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Interest of Horse-Assisted Therapy (HAT) in the evolution of emotional disorders of addicted patients in aftercare.

Charlène Leconstant & Elisabeth Spitz*

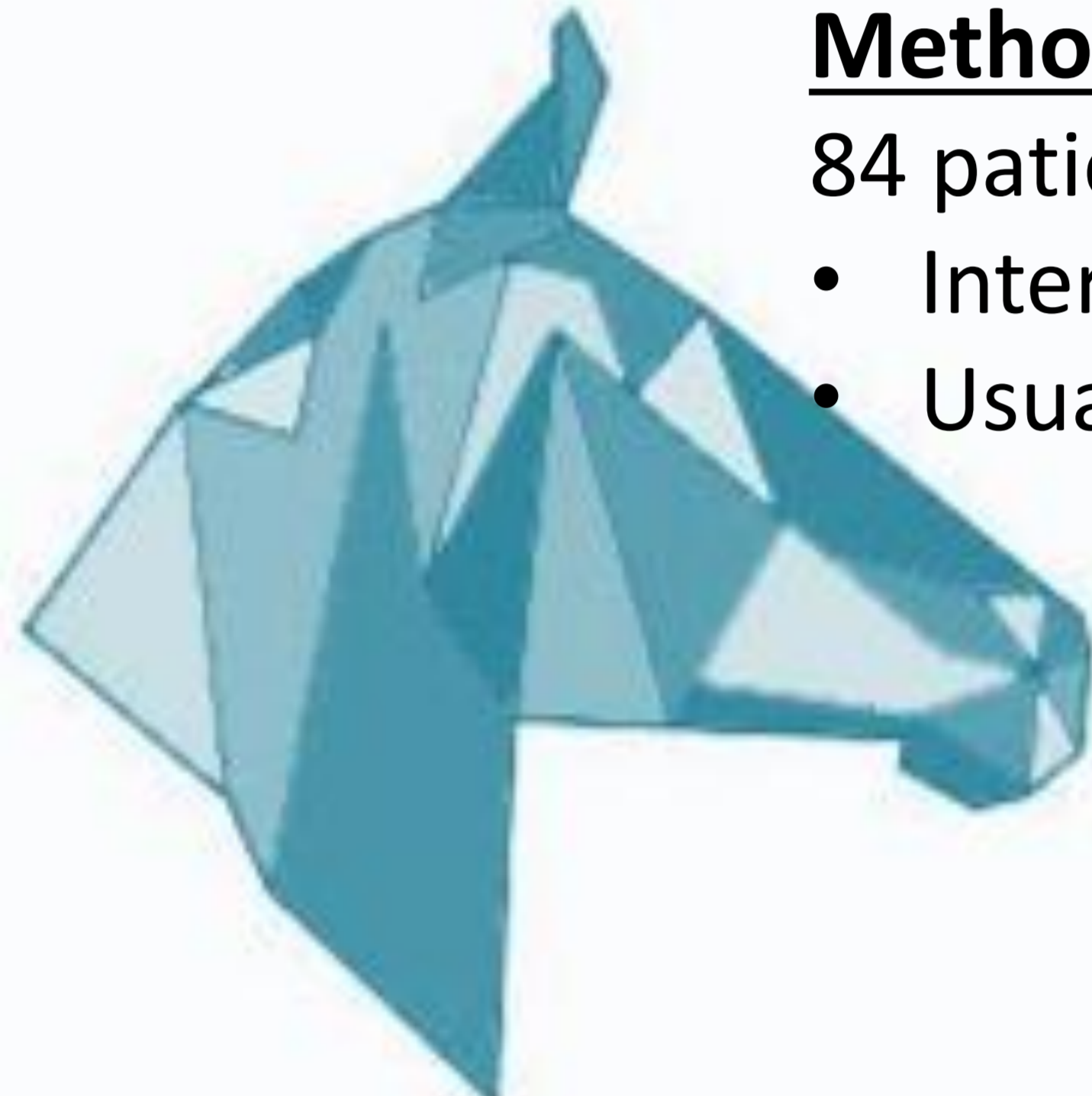
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In collaboration with Centre de Soins de Suite et de Réadaptation en Addictologie « La Fontenelle », Maizeroy.

September 2019, EHPS, Dubrovnick.

Context:
 People dependent on alcohol or drugs have difficulties with emotional regulation, especially with anger management (Walfish, Massey & Krone, 1990; De Mojá & Spielberger, 1997). They report more difficulty regulating their emotions at the beginning of abstinence (Fox, Axelrod, Paliwal, Sleeper & Sinha, 2007). In addition, impulse control problems suggest a potential vulnerability to relapse.

Intervention objectives :
 To take part in improving emotional regulation and anger reduction skills in patients with addictive disorders during their aftercare stay. During the intervention, the therapist offers patients the opportunity to practice mindfulness and emotional regulation exercises with horses. The horse's presence allows patient to experiment both cognitively and sensorially, and to adjust their behavior during the session.



Methodology:
 84 patients divided into 2 groups:
 • Intervention HAT group (n=47),
 • Usual care group (n=37).

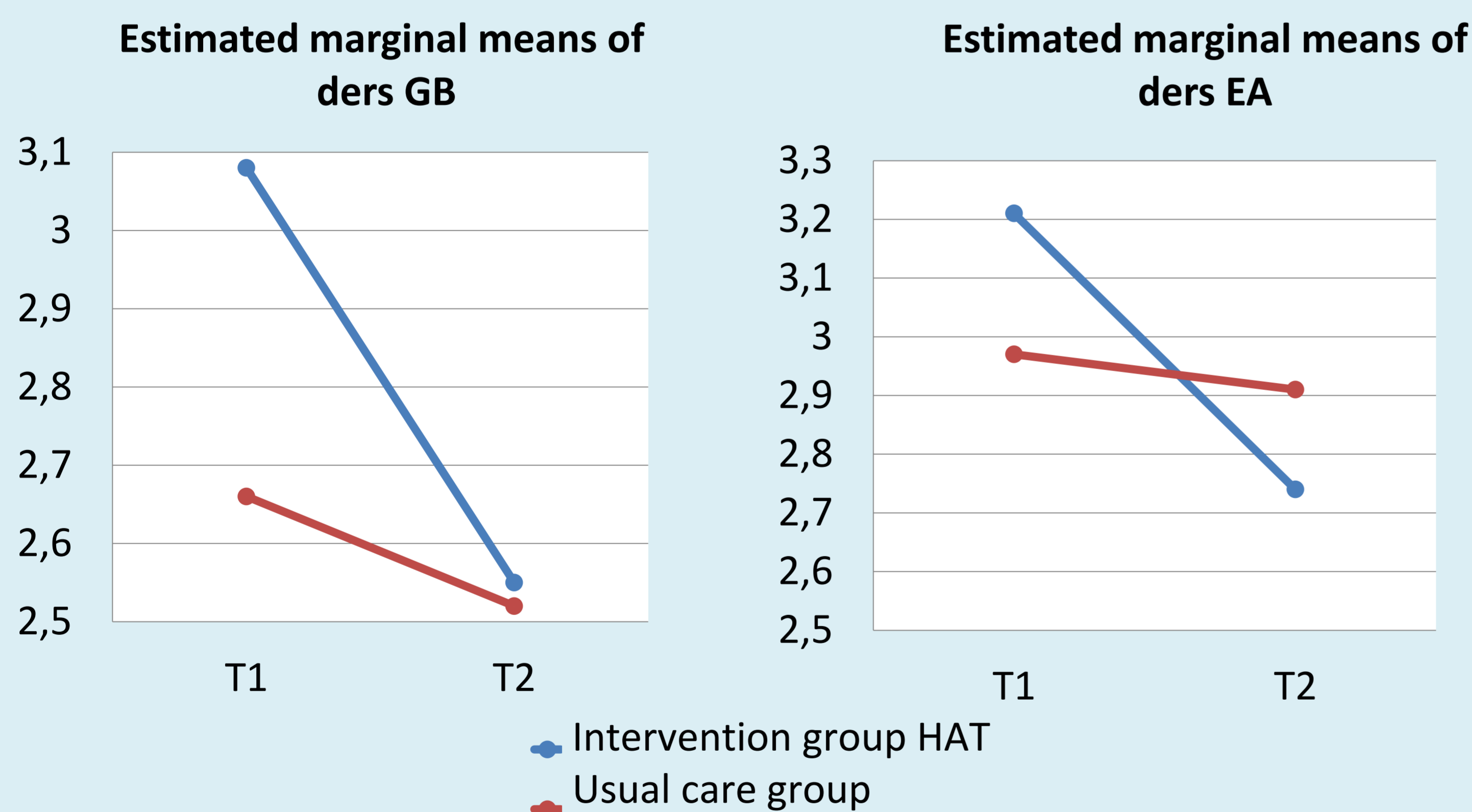
Statistical analyzes:
 - t Student
 - repeated measures ANOVA.

Scales of measurements used at the beginning and end of the stay:
 • Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (Gratz & Roemer, 2004),
 • Anger Expression and Control Scale (van Elderen, Maes, & Komproe, 1997).

In addition to the usual care of the center, patients in the intervention group participate in 1 session / week of horse-assisted therapy for 2 hours for the duration of their stay, ranging from 5 to 17 weeks.

Results:

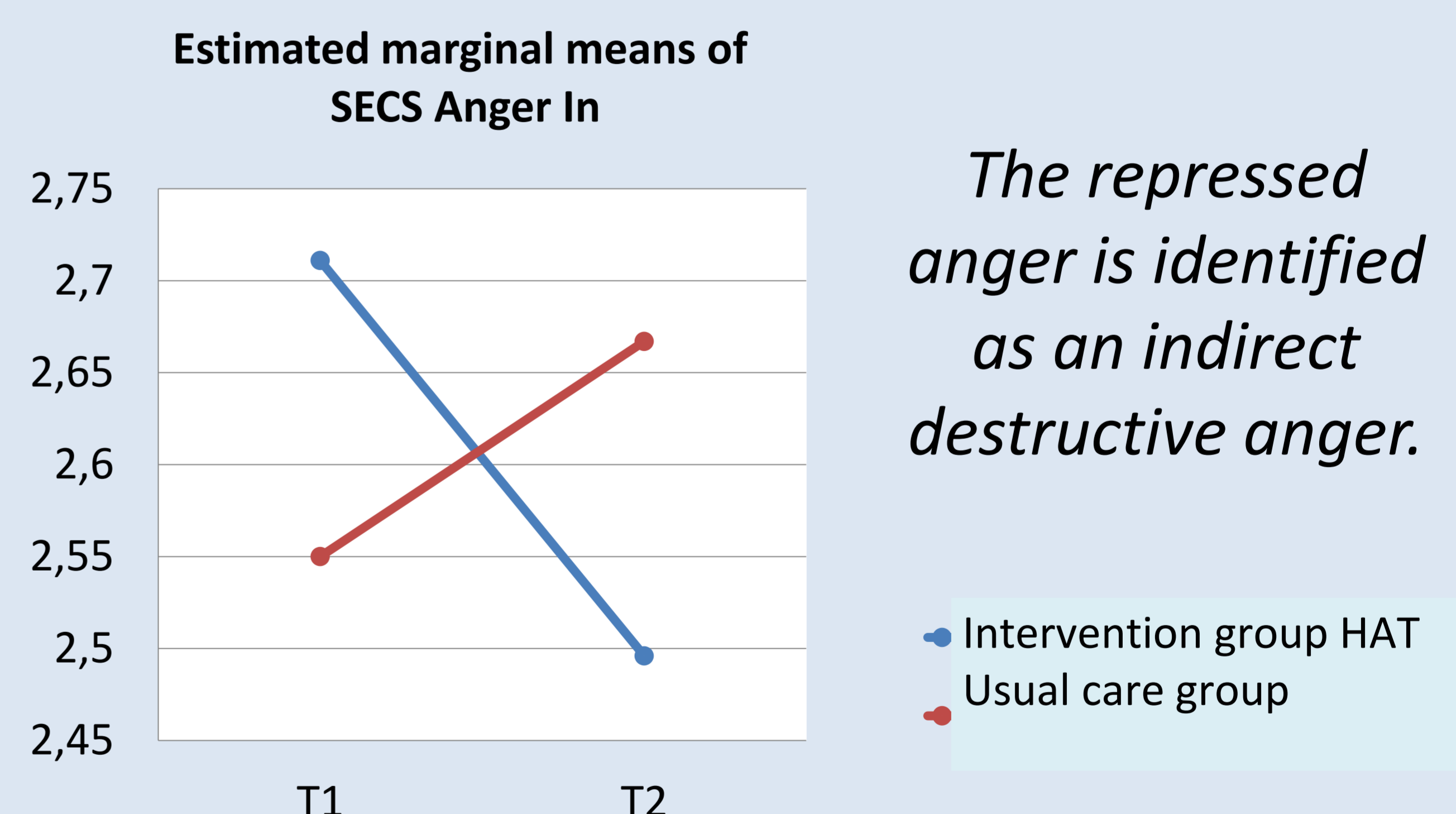
1) The difficulties of emotional regulation



Significant interaction effect "Time*Groups":

As a result of the HAT, there is a more rapid decrease in difficulties engaging in goal-directed behavior in the presence of negative emotions (GB) $F(1,82) = 5.74, p = .01$, as well as the lack of Emotional Awareness (EA) ($F(1,82) = 5.41, p = .02$).

2) The repressed Anger



The repressed anger is identified as an indirect destructive anger.

Following the HAT, patients in the Intervention group tended to suppress their anger less ($t(46) = 1.84, p = .07$).

Significant cross interaction effect "Time*Groups":
 At the end of their stay, patients in the Intervention group patients feel less anger in them ($F(1,82) = 5.04, p = .02$) than patients in the usual care group.

Conclusion:

Horse Assisted Therapy (HAT) can be an effective complement to reduce emotional regulation difficulties and repressed anger of addicted patients. It allows the learning of concrete strategies to recognize one's emotions and express them in a more appropriate way. She is involved in supporting abstinence and preventing relapse.