

# Compassionate Yoga - Can it Increase Compassion with Female Forensic Patients?

## Introduction:

Compassion Focused Therapy (CFT) is developed for individuals who experience high levels of shame and self-criticism (Gilbert, 2009). Some individuals may find it difficult to soothe themselves in response to threats due to possible early abusive histories, neglect (Gilbert, 2009) or due to a biological basis (Belsky & Beaver, 2011).

In a group setting, CFT can aid patients in de-shaming, validating, soothing and learning self-encouragement (Bates, 2005). CFT based groups can reduce self-reported measures of shame, self-hatred, depression, stress and perceived risk for patients with diagnoses of personality disorders (Lucre & Corten, 2013).

Yoga shares similar principles with CFT, within both Yoga and CFT, individuals can learn to use imagery to provide themselves with a place of relaxation and emotional calm (activating the soothing system). An important aspect of Yoga, is improving ones non-judgemental and objective view of themselves. It has been identified that some individuals who are high in self-criticism can understand the theory of cognitive behavioural therapy and can generate alternative thoughts but struggle to feel reassured or soothed by these (Lee, 2005). Yoga with the use of principles of CFT may be able to help individuals to start to feel warmth and develop feelings of soothing by using yoga poses that have been theorised to impact and bring online these areas (increasing activation of the soothing system).

## Intervention

The compassionate yoga group was facilitated by a qualified Yoga teacher and a qualified Psychologist. Patients self-referred to the group with a group size of 5-7 patients. The group was a six session group with each session focused on a 'theme' grounded in lessons from CFT principles; Warmth, Responsibility, Strength, Wisdom and Compassion. Each session began with a description of the class 'theme' and how these relate to compassion focused therapy, the session then focused on using yoga poses that have been theorised to impact and bring online these areas. The sessions also tapped into development of the three flows of compassion (self to self, self to others, others to self).

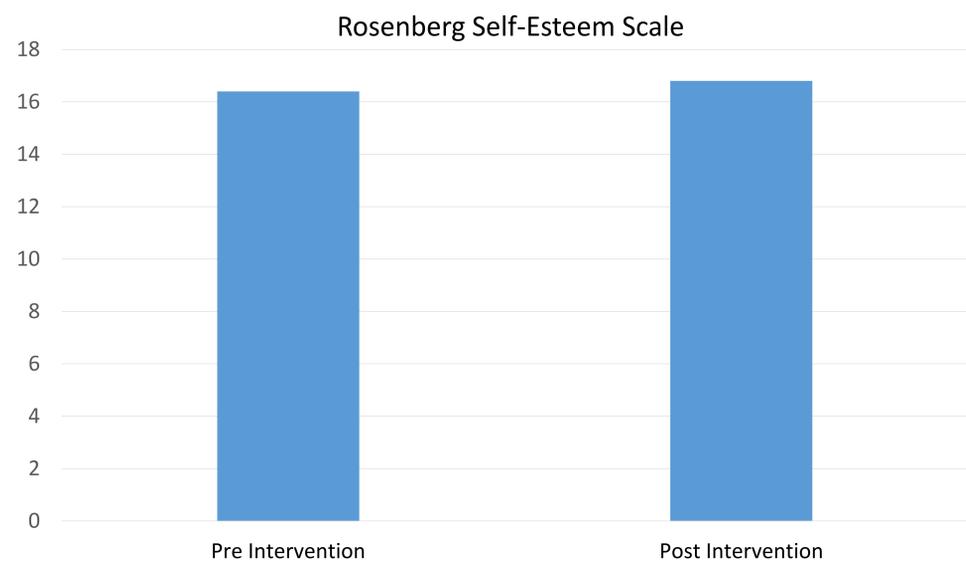
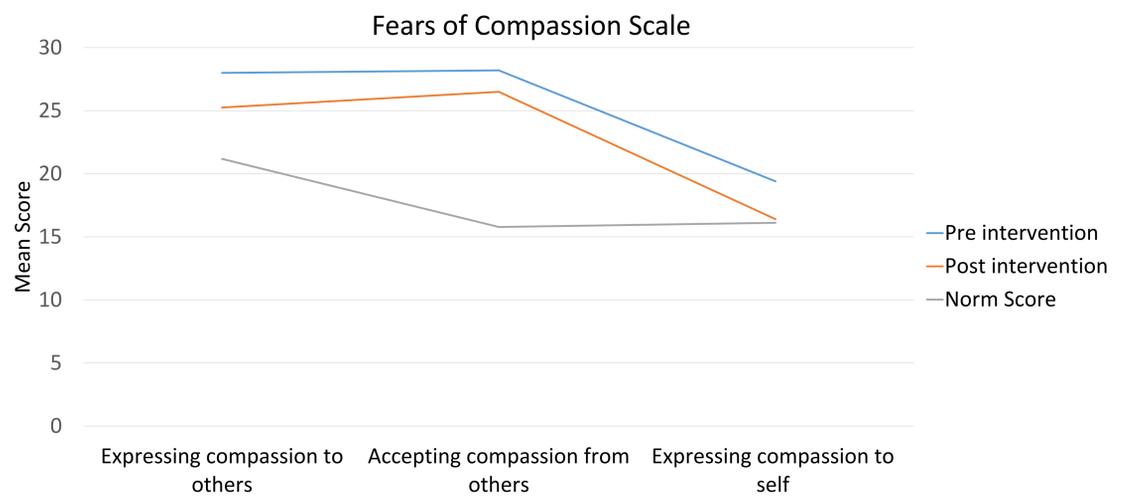
To measure the outcome of this group, the Fears of Compassion Scale (Gilbert, McEwan, Matos & Ravis, 2014) and The Rosenberg self-esteem scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965) was completed by patients pre and post group. Qualitative feedback was also collected from the patients.

## References

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## Results:

### Quantitative:



### Qualitative – Patient Feedback:

*“You cared and you were supportive”*  
*“I’ve learnt that I have to look after myself”*  
*“I do deserve good things”*  
*“I found it hard to think about what I liked about myself... I thought about it [after the session] and realised there were things I liked about myself”*

## Conclusion

The psychometric results show that the initial pilot of a compassionate yoga group has shown to be helpful for female forensic patients to start to develop the three flows of compassion. It may be that through using yoga this is a less threatening way for individuals to start to consider and develop compassion to themselves as well as to others. Further development of the group based on patient and facilitator feedback to support development of compassionate ability may be beneficial.

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