The Added Value of Group CBT combined with Supported Employment Programs

Synthesis

This document has been produced by l'Agence nouvelle des solidarités actives (Simon Roussey, Manon Coulange) under the supervision of Professor Bernard Pachoud, with the support of Professor Tania Lecomte (University of Montreal), Professor Marc Corbière and Charles-Edouard Giguère (Research Center of the University Institute of Mental Health of Montreal).

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Summary

I. Foreword

This experimentation, led by l'Agence nouvelle des solidarités actives (Ansa) (ANSA), was conducted to prove the usefulness of deploying, in France, group interventions inspired by cognitive behavioral therapies (CBT), in addition to the individual support.

This experimentation required more than two years of work and the involvement of many contributors that we would like to thank here.

First of all, Ansa would like to thank all the people, professionals and Supported employment programs : GEIST (Mayenne), Emploi accompagné 44 (Loire-Atlantique), Ladapt (Calvados et Val d'Oise), Workin'Normandie (Seine-Maritime), CAFAU (Oise), les amis de l'atelier (Val de Marne), SIMOT (Bas-Rhin), Vivre 94 (Val de Marne), Fondation COS (Seine-et-Marne), PEP71 (Saône-et-Loire), AARPHA (Martinique), Handamos ! (Gironde) et ARPS37 (Indre-et-Loire).

L'Ansa also wishes to thank the experts who were involved in this experimentation:

- Professor Tania Lecomte (Université de Montréal, Centre of Institut Universitaire en Santé Mentale de Montréal) and Professor Marc Corbière (Université du Québec à Montréal, Research Centre of Institut Universitaire en Santé Mentale de Montréal, Reseach Chair in Mental and Work, Community of Practices in Mental and Work) for the implementation of group interventions through the training and supervision of professionals. Tania Lecomte and Marc Corbière also contributed to the production of the final deliverables which will allow this new approach to be widely deployed in France.

- Professor Bernard Pachoud (Université Paris Cité) for supervising the evaluation of the experimentation. Bernard Pachoud also personally conducted on-site visits and led the production of the evaluation report demonstrating the positive results of group interventions inspired by CBT.

- Charles-Edouard (Centre of Institut Universitaire en Santé Mentale de Montréal), data analyst, for his support in processing the collected data.

- Valentine Cadu et Félicien Bineau (Signe de Sens) for the production of two videos allowing a very clear understanding of the added value of group interventions inspired by CBT.

Many deliverables have been produced : an evaluation report et de many other deliverables (a deployment guide, videos, training information leaflet) in order to disseminate these practices more widely beyond experimentation.

Thanks to the results obtained by this experimentation, a webinar held in February 2025. After this webinar, many organizations and professionals have expressed their desire to be trained.

To meet these requests, new training courses are scheduled by the end of 2025 and in 2026.

II. Abstract

The objective of this experimentation was to improve job access, job retention and, more generally, the well-being at work of people with severe mental illness, by offering group interventions inspired by Cognitive Behavioral Therapies (CBT) within Supported Employment (SE) programs.

The aim of these group interventions was to raise people's awareness of their needs but also help them to change their relationship with their work environment to improve their situation and promote their sustainable integration in their job.

The group interventions were implemented within seven SE programs in France in fourteen groups of five to eight individuals, led by two facilitators. The fourteen facilitators were trained in December 2022 by Tania Lecomte and Marc Corbière and monitored throughout the implementation of the group workshops between March 2023 and July 2023. In all, over 90 people benefited from the intervention during the experimentation.

Each group was invited to attend eight sessions, each with its own purpose: Coping with stress at work, recognizing and modifying my dysfunctional beliefs linked to work, overcoming obstacles linked to reintegrating the workplace, my strengths and competencies related to work, accepting criticism and asserting myself appropriately, my best coping strategies for work.

The experimentation was evaluated using a mixed approach, combining a quasi-experimental longitudinal evaluation and a qualitative assessment. Professionals and participants of SE programs took part in the construction of the evaluation methodology during videoconference workshops organized at the beginning of 2023, before the start of the group intervention. An ethics committee validated the experimentation and evaluation protocol.

The longitudinal quasi-experimental evaluation was carried out by comparing, over one year, the evolution of the situation of people in the experimental group who had benefited from the group intervention (N=46, Supported Employment + group intervention) and the evolution of the situation of people in a control group who were being followed up in other SE programs (N=46, Supported Employment only).

The longitudinal quasi-experimental evaluation measured the positive impact of the workshops on access to and retention in employment, as well as various types of benefits for participants (self-esteem as a worker, anxiety and depressive syndromes).

For people who were unemployed at the beginning of the experimentation (T0), there is a better rate of access to employment at 3 months (T1). Thus, 22% of people in the experimental sample found a job during this period, compared with 13.4% in the control sample. The difference is also significant 6 months after the beginning of the workshops (T2), with 28.6% of people in the experimental group finding employment, compared with 16.7% in the control group.

For people in employment at T0, we note a better job retention rate at T1, with a retention rate of 77% for people in the experimental group versus 66.7% for people in the control group. At T2, the results are more nuanced and slightly to the disadvantage of the experimental group, with a job retention rate of 70.4% for people in employment at T1, compared with 80.2% for people in the control group.

Other changes in people's well-being were measured at the end of the experimentation. These include an improvement in self-esteem as a worker (score up for the experimental sample and down slightly for the control sample) and a faster improvement in anxiety and depressive symptoms for the experimental sample. However, the results were much more marked at T1 (3 months after the start of the workshops) than at T2 (6 months after the workshops), indicating an acceleration effect induced by the workshops, the individual support playing a predominant role in improving people's situation over the longer term.

The qualitative assessment consisted of 6 on-site visits by Professor Bernard Pachoud and the Agence nouvelle des solidarités actives between October 2023 and January 2024, four to eight months after the group

intervention. For each visit, participants of the group interventions, group facilitators as well as the management of the SE structures we interviewed.

The interviews enabled us to have a better understanding of how CBT-inspired group interventions have a positive and accelerating effect on SE programs.

From a general point of view, CBT-inspired group intervention and the dynamic induced by the group have an impact on people's well-being, insofar as they provide new skills to manage stress and to analysis and manage emotional feeling. These skills are especially useful when people face anxiety-provoking situations or people who impress them. People also notice an improvement in communication with family and friends, and at work. Professionals confirm these benefits and add additional benefits such as a change in the way people see their disability, and a greater ability to overcome obstacles in everyday life. Finally, both people and professionals mention the added value of group time in breaking down isolation and developing social relationships.

Concerning job access, people who were not employed at the beginning of the CBT-inspired group interventions notice direct benefits in terms of remobilization or in terms of dynamic to find a job. They also mentioned a greater awareness of their qualities as workers and, more generally, a renewed confidence in their ability to find a job. Finally, they felt that they had been able to reduce their fear of work and better manage their stress during job interviews. Professionals added that they were better able to talk about their disability and imagine solutions to overcome their difficulties.

For those who were in employment when the CBT-inspired group interventions began, the main points raised were a greater ability to talk about the repercussions of disability, and a better capacity to deal with emotions at work. The ability to adapt work conditions and deal with unusual situations is also strongly emphasized.

Professionals who run the group intervention mentioned the benefits for their own professional practices. Some of the group facilitators notice a better understanding of the person’s concerns and a greater sense of complicity with him or her. In addition to this, methods and tools acquired during the training and experiences during the group intervention are now useful in the context of their individual support. In particular, the “CBT chart” was highlighted as a very useful tool for both individuals and professionals.

The impact of the workshops on job access and job tenure, as well as the benefits mentioned by the participants and the group facilitators, confirm the benefits of group intervention inspired by CBT. The evaluation of the experimentation indicates that it would be useful to disseminate this practice as a complement to individual support in Supported Employment, and potentially in other services supporting people with severe mental illness.

III. Content and expected benefits of the group interventions

Group interventions inspired by Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) aim to improve access to employment, retention in employment, and overall well-being for people with mental health disorders by offering group interventions. In this experimentation, Group interventions inspired by CBT were offered within Supported Employment programs. These interventions do not aim to replace individual support, but they can improve its results. This is known as "Augmented Supported Employment" or "Supported Employment +."

These group interventions help people to have:

- A better understanding of their needs
- A better ability to express their needs
- A strengthening of self-esteem and a sense of usefulness
- Better capacities to organize their work conditions
- An improved confidence in finding a job
- An improvement in well-being at work

In terms of results, group interventions inspired by CBT will have an impact on people's ability to find a job and to keep it.

Until then, group interventions had been implemented in Canada (Lecomte et al., 2014) but they had never been tried out in France.

In this experimentation, in order to validate their added value in France, group interventions were deployed within 7 supported employment schemes.

Group interventions are made up of 8 workshops. Each workshop has a specific content:

- Workshop 1: Coping with stress at work
- Workshops 2 & 3: Recognizing and modifying my dysfunctional beliefs linked to work
- Workshop 4: Overcoming obstacles linked to reintegrating the workplace
- Workshop 5: My strengths and competencies related to work
- Workshop 6: Accepting criticism and asserting myself appropriately
- Workshops 7 & 8: My best coping strategies for work

Each workshop is preceded and/or followed by an informal session to allow participants to connect with each other. Between workshops, participants can complete "homework assignments".

IV. Results obtained by the experimentation

Results measured on employment access and retention

Group interventions inspired by CBT have an impact on people's ability to find or maintain employment.

Considering access to employment, they accelerate the probability of finding a job in the first months following the workshops. Thus, at 6 months, the percentage of people having found a job in the experimental group (28%) is almost twice as high as the percentage of people having found a job in the control group (16%).

Considering job retention, the results are more nuanced. In the first three months following the workshops, higher retention rates are observed in the experimental group (77% compared to 67% in the control group) but the ratio is reversed in the following 3 months (70% in the experimental group compared to 80% in the control group).

Results measured on the appropriation of the CBT

Regarding the appropriation of the CBT method by the participants (self-confidence, positive way(s) of interacting with people, ability to question the way people look at things, ability to manage tensions, etc.), the results measured are very positive at the end of the workshops since we note significant differences in scores between the experimental group and the control group (+1.5 points).

On the other hand, these results seem to diminish 6 months after the workshops, with the results of the two groups then being very close.

This result raises the question of the impact of the workshop on the long term. It also raises the question of the usefulness of "booster" workshops, six months after the workshops, to maintain their benefits in the long term. These could be useful for maintaining the positive momentum generated by their participation in the workshops.

Results measured on anxiety symptoms and depression level

In both the experimental and control groups, there was a significant decrease in anxiety and depressive symptoms.

Although the decrease is greater for the experimental group compared to the control group during the first three months following the workshops, the results are very similar between the two groups at 6 months.

This leads to the conclusion that supported employment, itself, helps reduce anxiety and depression symptoms. However, group interventions inspired by CBT probably accelerate this movement, and this time saving is useful in enabling people to quickly find employment, as shown by the results measured on the speed of access to employment.

This observation also confirms the potential usefulness of “booster” workshops, 6 months after the workshops to maintain the positive impact of the group interventions in the long term.

Opinion of individuals and professionals about the improvement of well-being

From the perspective of interviewed individuals, the benefits of group interventions on people's well-being are undeniable, as they provide better abilities to analyze stress and manage emotions. These abilities are especially useful when people are faced with anxiety-provoking situations or when they are dealing with people who impress them.

People also notice better communication at home and at work.

The professionals interviewed share the opinion of the individuals and mention additional benefits such as a change in the representation of their disability and a better ability to overcome obstacles that happen in daily life.

Finally, individuals and professionals mention the added value of group session to break isolation and develop their social relationships.

Opinion of professionals and individuals on employment access and retention

According to the opinion of the people and professionals interviewed, the workshops have a significant impact on the ability to find and maintain employment.

For people who were not employed, a remobilization in a positive momentum is mentioned. People also perceive an awareness of their qualities at work and more generally a renewed confidence in their ability to find a job. Finally, people who were unemployed at the beginning of the workshops think that it helps them to reduce their fear of work and manage their stress during job interviews. In addition to this, professionals notice a better ability to talk about disability and to imagine solutions to overcome certain perceived obstacles to accessing employment.

For people who were employed at the start of the workshops, the main benefit is an improved ability to discuss the impact of disability and a better management of emotions at work.

Professionals' opinions on individual support enhancement

Professionals believe that the workshops help them to change their professional practices in a positive way. Some facilitators, for example, notice that the workshops have allowed them to develop a better understanding of the supported people’s needs and a better relationship with them.

Beyond the evolution of professional stance, many facilitators used the methods and tools acquired during the training as part of individual support. The "CBT chart" was particularly highlighted and appears to have been very useful to both individuals and professionals.

V. Recommendations

The various benefits measured for individuals, the impact of the workshops on access to and retention in employment, as well as the satisfaction unanimously expressed by participants and workshop facilitators, constitute very positive arguments in favor of the dissemination of group interventions inspired by CBT, as they were implemented during this experimentation.

It is recommended to deploy group interventions inspired by CBT in supported employment programs in addition to individual support. This type of intervention could also be useful to other forms of socio-professional support.

At the end of this experimentation, an implementation guide have been produced. It specifies the target audiences for collective interventions inspired by CBT and presents the necessary prerequisites as well as the key factors for the success of the workshops.

The implementation guide provides tips for mobilizing people, organizing and preparing workshops, and ensuring the best possible experience for both individuals and professionals. It is strongly recommended to consult this guide before implementing CBT-inspired group interventions.

Among the essential prerequisites for the success of workshops, training is fundamental. Improper use of this approach can even have negative effects on the support provided to individuals.

Each organization wishing to implement this intervention must therefore necessarily form at least one pair of professionals. These professionals can be jobcoach or professionals working in other services provided by the organization.

The guide provides the information needed to register professionals for training in order to deploy group interventions inspired by CBT within their structure.

VI. Available application support

Several application materials were produced during this experimentation. All these materials are freely available on the website of Agence nouvelle des solidarités actives.

Evaluation report : click here

The evaluation report presents all the results collected through data collection and site visits. It presents:

- The objectives and evaluation methodology
- A summary of the evaluation
  The results measured on access to employment, on participants' adoption of CBT methods, on self-esteem as a worker, on anxiety-depressive symptoms
- The perception of individuals and professionals of the impact of group interventions
- A detailed analysis of the added value of each workshop of the group intervention according to the participants
- Feedback on the training offered to professionals, from the participants' point of view (degree of satisfaction of professionals with the content, the process and the tools used during the training).

Implementation guide : click here

The implementation guide provides the elements necessary to ensure their successful deployment. The implementation guide presents:

- The necessary prerequisites for the implementation of interventions: involvement of management, training of facilitators, time and resources required
- Key success factors for the group intervention: choice of facilitators, involvement of colleagues, identification and mobilization of people, logistical organization, preparation of workshops, facilitation of workshops, debriefing, capitalization to improve individual support.

Videos

Three videos are available:

- A 10-minute video including a presentation of group interventions inspired by CBT, the experimentation aims and its main results as well as testimonies from professionals, workshop participants and manager: click here
- A 3-minute teaser to understand what the interventions consist of : click here
- A replay of the 1.5-hour webinar held on February 25, 2025, with testimonials from all stakeholders to provide feedback on the experiment, present the results and provide the elements needed to deploy collective interventions inspired by CBT within its structure or in its territory.: click here

A leaflet about the training, which describes the benefits of interventions inspired by CBT and specifies the procedures and costs of the training.

Finally, **articles** have also been submitted to specialized journals on mental health (Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health, a specialized mental health journal published by Agefiph), and a poster was displayed at the SIRS conference (Schizophrenia International Research Society, Chicago, end of March 2025).