Couple HOPES

Can an online self-help couples intervention improve PTSD symptoms and relationship satisfaction?

A Randomized Controlled Trial Testing Couple HOPES: An Online, Self-Help Couples Intervention for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

IMPACT LAB
investigating methods to prevent, assess & care for trauma

TULiP LAB

Conjoint PTSD Interventions

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a chronic, debilitating disorder that develops after trauma and is linked to broad impairments in functioning.

Military members, veterans, and first responders (MMVFR) are particularly vulnerable and often show poorer treatment outcomes.

Relationship difficulties can worsen PTSD and are linked to poorer treatment outcomes.

PTSD is strongly associated with: Impaired relationship functioning, increased conflict and aggression

Improving relationship functioning may be critical for PTSD recovery, especially among MMVFR, who often prefer family involvement in treatment.

What is Couple HOPES?

Couple **HOPES** :
Helping Overcome PTSD and Enhance Satisfaction

A self-help online program for couples wherein one member has PTSD symptoms designed to help:

- PTSD
- Relationship functioning
- Partner mental health

We Wanted to Know

Does Couple HOPES help to improve PTSD symptoms and relationship symptoms more than time passing for couples wherein one member has PTSD symptoms and is:

- An MMVR
- A Healthcare worker
- Or has PTSD from COVID?

Does having PTSD related to COVID change response to Couple HOPES?

Who Participated

67 couples joined the study

One partner had PTSD symtoms related to COVID-19 OR was one of the following professions

- Military member
- Veteran
- First responder
- Healthcare worker

Participant flow

Couples were randomally assigned to either the Couple HOPES intervention or a waitlist control

67 couples
eligible and randomized

30 Couples
Couple HOPES

Immediate access to the couples hopes program

37 Couples
waitlist

8 week waiting period before recieving the program

Assesments

start

middle (week 4)

end (week 8)

1 month

3 months

Outcomes examined: PTSD symptoms, relationship satisfaction, partner outcomes and other secondary measures

What's in Couple HOPES

7 online, interactive modules with practice assignments

1. Introduction to program, understanding the impact of trauma and PTSD
2. Conflict managment
3. Listening: communication skills
4. Approaching: reducing trauma-related avoidance
5. Feeling: Sharing feelings
6. Thinking: sharing thoughts
7. Moving forward: Review progress

Brief calls with a coach to help couples use the program

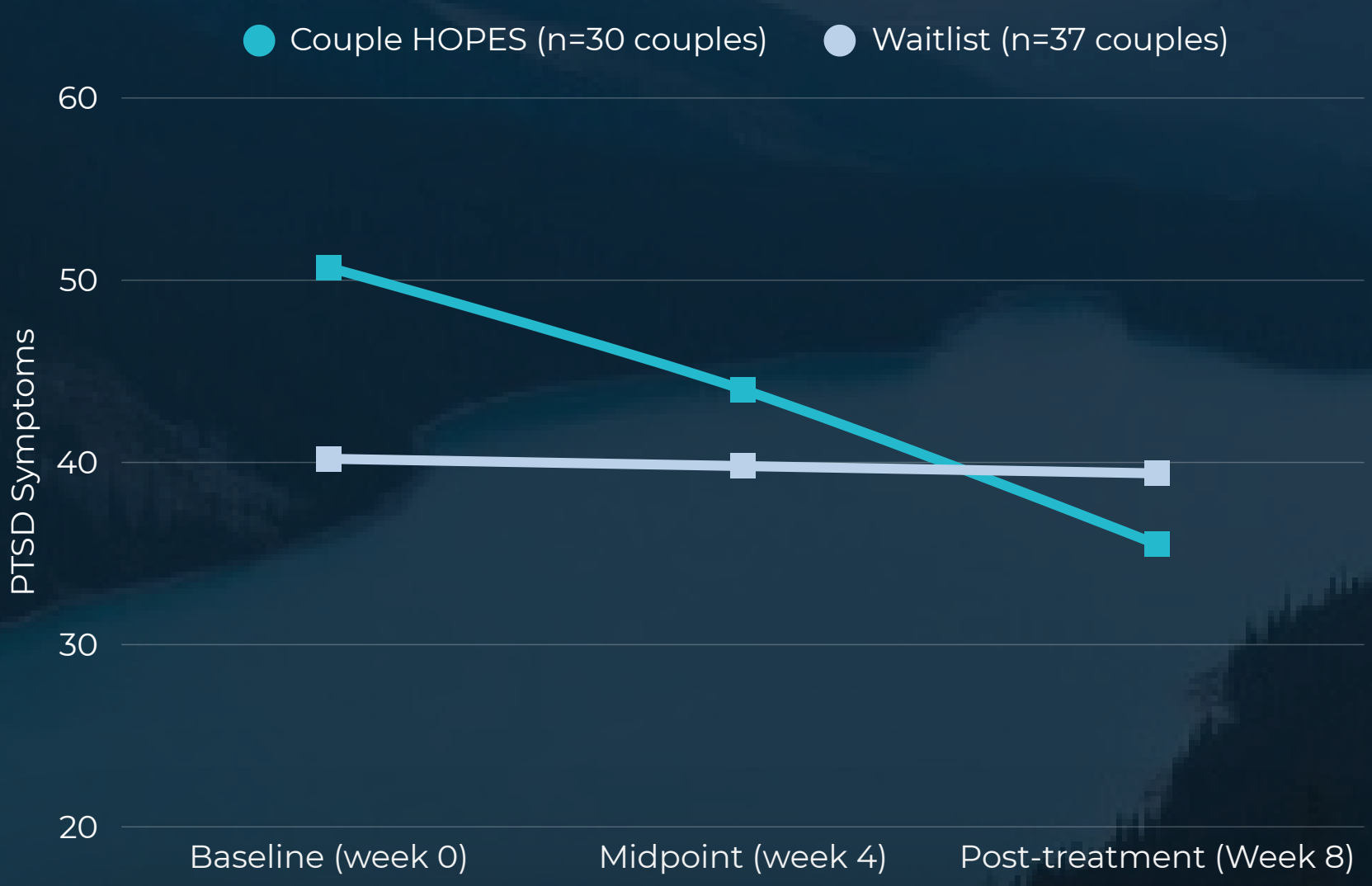
Psychoeducation was woven throughout each module

Main Findings

Self-Reported PTSD Symptoms

Primary outcome: Self reported PTSD symptoms (PCL-5)

Lower score = fewer symptoms

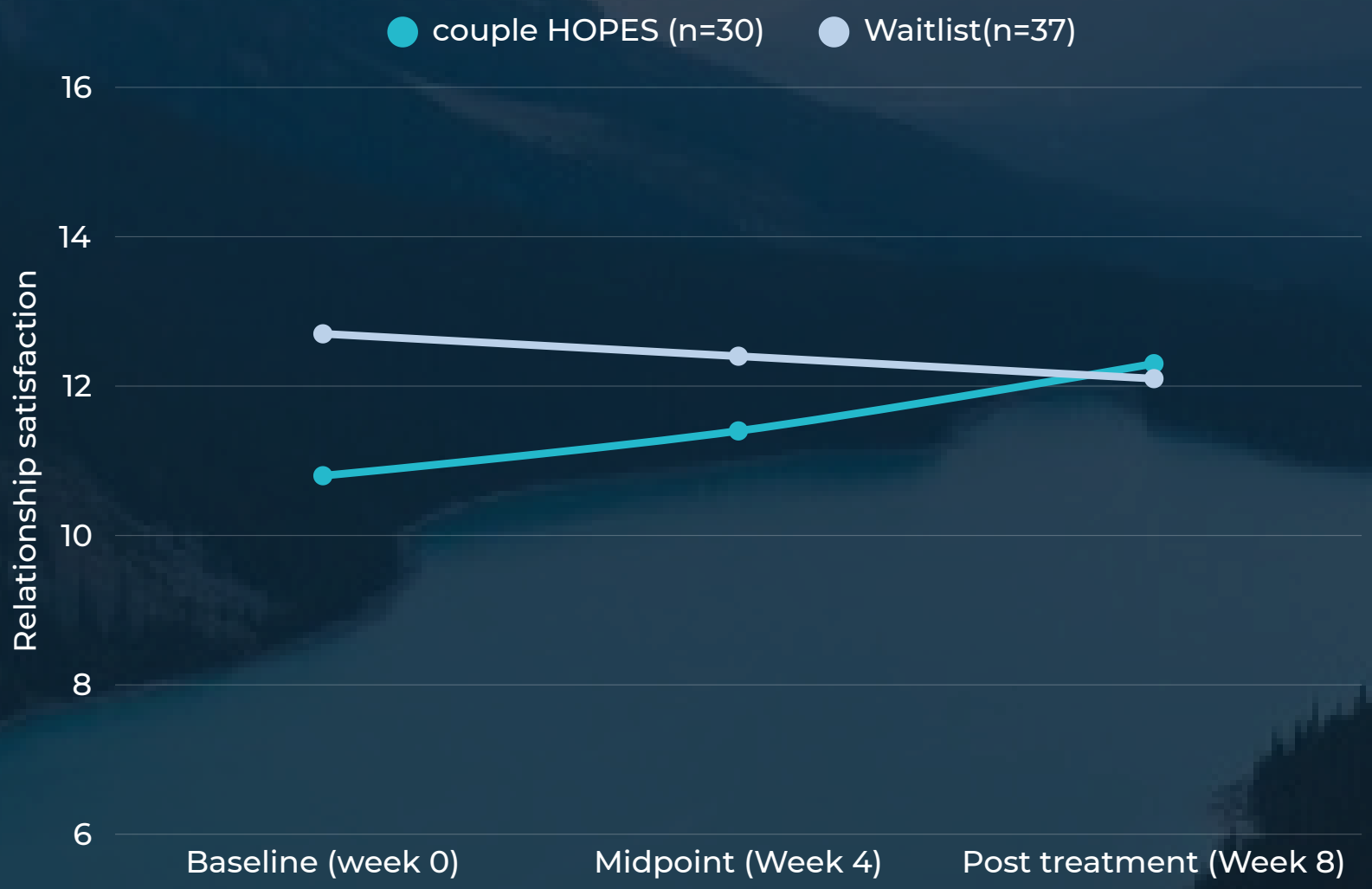


Greater improvements in Couple HOPES compared to waitlist

Relationship Satisfaction

Partner reported relationship satisfaction

Higher score = better relationship satisfaction



Partners without PTSD symptoms reported greater improvements in relationship satisfaction after Couple HOPES compared to the waitlist group.

Couples receiving Couple HOPES also showed greater improvements in

Partner-rated PTSD symptoms

Partner accommodation of PTSD symptoms (i.e., how partners “work around” the PTSD)

Partner anxiety

Does having PTSD related to COVID change response to Couple HOPES?

Couple HOPES appeared to help whether PTSD symptoms were COVID-19-related or not

This suggests the program may be useful across different trauma experiences

Outcomes that did not differ across conditions

No significant diffrences between Couple HOPES and waitlist were found for:

- Relationship satisfaction (PTSD Partner)
- Depression
- Alcohol or drug use
- Conflict
- Work functioning
- Percieved health
- Quality of life

Changes over time

Self-reported PTSD symptoms remained improved at 3-month follow-up

Relationship satisfaction and partner-reported PTSD did not show sustained gains

The researchers suggest that future versions may need:

- Booster coaching sessions
- more help engaging with the platform or using it after the program ends
- Larger studies
- More diverse samples

Couple **HOPES** may be an effective, low-cost, and scalable intervention for reducing PTSD symptoms

It may help reduce PTSD symptoms and support partners, especially when traditional therapy is difficult to access.

Healing from PTSD may be easier when couples have tools to face it together.

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