

Mindfulness Practices for Medical Students and the Impact of Accountability on Well-Being

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INTRODUCTION

Medical School Mental Health Challenges:

- **Demanding Program:** Medical school is highly challenging and stressful for students.
- **Psychological Distress:** Medical students report higher levels of psychological distress (such as anxiety and depression) than the general population.
- **Underutilization of Services:** Many students do not seek mental health support.

Prevalence of Mental Health Issues:

- **Anxiety:** 33% of medical students experience anxiety.
- **Depression:** Over 27% report depression or depressive symptoms.
- **Suicidal Ideation:** 11% of students experience suicidal thoughts.
- **Growing Interest:** Increased research on mindfulness to enhance student well-being.

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR):

- A standardized 8-week program designed to teach mindfulness skills.
- Associated with increased psychological well-being and self-compassion.

Online Mindfulness Programs:

- Previous research has highlighted the positive impact of online mindfulness interventions on medical students' mental health.

METHODS

Study Overview:

- **Recruitment Period:** August - September 2023
- **Participants:** A total of 13 students at the University of Maryland School of Medicine
 - Asynchronous Mindfulness Exercises (AME): n=6
 - AME with Weekly Accountability Group Sessions (AME +): n=3
 - Control Group: n=4

Group Interventions:

- **AME Group:** Engaged in asynchronous mindfulness exercises.
- **AME + Group:**
 - Participated in 6 weekly focus group sessions.
 - Debriefed and performed mindfulness exercises together.

Data Collection:

- **Questionnaires:** Completed weekly during the intervention and post-intervention follow-ups at weeks 2, 4, and 6.

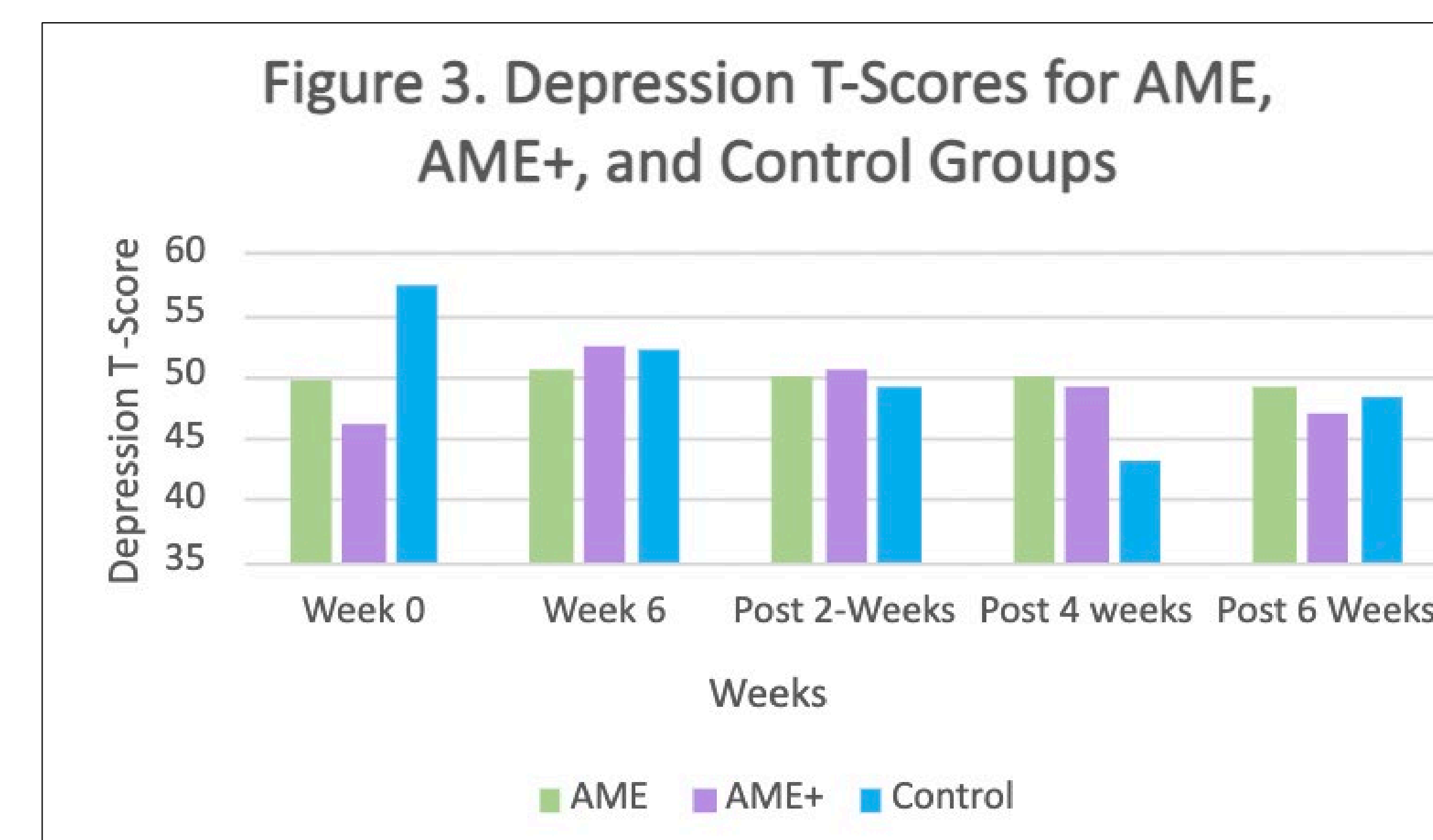
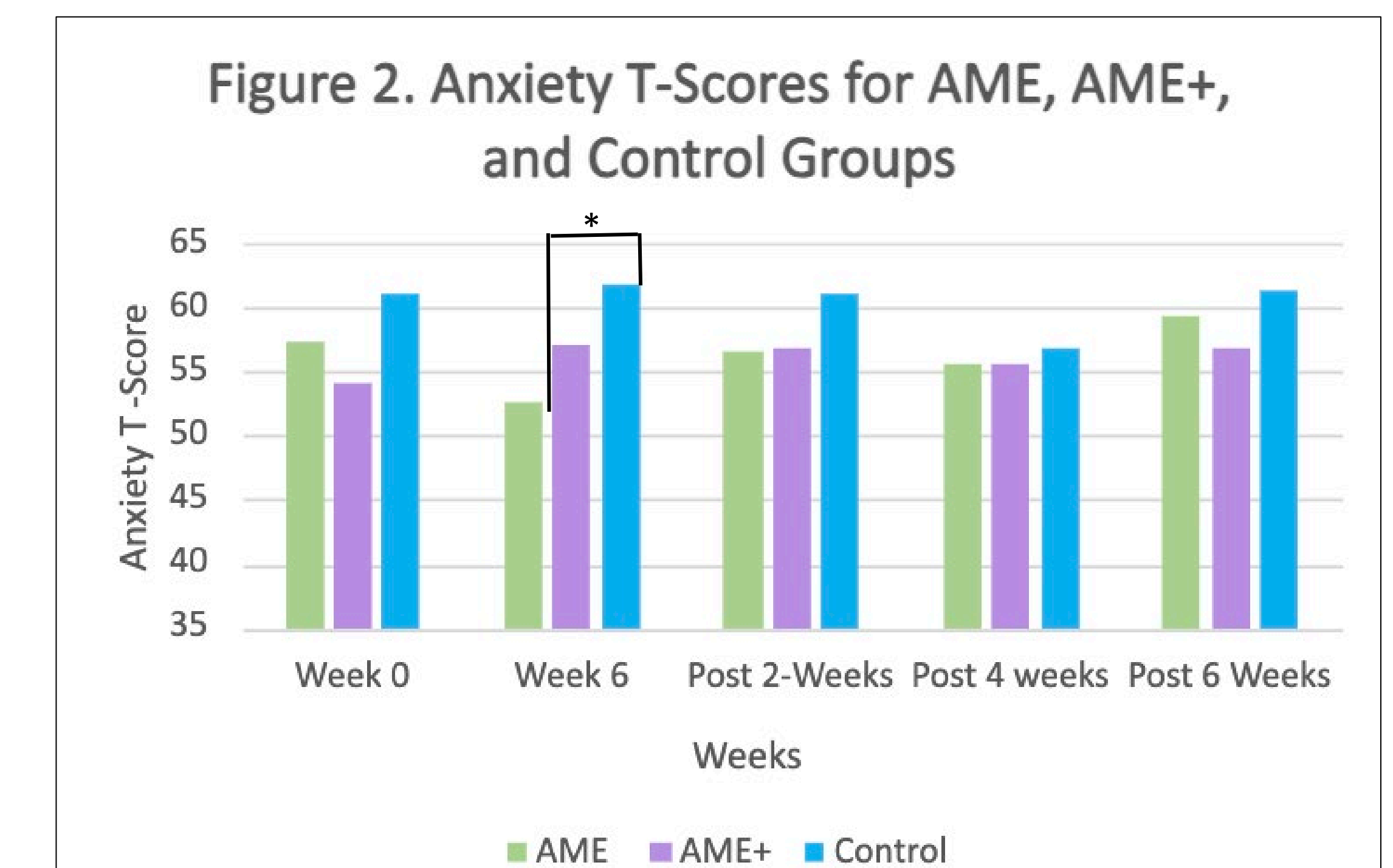
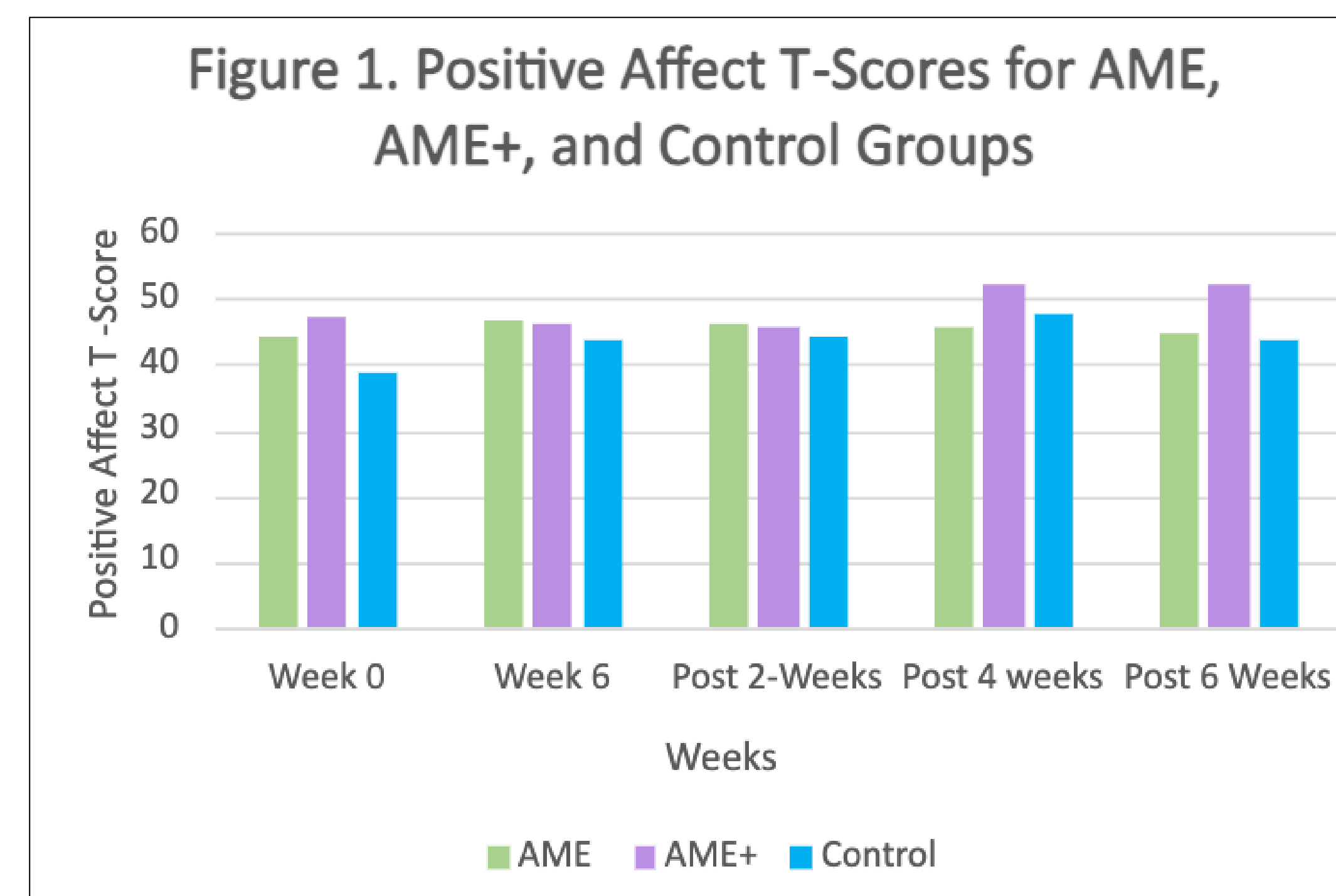
Assessment Tools:

- PROMIS Anxiety Scale
- PROMIS Depression Scale
- PROMIS Positive Affect Scale

Analysis:

- **Comparison:** T-scores were analyzed between the different groups.

RESULTS



DISCUSSION

- A significant decrease in anxiety between the control group and the AME group immediately post-intervention (week 6) suggests continuous mindfulness activities could positively impact students' overall mental health. However, a larger sample size is needed to further explore this finding.
- The absence of significant differences between the AME + group and the other two groups suggests that mindfulness activities are more beneficial when self-implemented by students rather than scheduled by a third party. However, a larger sample size is needed to confirm these findings.
- Accountability checks do not appear to influence mental health outcomes, either negatively or positively.
- Limitations of our study included a small sample size and some participants being lost to follow-up.

CONCLUSION

- Mindfulness activities are important for improving anxiety in medical students undergoing a stressful, intense curriculum over four years.
- Implementing the activities at times that work best for students' schedules, even if it's only for 5 minutes, can improve mental health and overall performance over the long term.
- Future studies exploring different forms of mindfulness activities and their effects on students' long-term mental health outcomes are important for better understanding how to improve the medical student experience.

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