



KORU at McMaster: A 4-week Group Program Teaching Meditation and Mindfulness Practice to Post-secondary Students



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BACKGROUND & RATIONALE

- University students report **high levels of stress**, feeling **overwhelmed by anxiety**, or **feeling very sad** during the academic year^{1,2}
- There are increasing numbers of students presenting to mental health services on campuses without a parallel increase in resources. Universities are in need of *evidence-based, acceptable, accessible, brief, and cost-effective interventions*.
- Most evidence is based on traditional Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs) that require significant time (minimum 8 weeks) and may not be practical or appealing to students.
 - Previous systematic reviews of MBIs have demonstrated small to moderate effects for stress, anxiety, and depression in broad clinical and non-clinical populations³⁻²².
- Developed initially for college students at Duke University, **Koru is a four-week mindfulness, meditation, and stress management program** specifically designed to meet the developmental needs and interests of emerging adults. Koru has demonstrated significant improvements in perceived stress, self-compassion, mindfulness, and sleep in post-secondary students²³.

OBJECTIVES

- To determine the feasibility of training health and counseling professionals to conduct a 4-week group mindfulness and meditation program open to all students in a Canadian university setting.
- To explore the demographic and behavioural profiles, including mental health symptomatology and substance use patterns, of university students who attend Koru.
- To evaluate possible effects on stress, mindfulness, mental health, and substance use.

METHODS

RECRUITMENT:

- Participants were recruited through convenience sampling by self-referral or referrals from McMaster Student Wellness Centre physicians and counsellors.

THE INTERVENTION:

- 1.5 hours of guided Koru group practice for 4 weeks.
- Students were encouraged to participate in the following independent daily practice: 10 or more minutes of meditation, one activity carried out mindfully (e.g., walking to class, riding the bus, eating a meal, etc.), and gratitude reflection.
- Students were asked to read *Wherever you go, there you are* by Kabat-Zinn.
- The intervention was led by Counsellors and Family doctors (1-2 per session) who have received standardized training through the Duke program.
- Pre, post, 1-month and 3-month follow up surveys are used to evaluate the program. Participants were offered a \$5 gift card for a coffee company for each survey they complete. Participants may still attend Koru regardless of participation in the surveys.

Day 1

- Opening meditation
- Introductions and group discussion
- Introduction to mindfulness and meditation
- Mind-body skill: Diaphragmatic breathing with scientific rationale
- Mind-body skill: Ocean breathing
- Guided meditation: Body scan
- Reflections
- Introduction of weekly meditation log

Day 2

- Opening meditation
- Group discussion
- Mind-body skill: Guided Imagery
- Guided meditation: Labeling thoughts
- Reflections
- Meditation logs

Day 3

- Opening meditation
- Group discussion
- Guided meditation: Walking meditation
- Guided meditation: Gatha by Tich Nhat Hanh
- Reflections
- Meditation logs

Day 4

- Opening meditation
- Group discussion
- Guided meditation: Eating meditation
- Guided meditation: Labeling feelings
- Mind-body skill: Dynamic breathing
- Reflections
- Next steps for deepening personal practice

DEMOGRAPHICS



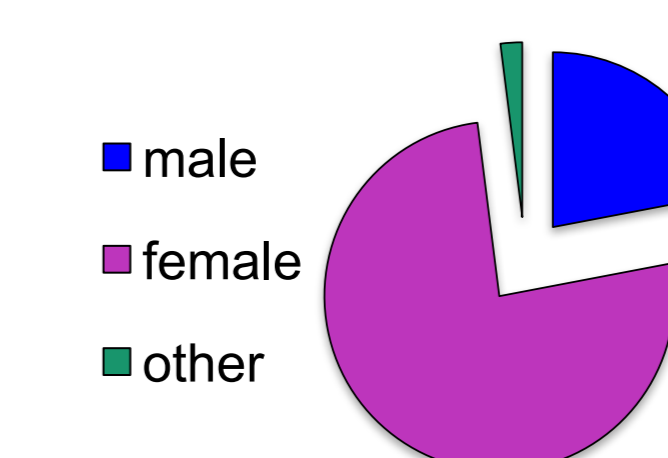
Participants:

- 205 students participated in Koru
- 6 staff were trained to be Koru instructors
- 22 sessions ran

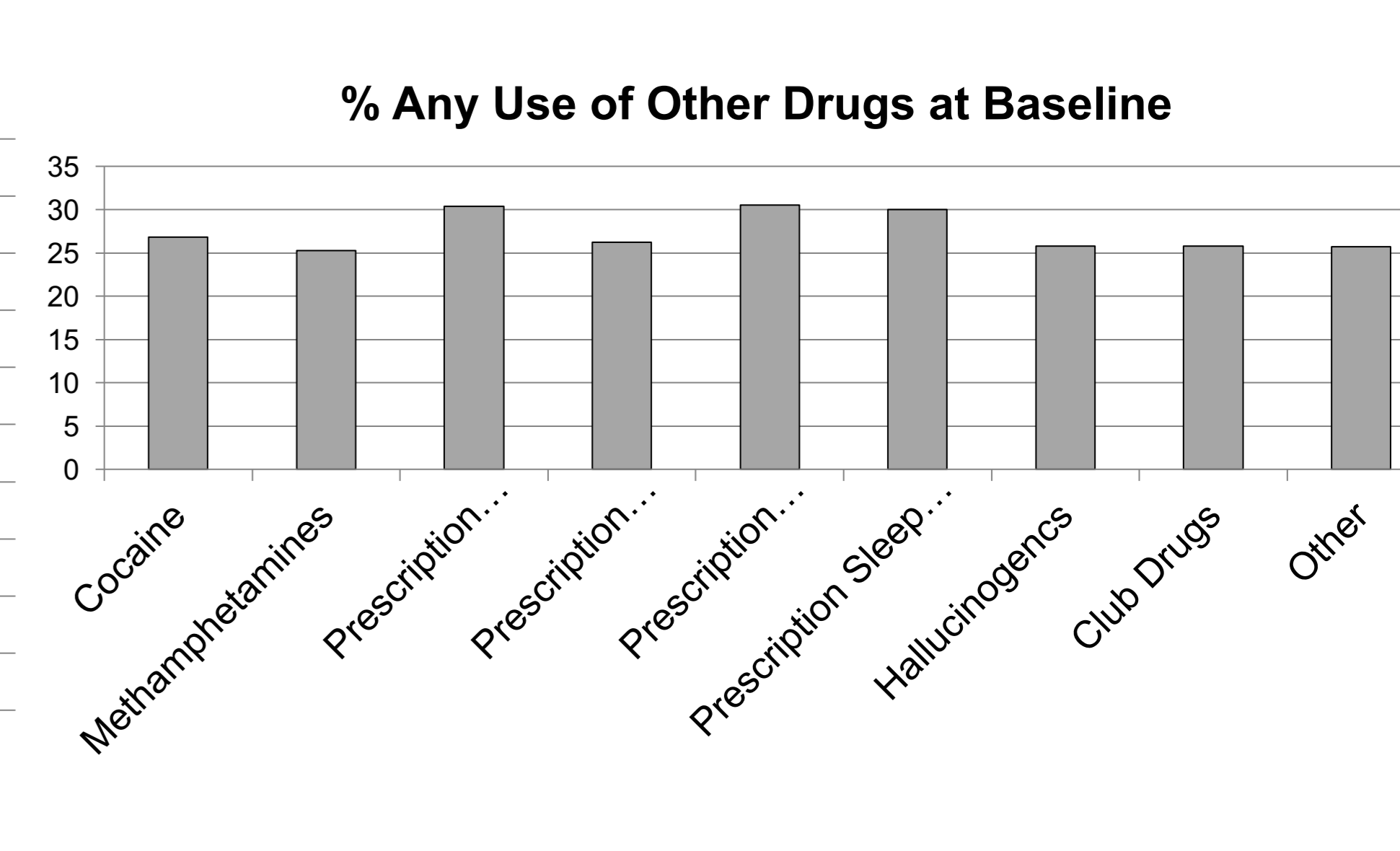
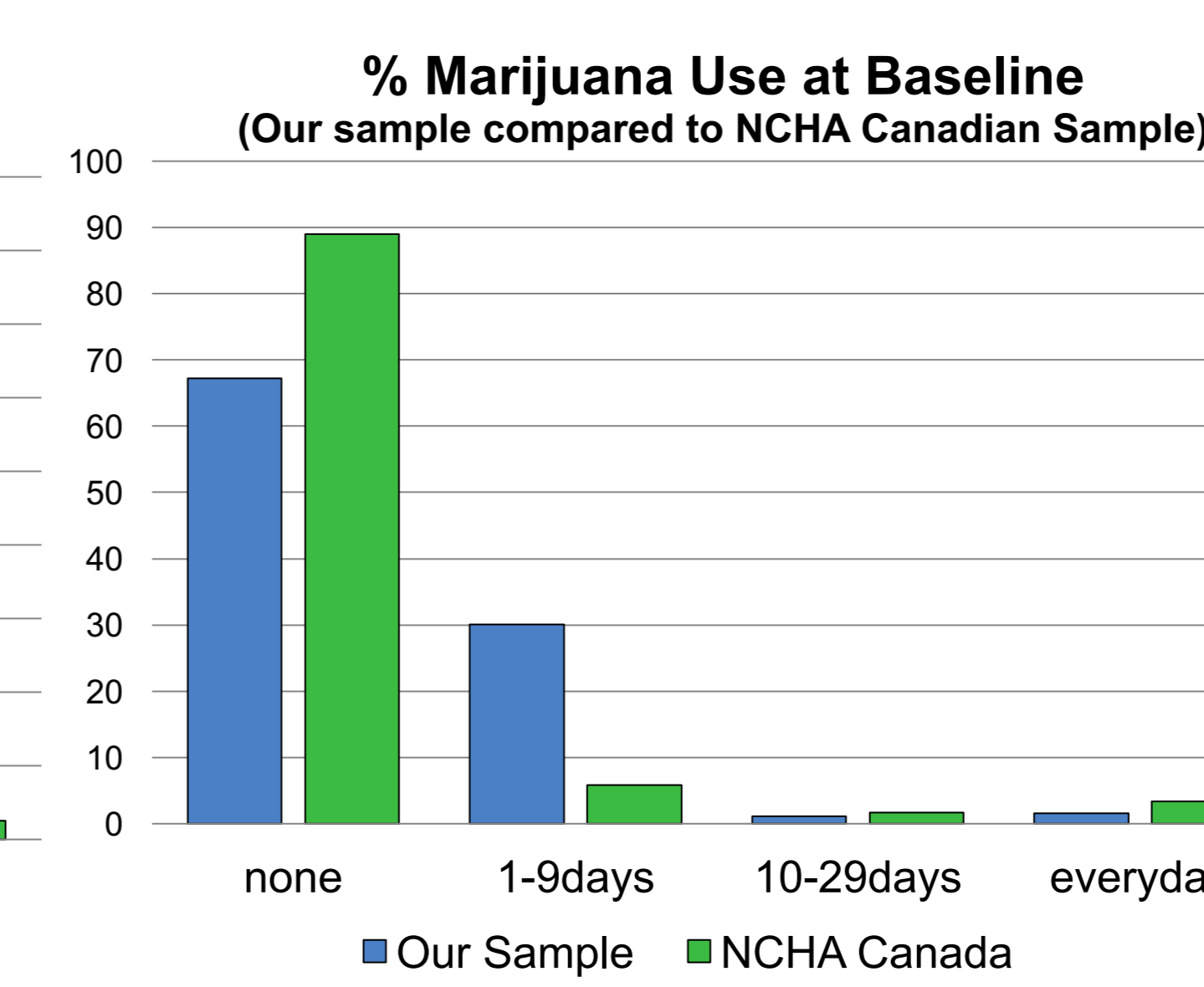
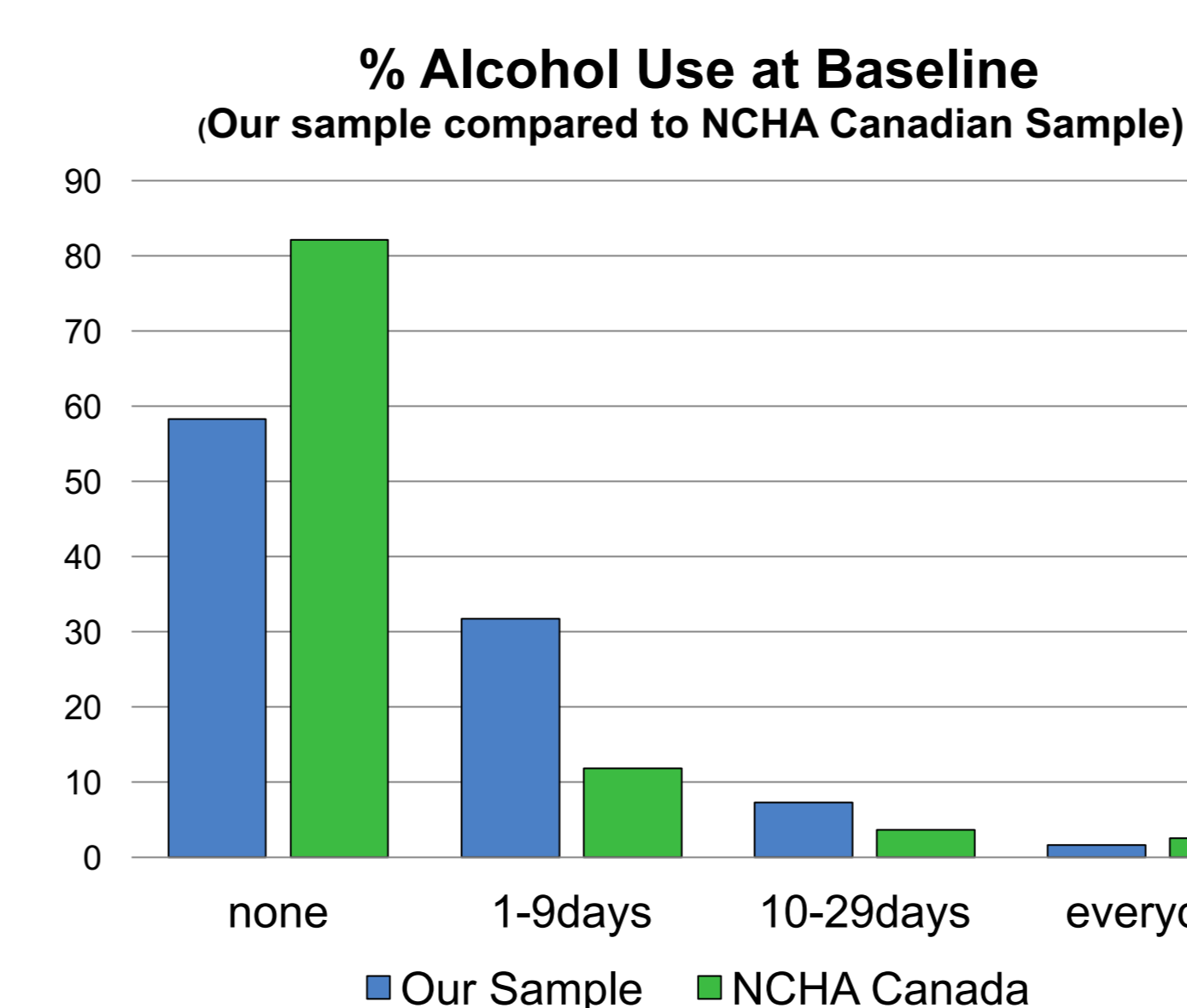
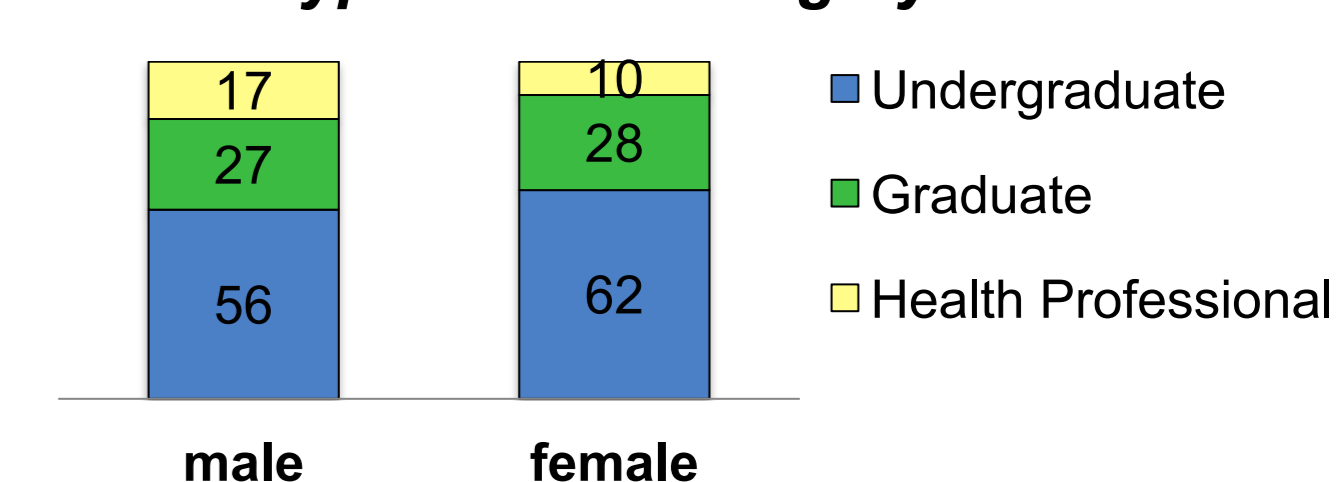
Most common reasons for participating:

- Improve mental health (reduce anxiety, improve mood)
- Cope with stress
- Improve Sleep

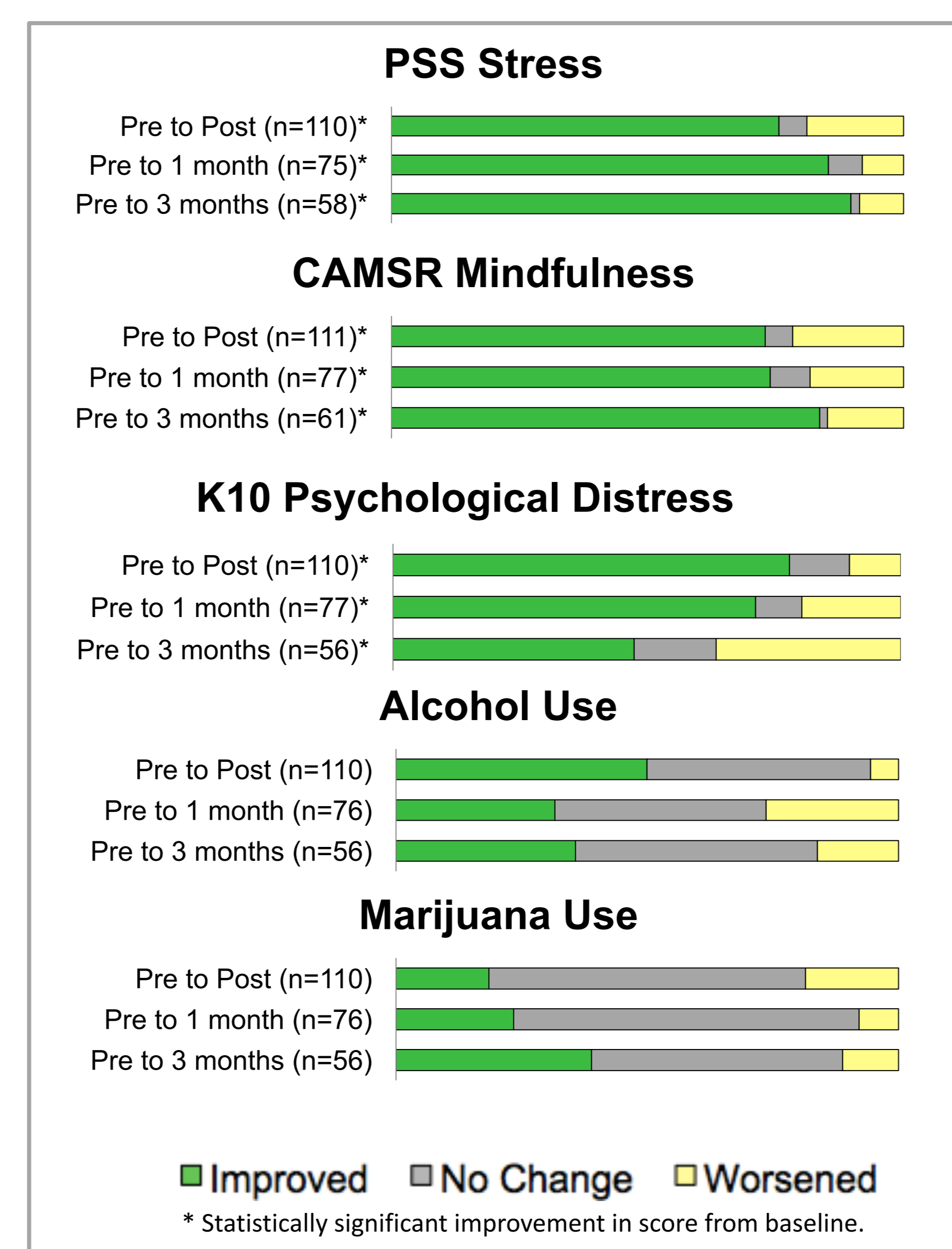
Student Gender



% Type of Schooling by Gender



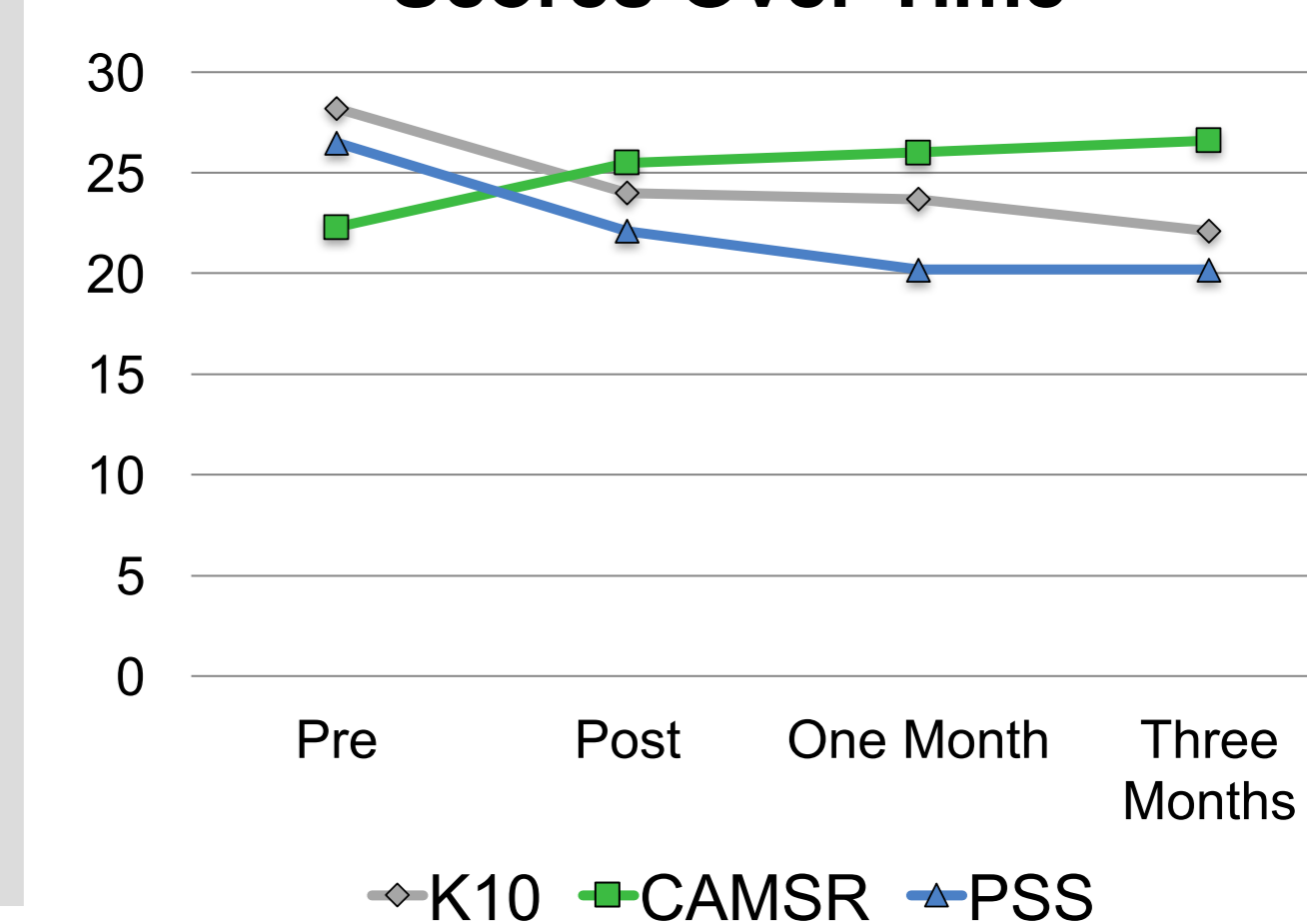
RESULTS



THE MEASURES

- Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)**
Max Score = 48; Higher values = More perceived stress
- Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale Revised (CAMSR)**
Max Score = 40; Higher values = More mindful qualities
- Kessler-10 (K-10)**
Max score = 50; Higher values = More psychological distress
- Substance Use Checklist**
Measures frequency of substance use

Scores Over Time



Student Experience

- 82% of students attended 3 to 4 classes (about 83% females and 76% males retained)
- 97% stated they enjoyed attending the class.
- 95% intended to continue practicing.
- 88% would recommend Koru to other people they know.
- 65% felt Koru helped them cope with stress 'more than a little bit' or 'a lot.'

"I enjoyed the way the course was structured, and I really felt as though it fostered a very comfortable environment, where I could fully engage in the activities."

"Loved all the techniques I learned with Koru. I hope to find another meditation group similar to Koru so that I may continue to be encouraged to continue my meditation practice."

"I really enjoyed Koru class. I'm not a person that opens up in a group of strangers so the fact that I talked in this class and shared pretty personal things is amazing to me. I thought I had a pretty good grasp of meditation already but this class has taught me a lot of things I didn't know about and has surprised me with how effective these styles were for mastering certain situations (stress, homework breaks...). I kind of wish I had more classes to go to actually..."

CONCLUSION

Koru appears to be an **engaging, brief, and feasible intervention** to offer to a broad population of youth on a university campus. Koru has demonstrated positive impacts on the perceived stress, mindfulness traits, and psychological distress of students. Students enjoyed participating in Koru. A controlled trial is needed to support our findings.

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