

Dialectical Behaviour Therapy Skills Group for Clients with Substance Use Disorder: A Pilot Intervention

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Background: Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) focuses on managing maladaptive behaviours concerning emotional distress, suicidality, self-harm, and interpersonal difficulties. DBT's dual focus on acceptance and change is particularly suited for treating disorders marked by emotional dysregulation, such as Substance Use Disorder (SUD), and can reduce drug use, and likelihood of relapse. Despite this, traditional DBT programs often exclude individuals with active substance use or are not financially viable, limiting access for many individuals requiring evidence-based treatment.

Description of Model of Care/Intervention: St Vincent's Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) Service piloted a 22-week DBT outpatient skills group for clients with SUD focusing on mindfulness, distress tolerance, emotion regulation, and interpersonal effectiveness. The two-hour group ran weekly with two clinicians and 8-12 participants each session. Participants were adults experiencing SUD, often comorbid with other complex mental health concerns.

Effectiveness/Acceptability/Implementation: Run by a team of seven clinicians and open to new members during mindfulness modules, the group received 20 referrals and accepted 12 participants. Six participants completed the program with an average attendance of 75%. Of the other six, two dropped out before starting, and the other four dropped out early due to relapse although they had an average attendance rate of 64%. Emotional regulation and distress tolerance improved post-intervention, and participants' overall satisfaction with the program was 96/100 upon program completion

Conclusion and Next Steps: A DBT skills group was successfully integrated into an AOD setting, offering a comprehensive approach to treatment. Future investigation will evaluate the intervention's impact on reducing substance use using AOD-specific outcome measures, further bridging the gap between mental health and addiction services.

Implications for Practice or Policy: DBT offers an adaptable framework that supports initiatives to make evidence-based treatment more accessible to individuals with SUD, which can be implemented utilising existing resources within AOD services.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: *The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding this study.*