

MELLOW DADS: SCOTLAND

A gender specific relationship focused parenting programme for fathers and their young children

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INTRODUCTION

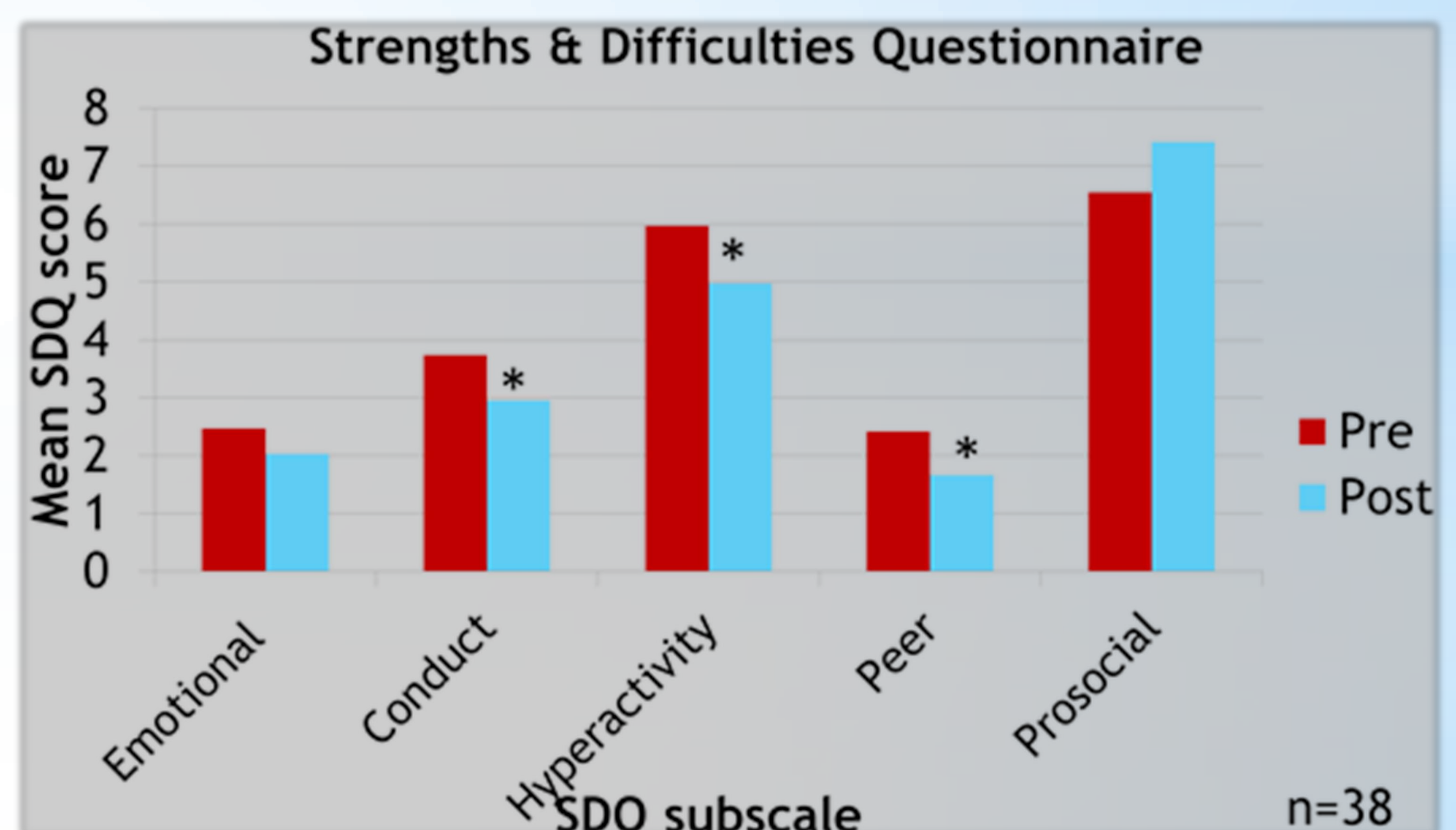
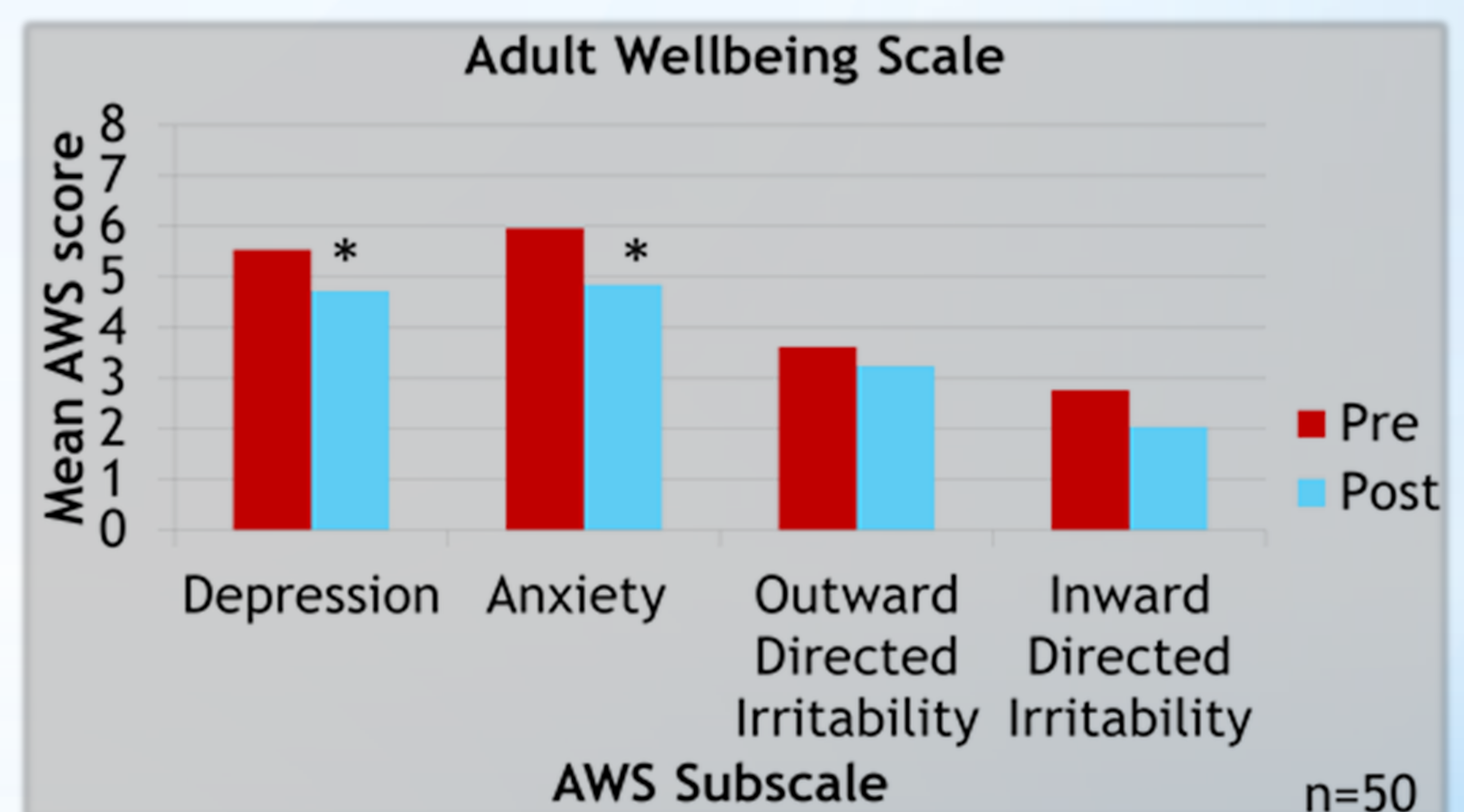
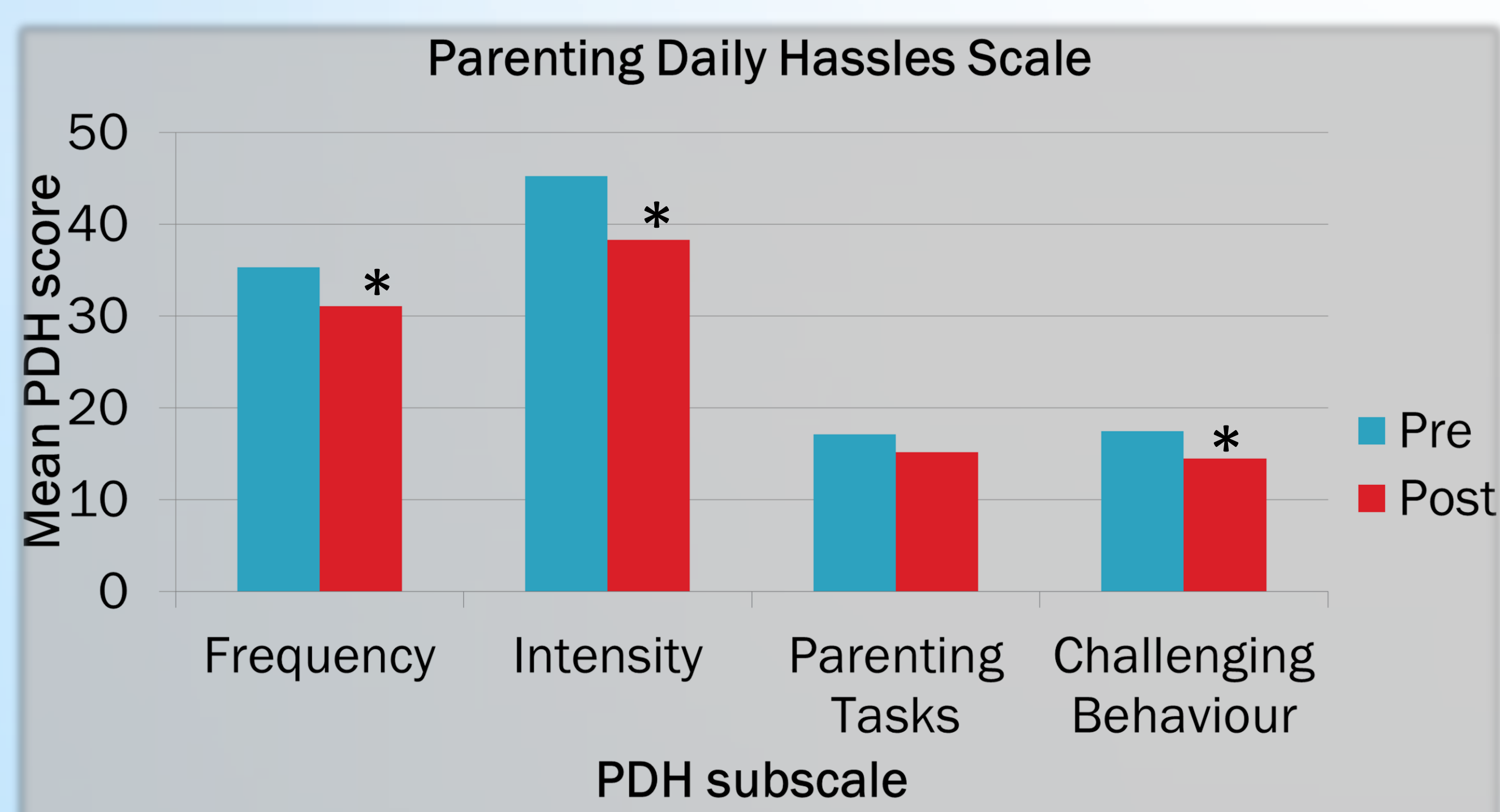
- In Scotland a commonly held belief is that engagement with fathers is difficult and often unsuccessful. Although willing to acknowledge that dads are important, services frequently fail to engage with them. “When we talk about parents, we tend to mean mums, and cut dads out of the picture.” (Clapton, 2013).
- There is a growing body of evidence to show that the positive involvement of fathers has been implicated in the subsequent development of fewer behaviour problems and improved cognitive outcomes (Ramchandani et al, 2013).
- Lack of paternal responsiveness is associated with multiple indicators of poor child outcome, including social and academic impairment (Wilson & Durbin, 2010).
- Mellow Parenting offer gender specific parenting programmes aimed at improving parent-child relationships. The Mellow Dads programme is delivered over 14 weeks, 1 day per week.
- Fathers experiencing difficulty in their relationship with their young children (0-5 years) are the target group for the programme, which aims to support families with additional health and social care needs to improve their relationships.
- Both the father and their child attend the group, with a joint lunchtime activity and separate morning and afternoon activities.
- A variety of techniques are used with fathers, including video feedback, and at the core of the programmes are the psychological theories of attachment, social learning and CBT.

METHOD

In this cohort study, participants completed measures before and after the group. Scores were compared using non-parametric tests (Wilcoxon signed rank) to assess any changes following group participation on the following scales.

1. **Adult Wellbeing Scale (AWS):** Assessment of mental wellbeing, broken down into subscales of depression, anxiety, outward-directed irritability and inward-directed irritability.
2. **Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ):** Parental report measure of their child’s positive and problem behaviours. The SDQ can be broken down into subscales of emotional behaviours, conduct problems, hyperactive behaviour, peer problems and prosocial behaviours.
3. **Parenting Daily Hassles (PDH):** Considering the frequency and intensity of hassle regarding parenting tasks and challenging child behaviours.

RESULTS * denotes statistical significance $p < .05$



DISCUSSION

The results show that participants in the Mellow Dads programme report significant improvements in their own wellbeing, improvements in their child’s behaviours and a reduction in their own levels of stress due to their child’s behaviours. The attrition rate for these groups is currently 20.9%. This suggests that the Mellow Dads programme is successfully engaging a group that services often consider “hard to reach”.

Early qualitative data show that fathers appreciate a parenting group which is gender specific and focuses on their relationships with their child, particularly as fathers are often overlooked in traditional children/parent services. Group facilitators have also reported increased confidence and further service uptake with fathers continuing to stay involved with the service post group.

CONCLUSIONS

The preliminary findings of this study are limited due to the small sample size. However at this stage results are promising and suggest that the Mellow Dads programme has positive outcomes for fathers and their children. Further research will add to this sample in order to best capture the outcomes of this programme. Pilots will also be delivered in prison sites across Scotland and England to assess acceptability, feasibility and outcomes of the programme in a different setting.

References

- Clapton, G. (2013) Social Work with Fathers: Positive Practice, Edinburgh: Dunedin Press.
- Ramchandani, P., Domoney, J., Sethna, V., Psychogiou, L., Vlachos, H. & Murray, L. (2013). Do early father-infant interactions predict the onset of externalising behaviours in young children? Findings from a longitudinal cohort study. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 54, 56-64.
- Wilson, S. & Durbin, C.E. (2010) Effects of paternal depression on fathers' parenting behaviors: A meta-analytic review. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 30, 167-180

