



BPD SOCIETY OF BC

Support Group Survey Report 2023

Introduction

This survey was created to measure the impacts of the Borderline Personality Disorder Society of BC's support groups. This survey was the first of its kind, offering a space for participants to reflect on their experience in the group and offer their observations and suggestions. This survey had two parts, one that was open to current and past participants of the support group who have lived experience with BPD (Lived Experience Survey) and one that was open to health care professionals who refer clients to the group and/or support clients that attend the group (Health Care Professional Survey).

Lived Experience Survey

Demographic Information

Among 41 individuals who completed the Lived Experience Survey, the majority of the respondents were individuals living with BPD (88%). The rest were loved ones of those with BPD (12%). Approximately half of the respondents participated in the Victoria BPD support group (51%) and indicated Victoria as their city of residence, while others joined in Nanaimo (5%), New Westminister (22%), Vancouver (2%), or online (20%). The age of the respondents ranged from 19 to 85, with an average age of 36. Most of the respondents were women (71%), while others identified as male (17%), non-binary (7%), gender queer (5%), transgender (2%), two-spirit (2%), agender (2%), or preferred to self-describe (2%). Regarding ethnicity, the sample was predominantly White (85%). The remaining respondents were Indigenous (15%), Latin American (5%), Middle Eastern (3%), or preferred to self-describe (8%). Most of the respondents were current group members (68%), while others were past group members (32%).

Scale Questions

Participants were given the following seven statements and asked to select whether they strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed, strongly disagreed or felt neutrally about the statement.

This group has made an important difference in my life.



of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

5% of respondents (2/40) strongly disagreed with this statement. The remaining participants, 12.5% (5/40), answered neutrally.

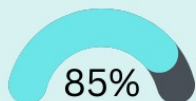
I feel welcome when I attend support group meetings.



of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

7.5% of respondents (3/40) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. The remaining participant, 2.5% (1/40) answered neutrally.

I have learnt skills and information in this group that I can use in my everyday life.



of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

7.5% of respondents (3/40) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. The remaining participants, 7.5% (3/40), answered neutrally.

I feel that this group is accessible.



of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

5% of respondents (2/40) strongly disagreed with this statement. The remaining participant, 2.5% (1/40) answered neutrally.

There are no other services available to me that offer the same level of support.



of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

27.5% of respondents (11/40) were neutral in their response to this statement. 5% of respondents (2/40) strongly disagreed with this statement.

I feel the facilitators provide an inclusive, trauma-informed, culturally safe space.



of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

7.5% of respondents (5/40) strongly disagreed with this statement. The remaining participant, 2.5% (1/40) answered neutrally.

Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the group.



of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

7.5% of respondents (5/40) strongly disagreed with this statement. The remaining participant, 2.5% (1/40) answered neutrally.

Short Answer Questions

Participants also answered six short answer questions. Their responses are represented here through illustrative quotes and reoccurring themes that appeared in the data.

Why did you decide to join this group?

Theme #1: Participants joined the support group because they wanted to learn more about BPD, build skills, and learn to express themselves emotionally.

- "I joined the group for a number of reasons – one would be to understand myself by listening to others, another to know I'm not alone, to understand others and how they feel, and to look forward to something. When I went to the program on an ETA after 30 years in prison, I knew this was the program I needed since I was 10 and other programs never fit for me."
- "This is my first time joining the group and mainly because I want to try and learn to talk about feelings, especially since one of the main ways I dissociate is emotionally."

Theme #2: Participants joined the support group because they wanted to learn how to support a loved one.

- "I joined this group to learn how to best support my daughter who has BPD."

Theme #3: Participants joined the support group because they wanted to find community with people who had similar experiences, make new friends and feel less alone.

- "I have struggled with feeling heard and understood all of my life. In the group I hear people who share emotions, feelings and actions as I do."
- "I received a diagnosis of BPD after almost losing myself, and decided to attend to see what a group setting would be like – never having been in one before. I was looking for validation, others to make it seem less lonely, and a safe place, and though only one meeting in, it's changed my hard-wiring in my brain already."
- "When I was diagnosed I didn't really have any places to go to learn about BPD, I also felt really alienated due to being with someone who was abusive (At the time) so being around others with BPD, and seeing how "normal" we are really helped."

Theme #4: Participants joined the support group because they were seeking personal growth and development.

- "I joined this group because I wanted to better myself as a person."

Theme #5: Participants joined the support group because they were referred by a health care professional after diagnosis and found that it was difficult to find other resources.

- "My daughter has borderline and there is no support for it but this group."

What are your overall impressions of the peer support group?

Theme #1: The participants found that the support group was a supportive, welcoming and non-judgmental environment.

- "A welcoming and safe environment that is comfortable and not pressuring with the freedom to step out and return or leave without detailed explanation but with a simple verbal "check out" as people's well-being is very important to the facilitators."
- Adjectives used: Kind, respectful, supportive, understanding, warm, validating, inclusive, safe, comforting, welcoming, nurturing, quiet, accessible, diverse, healing-focused, vulnerable, sincere, free of stigma/prejudice, considerate, approachable, full of hope, non-judgmental.

Theme #2: Participants felt that the facilitators were helpful, knowledgeable and friendly.

- "Very informed and supportive and offering material for study. Very "validating" facilitators which is one big thing that helps people with BPD or any mental health need."
- "10/10 incredible. The volunteers who keep this peer support group are angels walking on earth. I've done many different styles of counselling and therapies and I truly have never found anything more beneficial than this group."
- "Supportive, inclusive, welcoming and accessible. I don't know what any of us would be doing without it."

Theme #3: The group provided a welcoming space for participants to build relationships, engage socially, and have great conversations.

- "The social time afterwards was also good for building relationships with people who understood what I was facing in daily life."

Theme #4: The group made the participants feel less alone.

- "Very validating experience. Only place I feel as though people understand me."

Theme #5: The group provided a space for participants to learn from others experiences, where a variety of experiences and ages were represented.

- "I like going to the program and look forward to it each week. I get to meet people that care for me, and get to hear people talk about their experiences, and be heard and feel seen about my experiences."
- "It's a safe space where I can learn and meet people going through similar things."

In what ways has your life changed after participating in this group?

Theme #1: The group made participants feel less alone, less alienated from society and challenged the self-stigma they felt associated with being diagnosed with BPD.

- "I don't feel alone in my diagnosis, I don't feel like I'm bad or wrong, I feel like a person with a name to a difficulty."
- "My life has changed from participating in this group in many ways. I used to feel like I was the only person on earth who dealt with BPD and the symptoms of it, alienated and unlike the rest of society. This group has reminded me that I am human, we all face adversity and problems in one way or another but that does not make me any less of an equal human being."
- "It's changed the way I view myself and my disorder."

Theme #2: The group helped participants gain a better understanding of how to support a loved one.

- "I am more understanding of the disorder – what it is and what it isn't, and I'm able to help my daughter better."

Theme #3: Participants learned new skills to manage BPD on a daily basis, making life easier and better.

- "I have learnt skills that I wouldn't have if I didn't go."
- "It has helped me focus on my mental health and encouraged me to further develop skills I can use that will help make my life easier to navigate."
- "A refocus on coping skills previously learned and the learning of new ones to apply. Success! I have less stress, less emotional reactions, less obsessive thinking and so forth, causing more order in my life while living with a "disorder". I can often have self-validating thoughts now and a large reduction in post-traumatic stress disorder. In other words: post trauma without the "disorder" Of course there are still times when I have symptoms but they are much less severe and much less frequent. This change was not from medicine – it was from psychological support."

Theme #4: Participants had the opportunity to connect with others with similar experiences and feel included and supported in a group.

- "I am able to connect with others that feel and think the same way that I do and have gone through similar experiences."

Theme #5: The group gave participants a desire to live and to practice self-love and care.

- "I no longer want to hurt myself and makes me want to live. It has made me want to love myself and stop hating the public for what happened to me. My social anxiety is less, and I've learnt more about social boundaries."

How have the facilitators created a welcoming, inclusive, trauma-informed, and culturally safe space?

Theme #1: Facilitators respect diverse needs and make sure that everyone feels welcome.

- "The program accepts everyone no matter what. No one is left out. Even if you are a criminal they don't judge you. If they notice I am feeling upset they pick up on it and talk to you."
- "Very sensitive to diverse needs, especially for people who have experienced intimate partner violence."

Theme #2: Facilitators are knowledgeable about BPD and demonstrate strong listening and facilitation skills.

- "Really personable, professional, compassionate, yet they hold the group discussion in control."
- "They are always friendly and non-judgmental."
- "They are very cheerful, always happy to see you and very knowledgeable on the subject."

Theme #3: Facilitators set clear boundaries and create a safe space.

- "Boundaries are clear and are repeated at the beginning of each meeting."
- "Preceding the meeting with clear rules of appropriate individual and group behaviour."
- "The facilitators greet and explain and the room is nice. They tactfully intervene if a person starts to speak in a distressing way. They do not slap labels' on me nor order me about. They make polite requests which is very important for a person who has issues with authoritarian abuse (abused by an authority) and wants to 'cooperate' and not sense a dominating energy of the expectation to 'comply.'"

If this service was not available, where else would you receive this form of support?

A few participants suggested DBT, regular therapy, Betterhelp, Youtube videos, and the hospital. Otherwise, most participants expressed that they are not aware of anywhere else that could provide support.

- "I don't have anywhere else, the province doesn't cover any mental illness treatment."
- "I searched everywhere for something like this and could not find it anywhere else."
- "I applied through the city I live in for DBT that was covered under MSP. I was notified that it was no longer available. This is the only group I can find that is not expensive."
- "Before the program I never reached out to anyone. I would just hurt myself. I don't contact the crisis line. It's not the same as the program."
- "I feel very validated here and it's difficult to find any kind of support because I have a personality disorder. I am unable to get free counselling services because I have BPD. Even going from once a week online groups to once every two weeks has been difficult."
- "No where. I allow myself 2 therapy sessions a month because its so expensive. The fact that I can go to a group that is free and has people experiencing similar things to me is incredibly helpful. I would feel a lot more alone without this group."

Is there anything you would like to share with us about your experience that would help us improve the program?

Most of the participants indicated that they have no suggestions and instead offered their positive reflections of the group:

- "I've loved coming to this group for over a year and I'm very grateful to have found it when I did."
- "This group is the most important thing in my life right now. I feel loved and supported. I like the stability of meeting regularly. I cannot imagine a better way to feel supported while living with BPD."
- "I am so grateful for this support group and also for being able to bring my loved ones who can learn as well."
- "I'd say just keep things as they are unless there is a need to change, it is a well run and well rounded group."
- "I was a facilitator for a short time. The training I was given was excellent. I think that the support group format was excellent and don't really have any ideas of how to improve it."
- "The group is peer support where some people have become best friends; I've gained a regular peer support worker that has helped me reintegrate back into society and made me feel I want to live. I am someone that suffered and wanted to get back at the public now my thinking has changed. This program has changed my life and healed me."

Among people who left suggestions, some examples include:

- Add an advocacy program to promote service access within the healthcare system
- Increase frequency of the meetings to weekly (for groups that are not already offered weekly)
- Expansion as anyone living with BPD could benefit from belonging to the BPD society.
- Have specific BPD topics for each meeting
- Split the group into two: one for individuals with BPD and one for loved ones
- Return to previous check-in format if time allows
- Promote the group on social media and increase online presence
- More structure and discipline around triggering topics

Health Care Professional Survey Summary

The majority of responses came from counsellors (80%, 4/5 respondents). The other respondent was a social worker. Each of the respondents reported that they had not participated in the group. In general, the respondents reported that their clients had positive experiences with the group. One respondent said, "My clients consistently report positive experiences of feeling supported." Another respondent said, "I have heard that it has had an extremely positive effect on the individuals that have gone and they very much value the opportunity to connect with others with this diagnosis and the support that they receive from the group." One respondent also added that "hearing from others in the support group about the value of DBT skills and other therapeutic concepts greatly expand the value of the clinical work that occurs in session."

The respondents expressed that there were no other similar supports available for their clients. One respondent shared, "It is the only support group of this kind to support this population" and that the group provides "a space to be witnessed."

The following recommendation was made by one of the respondents: "I don't know if this is already part of the available support, but conveying ongoing psycho-education around the impacts of trauma to contributing symptoms may be helpful for participants to hear, as well as part of the psycho-education that is offered to service providers and employers."