

TEAMS: A Randomised Controlled Trial of an Online Intervention to Promote Mental Health Help-Seeking in Elite Athletes

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Background

Mental disorders are more common in young adults than at any other stage of the lifespan (1). Despite this, young people have low rates of seeking professional help for mental health problems (2). Research indicates that athletes may have less positive attitudes towards seeking help than non-athletes (3). Young elite athletes may be particularly vulnerable to not seeking help.

Objective. The Elite Athlete Mental health Strategy (TEAMS) trial aims to investigate the effectiveness of three online interventions for increasing mental health help-seeking attitudes (primary objective) and increasing mental health literacy and reducing stigma (secondary objectives).

Methods

A universal randomised controlled trial (RCT) of online mental health help-seeking interventions was conducted with 58 young elite athletes within sports around Australia and at the Australian Institute of Sport following an audit survey of 770 elite athletes. The interventions were a **mental health literacy and destigmatisation condition**, a **feedback condition**, and a **minimal content condition** comprising a list of help-seeking resources. Interventions were compared to each other and a **“life as usual” control condition**. Outcome measures were the *Attitudes to Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale Short Form (ATSPPHS-SF)* (4), *Anxiety Literacy Scale (A-Lit)*, *Depression Literacy Scale (D-Lit)* (5), *Generalised Anxiety Stigma Scale (GASS)* (6), and the *Depression Stigma Scale (DSS)* (5).

Results

Mixed models repeated measures ANOVAs demonstrated a significantly greater improvement in mental health literacy (A-Lit, D-Lit) and a significantly greater reduction in stigma scores (GASS, DSS) for the mental health literacy/destigmatisation condition compared to each of the other conditions (see Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4). However, there were no significant differences in changes in help-seeking attitudes (ATSPPHS-SF) between the groups over time.

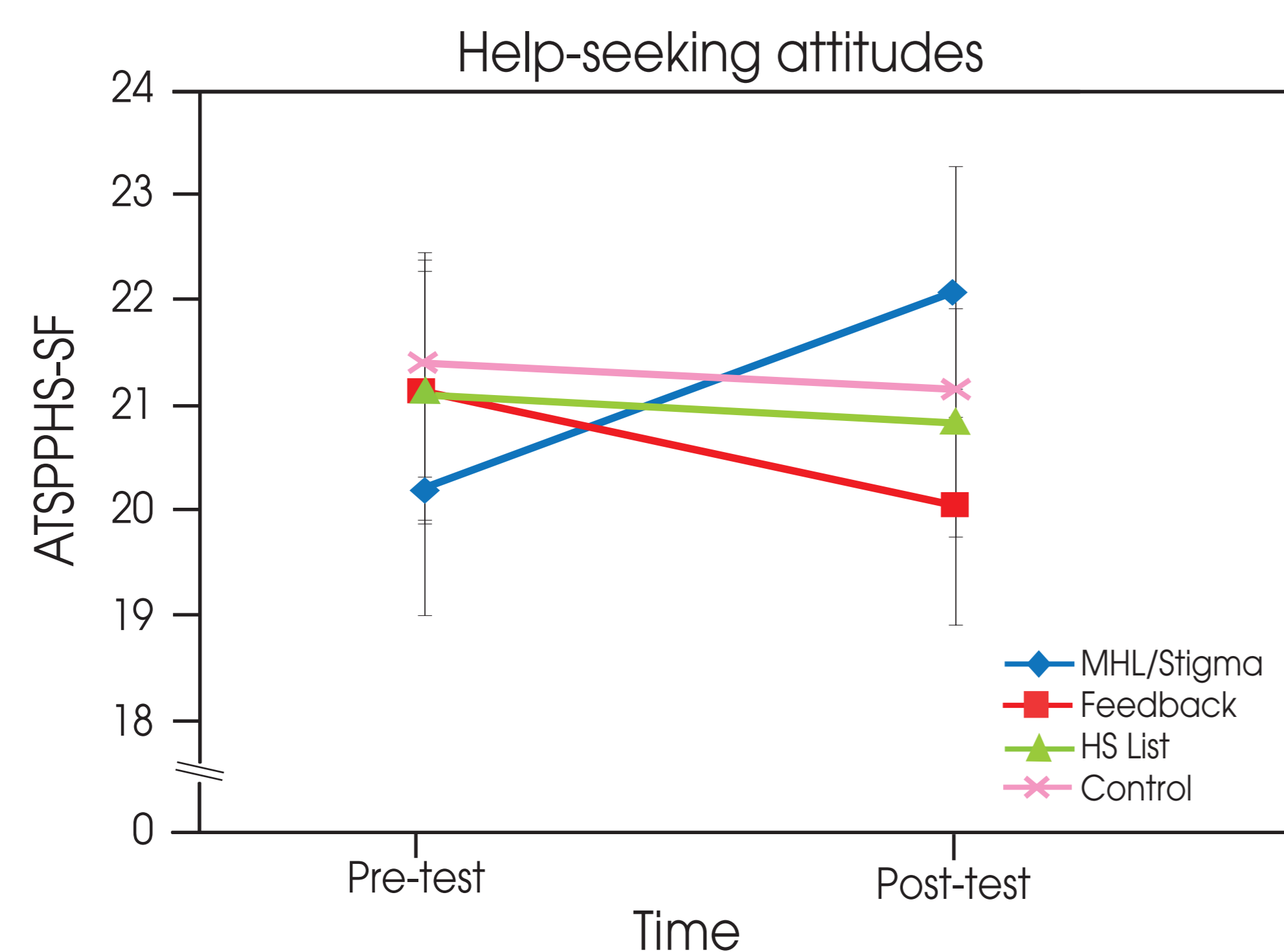


Figure 1. Help-seeking attitudes outcomes for each condition at pre- and post-test. Condition by time is not statistically significant.

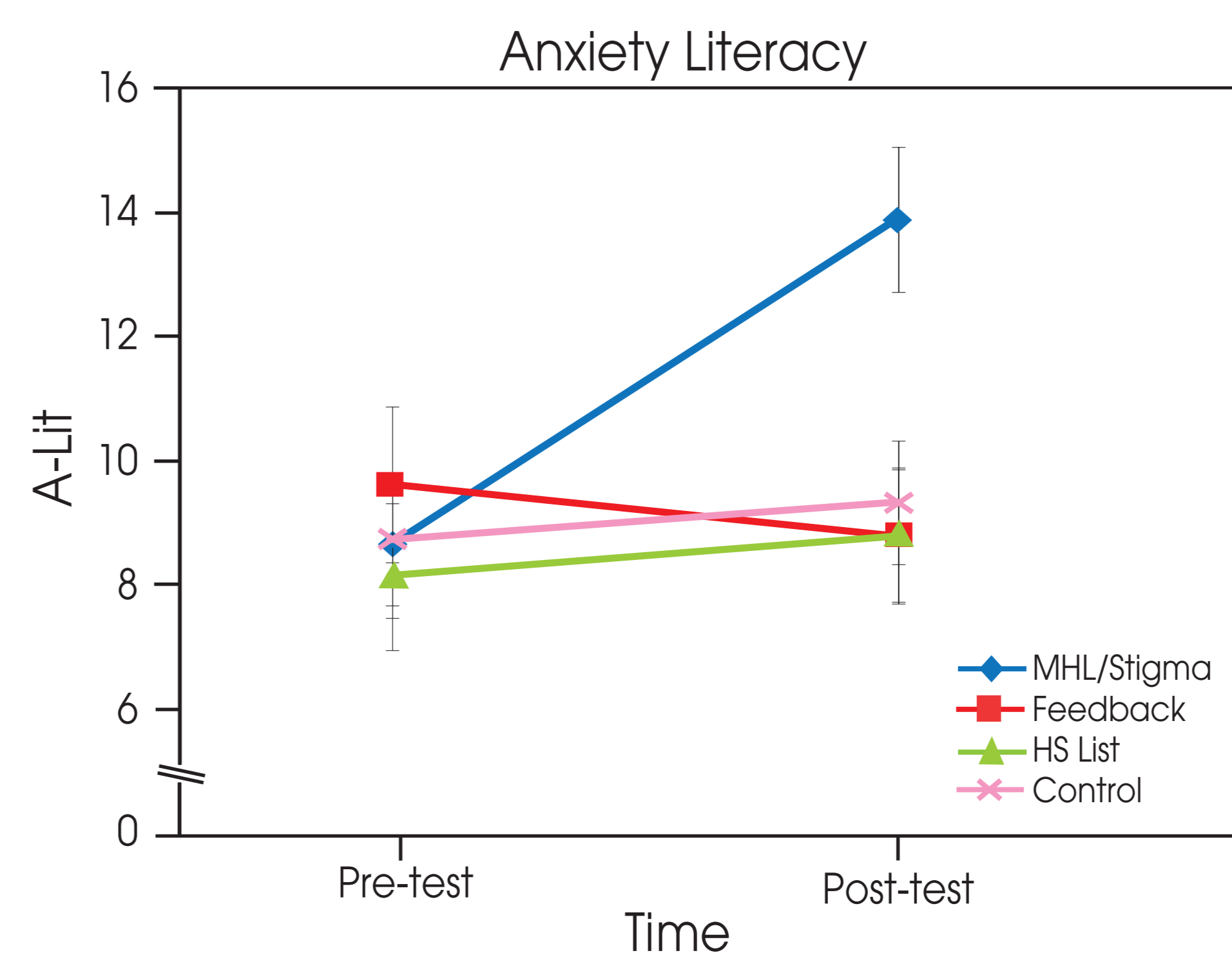


Figure 2. Anxiety literacy outcomes for each condition at pre- and post-test. Condition by time is statistically significant for Mental Health Literacy/Destigmatisation vs. all other conditions ($p=.001-.007$). Depression literacy (D-Lit) followed a similar pattern of results ($p=.010-.030$).

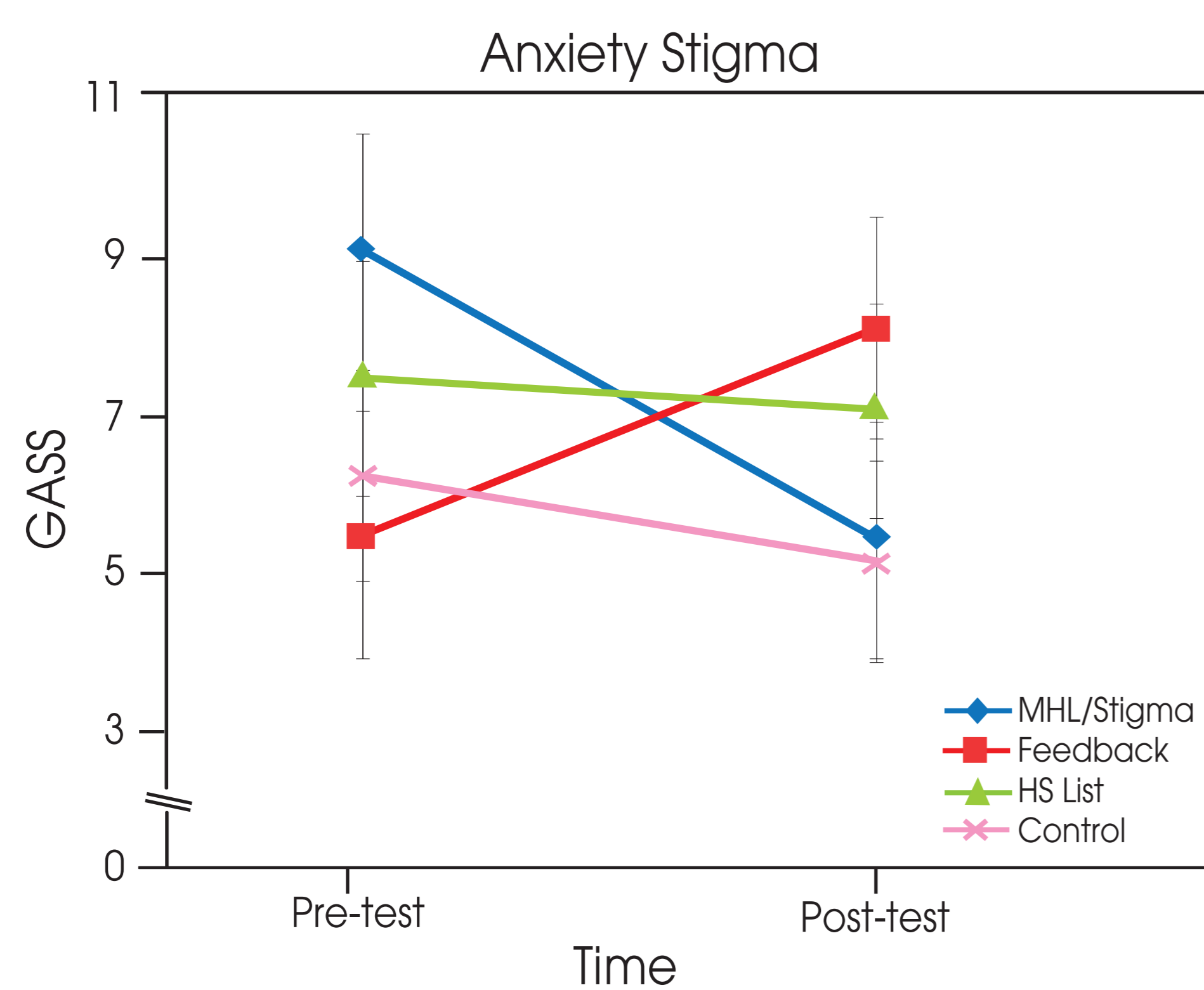


Figure 3. Anxiety stigma outcomes for each condition at pre- and post-test. Condition by time is statistically significant for Mental Health Literacy/Destigmatisation vs. Feedback ($p=.005$) only.

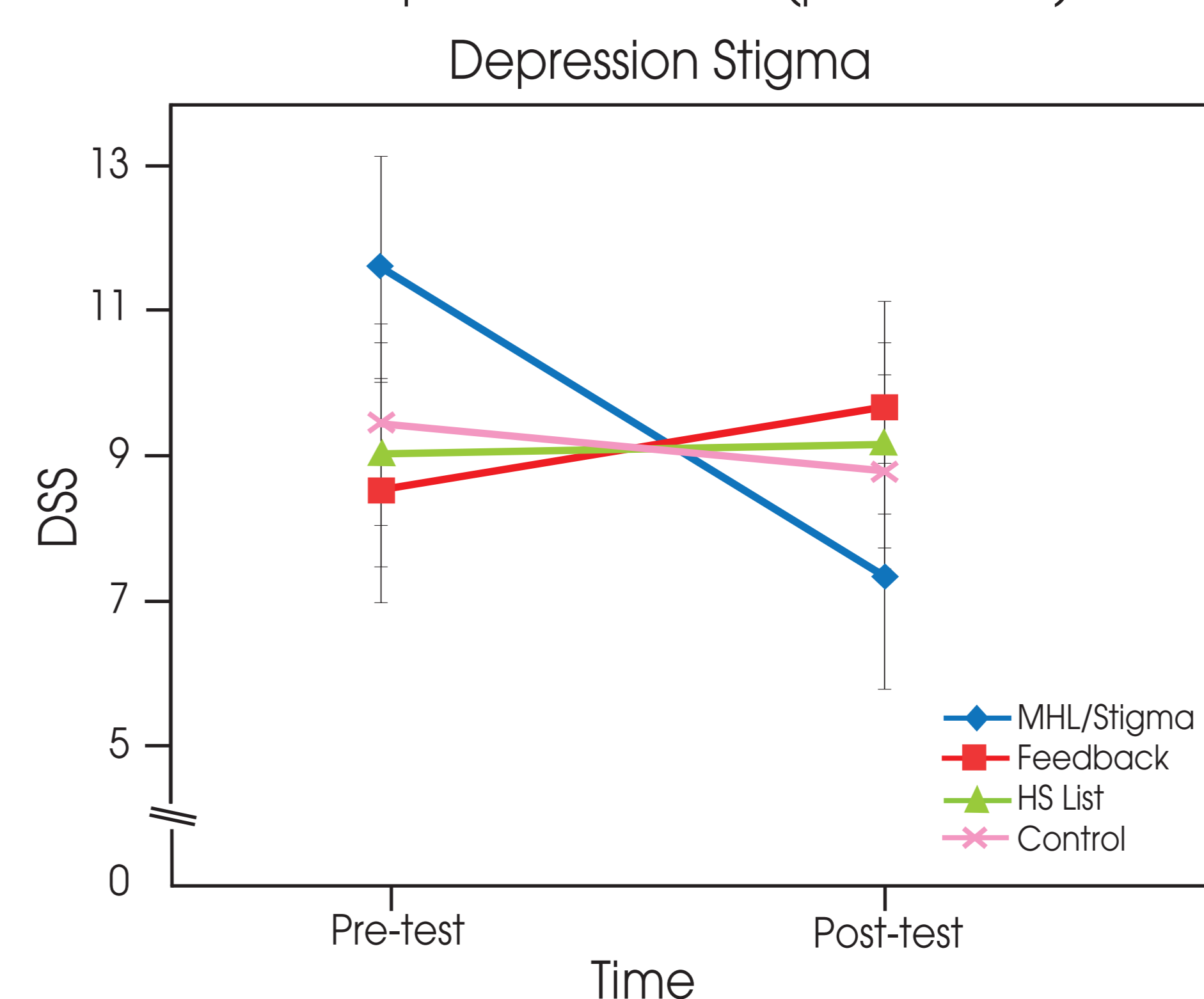


Figure 4. Depression stigma outcomes for each condition at pre- and post-test. Condition by time is statistically significant for Mental Health Literacy/Destigmatisation vs. all other conditions ($p=.009-.041$).

Conclusions

This is the first randomised controlled trial of an online mental health help-seeking intervention for young elite athletes. The results suggest that a brief mental health literacy and destigmatisation program may be an effective intervention for improving mental health literacy and attitudes to mental health in this group. However, none of the conditions improved help-seeking attitudes in this population.

Limitations: The achieved sample size was small and the failure to detect an effect for help seeking may result from insufficient power.

References

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