

SECTION 6

EVIDENCE BASE FOR
THE EFFECTIVENESS
OF THE SHARK CAGE®
GROUP PROGRAM

Introduction



The Shark Cage Group Program was evaluated to assess whether the stated program objectives listed below had been met:

1. To increase the participants' knowledge of healthy and unhealthy relationships.
2. To increase the participants' capacity to set boundaries.
3. To increase the participants' skills in assertive communication.
4. To increase the participants' awareness of the impacts of abuse.
5. To decrease any feelings of self-blame participants may have for abuse they have experienced.
6. To increase the participants' ability to care for and be kind to themselves.
7. To increase the participants' connection to their feelings.
8. To increase the participants' sense of self-worth.
9. To increase the participants' connection to their body.
10. To increase the participants' belief in their entitlement to rights.
11. To increase the participants' ability to recognise a potentially abusive or exploitative person.

Method

Quantitative and qualitative data was collected over a four-year period from WestCASA 'Strength to Strength' groups that use the Shark Cage Group Program. This section summarises the results of the quantitative data collected in the form of participant pre-group scores and post-group scores on a questionnaire comprised of 11 items that directly relate to the 11 core program objectives outlined above (see Forms 3 & 5). An additional question (question 12) was added in 2016 to enhance measurement of the variable of self-care (objective 6). As question 12 was not included in the data collected in previous years, it was excluded from the overall data analysis.

The data analysed was obtained from four cohorts of participants in the program in the years 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016. The total number of participants was 30. (n = 7 for 2013, n = 7 for 2014, n = 7 for 2015, n = 9 for 2016).

Participants ranged in age from 17 to 56 and came from a variety of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. Many of the women had a mental health diagnosis and one had been assessed as having an intellectual disability.

Results

The results provide an evidence base for the use of the Shark Cage Group Program. All 11 program objectives were met and the positive changes were statistically significant.

Table 1 presents the mean pre-test and post-test scores for the 11 objectives. It also shows the percentage positive change for each of the objectives, and the statistical significance of the changes observed. The changes were all shown to be strongly statistically significant ($p(29) < .001$ at minimum, paired t-tests).

Table 1: Pre- and post-test scores

	Pre-test mean	Post-test mean	% positive change pre-test to post-test	Significance of change (t-tests, df = 29)
1. Knowledge of healthy and unhealthy relationships	3.95	6.22	26/30 87% of sample	P<.001
2. Capacity to set boundaries	2.63	5.13	30/30 100% of sample	P<.001
3. Skills in assertive communication	3.13	5.10	24/30 80% of sample	P<.001
4. Awareness of the impacts of abuse	4.18	6.35	24/30 80% of sample	P<.001
5. Feelings of self-blame for abuse	4.83	2.93	22/30 73% of sample	P<.001
6. Ability be kind to self	3.12	5.17	24/30 80% of sample	P<.001
7. Connection to feelings	4.03	5.82	21/30 70% of sample	P<.001
8. Sense of self-worth	3.07	5.45	25/30 83% of sample	P<.001
9. Connection to body	3.10	5.22	24/30 80% of sample	P<.001
10. Perceived entitlement to rights	3.78	6.15	27/30 90% of sample	P<.001
11. Ability to recognise a potentially abusive or exploitative person	2.63	5.62	28/30 93% of sample	P<.001

Conclusion

It is clear from Table 1 that the objectives of the Shark Cage program were shown to be met in participants' questionnaire responses. On all 11 items a shift in the expected direction was observed. It is evident that the Shark Cage Group Program delivered the changes in the targeted participant variables that were desired and anticipated.

Qualitative data collected from participants after each session through written evaluations has been featured throughout this manual. The qualitative data was consistent with the quantitative data in demonstrating that the Shark Cage Group Program meets its stated objectives and is therefore an evidence-based program.

More examples of qualitative data from participant evaluation forms are featured over the page.

I have learnt the importance of self-care and that we need to help ourselves before we can help others. Putting the whole Shark Cage metaphor together in the mural was awesome.

Since starting this group I have already moved forward in a huge way in my healing and will continue to take the knowledge I have learnt to continue moving forward in my journey - a happier, healthier, stronger me.

Why do we not teach this to every woman? This needs to be taught to young women everywhere.

Our Shark Cages seem to be getting stronger for all of us.

Once again an incredibly powerful class. I can feel my personal progress taking place and that of others.

It's amazing to see how far the group has come.

Knowledge about the Shark Cage Framework gained in this program has and will continue to help me to walk in freedom and maintain healthy relationships whilst also having the ability to discern sharks.

Fantastic program. It has helped me to grow and keep working towards a better future and understanding and knowing my rights. Thanks heaps for changing my world.

Appendix:

Instructions for scoring Pre-Tests and Post-Tests

The questions in the pre- and post-test questionnaires relate directly to the 11 objectives of the Shark Cage Group Program. Each objective has one corresponding question. The exception is objective 6 (to increase the participant's ability to care for and be kind to themselves), which has two correlating questionnaire items (questions 6 and 12). Question 6 taps into the emotional capacity to 'be kind' to self. Question 12 taps into the more behaviourally-based 'care' aspect of the objective by asking about taking time for activities that are important to wellbeing.

Once the program is completed, the difference between pre- and post-group scores needs to be calculated. This is done by adding the number circled on each item for every participant and then dividing that number by the number of participants to get a mean score for each question.

Example

The following example uses a group of eight participants.

Responses to question 1 ("I know the difference between a healthy and an unhealthy relationship") as circled on the pre-test:

② ① ③ ① ① ③ ② ②

Add these numbers together:

$$2 + 1 + 3 + 1 + 1 + 3 + 2 + 2 = 15$$

Divide by the number of participants:

$$15 \div 8 = 1.875$$

This number then represents the mean score of the eight participants on the pre-test for question 1.

To calculate the post-test mean for question 1, the scores on question 1 of the post-test for all participants are added. In our example, the same eight participants circled the following numbers for question 1 on the post-test:

⑥ ⑦ ⑥ ⑥ ⑦ ⑦ ⑤ ⑦

Add these numbers together:

$$6 + 7 + 6 + 6 + 7 + 7 + 5 + 7 = 51$$

Divide by the number of participants:

$$51 \div 8 = 6.375$$

This number then represents the mean score of the eight participants on the post-test for question 1.

To find the pre- and post-test difference for question 1, subtract the pre-test mean from the post-test mean:

$$6.375 - 1.875 = 4.5$$

This demonstrates a 4.5 point increase in participant agreement with the statement “I know the difference between a healthy and an unhealthy relationship” over the duration of the group program.

Another way of thinking about this change is that it reflects that before the program, on average, participants moderately disagreed that they knew the difference between a healthy and an unhealthy relationship (score of less than 2). After the program, on average, they moderately agreed with the same statement (score of greater than 6). It can then be said that the objective of increasing participants’ knowledge of healthy and unhealthy relationships has been met in this group program.

An increase in mean scores for each question is expected to demonstrate that the objective relating to the question has been met. The exception is question 5 (“I blame myself for the abuse that has happened to me”), in which a decrease in the post-test mean score is expected to demonstrate that the objective relating to the question has been met.

Tests for statistical significance of pre- and post-test changes can be carried out after several groups have been run and data for at least 20 participants has been collected. These analyses require statistical expertise and are usually carried out using a statistical software package such as SPSS. This can be outsourced to a social sciences statistician if an organisation wishes to analyse a large amount of data to test for statistical significance.