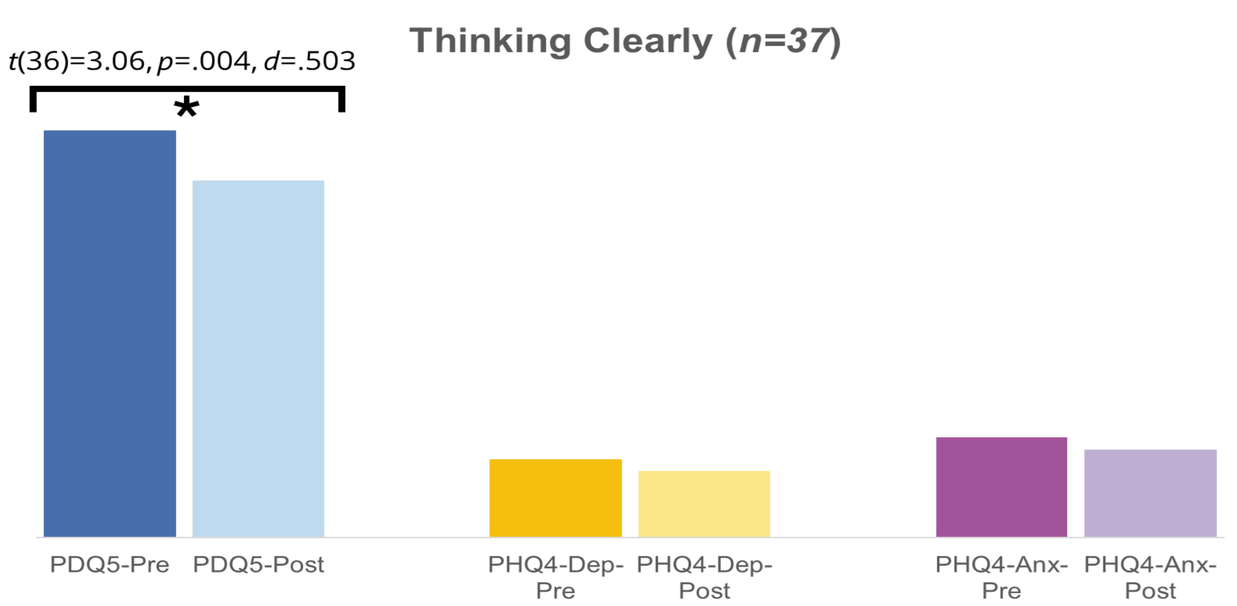
Participants

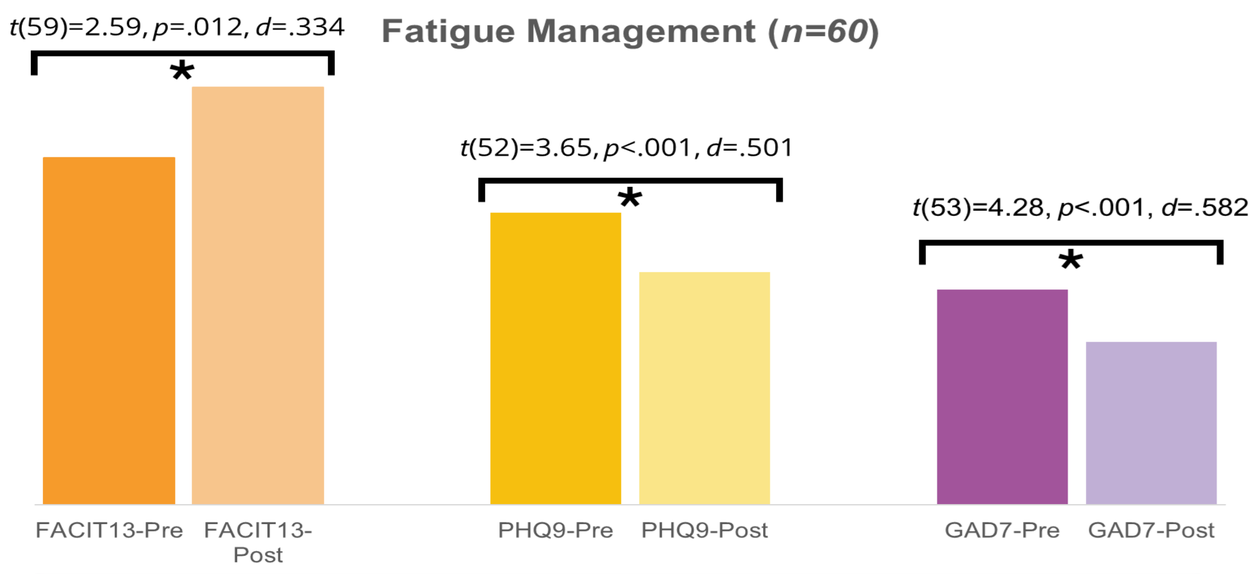
- All participants were referred by their local Post Covid MDT and had a diagnosis of Long Covid at the point of participation
- Inclusion criteria i) suitable for group approach, ii) diagnosis of Long Covid, iii) able to fulfil technological requirements, iv) open to practicing behavioural and psychological strategies for living well
- All attendees were screened before and after each group cycle
- Ninety-seven patients provided measures pre and post group attendance (TC=37/FM=60) and were therefore included in analysis

OUTCOME MEASURES

Cognitive symptoms: Perceived Deficits Questionnaire[6] (PDQ) | 5 items | max. 20 (higher scores = more cognitive difficulties)
Fatigue symptoms: Functional Assessment of Chronic Illness Therapy – Fatigue Scale[7] (FACIT13) | 13 items | max. 56 (higher scores = less fatigue)
Depression symptoms: Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ) [4[8] & 9[9]]
Anxiety symptoms: PHQ-9[9], Generalised Anxiety Disorder-7[10]
Qualitative feedback

RESULTS





'SENSE OF COMMUNITY' 'INCREASED AWARENESS OF SKILLS'
'COMPASSIONATE SUPPORT' 'VALIDATION OF EXPERIENCES'
'LEARNING FROM OTHERS' 'INFORMATION ABOUT CONDITION'

CONCLUSION

Results highlight potential usefulness of psychology groups

Statistically significant improvements in symptom presentation when comparing responses pre and post, with small-medium effect size differences in scores (PDQ5, FACIT13) following group attendance
Observed reductions in depression and anxiety symptoms in FM group
Qualitative feedback highlights value of peer support in this patient group
Results of study are limited by i) missing data, ii) lack of longer-term follow up, iii) missing descriptive data (so not possible to analyse outcomes by patient characteristics), iv) measurement validity (e.g., abbreviated questionnaires)

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