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ABSTRACT

Assault victims exhibit a variety of emotional responses including fear, depression, and sexual impairment. For most assault victims, these responses decline over time. This study examined the pattern of post-assault responses during the first 12 weeks and compared the pattern of responses following rape with non-sexual criminal assault reactions. Subjects included female rape victims (N=59) and male and female victims (N=37) of robbery or assault. Subjects were interviewed weekly by a mental health professional. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms, depression, anxiety, and symptoms representing responses to assault and rape were assessed. After 9 weeks, subjects were divided into those with and without PTSD. A comparison between groups revealed that the scores of the PTSD rape victims on non-PTSD symptoms such as depression diverged from those without PTSD and remained consistently elevated throughout the 12 post-rape weeks. These results suggest that post-rape reactions can be construed as PTSD and that non-sexual crime is less likely to produce PTSD than rape. (ABL)

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Responses Following Sexual and Non-Sexual Assault

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Responses Following Sexual and Non-Sexual Assault

Introduction

Assault victims exhibit a variety of emotional responses after the trauma including fear, depression, social, and sexual impairment. Common reactions also include nightmares, sleep difficulties, flashbacks, hypervigilance, and avoidance of situations associated with the assault. These reactions typically meet DSM-III-R criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). For most assault victims, these responses decline over time. The course of this decline, however, may vary across individuals. The present study is designed to investigate the pattern of post-assault responses during the first 12 weeks and to compare the pattern of responses following rape with non-sexual criminal assault reactions.

Procedure

Subjects were 59 female rape victims and 37 male and female crime victims (robbery, simple or aggravated assault). Subjects were interviewed weekly by a mental health professional. PTSD symptoms were assessed via a structured interview developed for this study and based on DSM-III criteria. Severity of PTSD was represented as a total score summed across symptoms. Participants also completed the Beck Depression Inventory, Spielberger State-Trait Anxiety Inventory, the Revised Impact of Event Scale, and the Rape Aftermath Symptom Test.

Characteristics of the 59 rape victims are as follows: the median age is 25, 59% are black, 76% are single, 48% received at least high school education, and 63% earned less than \$10,000/year. The crime sample of 14 men and 23 women is similar except for age (median age 36) and marital status (54% single).

Results

Questionnaire Data. Initial scores on questionnaires revealed that rape victims had more symptoms than crime victims. *t*-tests between groups on the BDI, RIES (Avoidance and Intrusion scales), and STAI-State were all significant at the .05 level. The rape victims' scores remained higher throughout the 3-month post-assault period. Both rape and crime victims showed a decline in symptoms until week 9 after which little change occurred.

Interview Data. Interview items corresponding to the DSM-III symptoms of reexperiencing, numbing, and arousal were used to estimate presence of PTSD. In the absence of questions pertaining to behavioral avoidance, the avoidance score of the RIES was combined with the interview items to yield a post-hoc PTSD diagnosis for each of 12 assessments. This analysis revealed that more rape victims met PTSD criteria than did crime victims. At week 1, 57 of 59 rape victims (97%) and 21 of 37 crime victims (57%) reported sufficient symptoms for a diagnosis

of PTSD if the duration criteria were met. Prevalence of PTSD gradually decreased until week 9 when 19 of 41 (46%) rape victims and 4 of 23 (16%) crime victims remained PTSD.

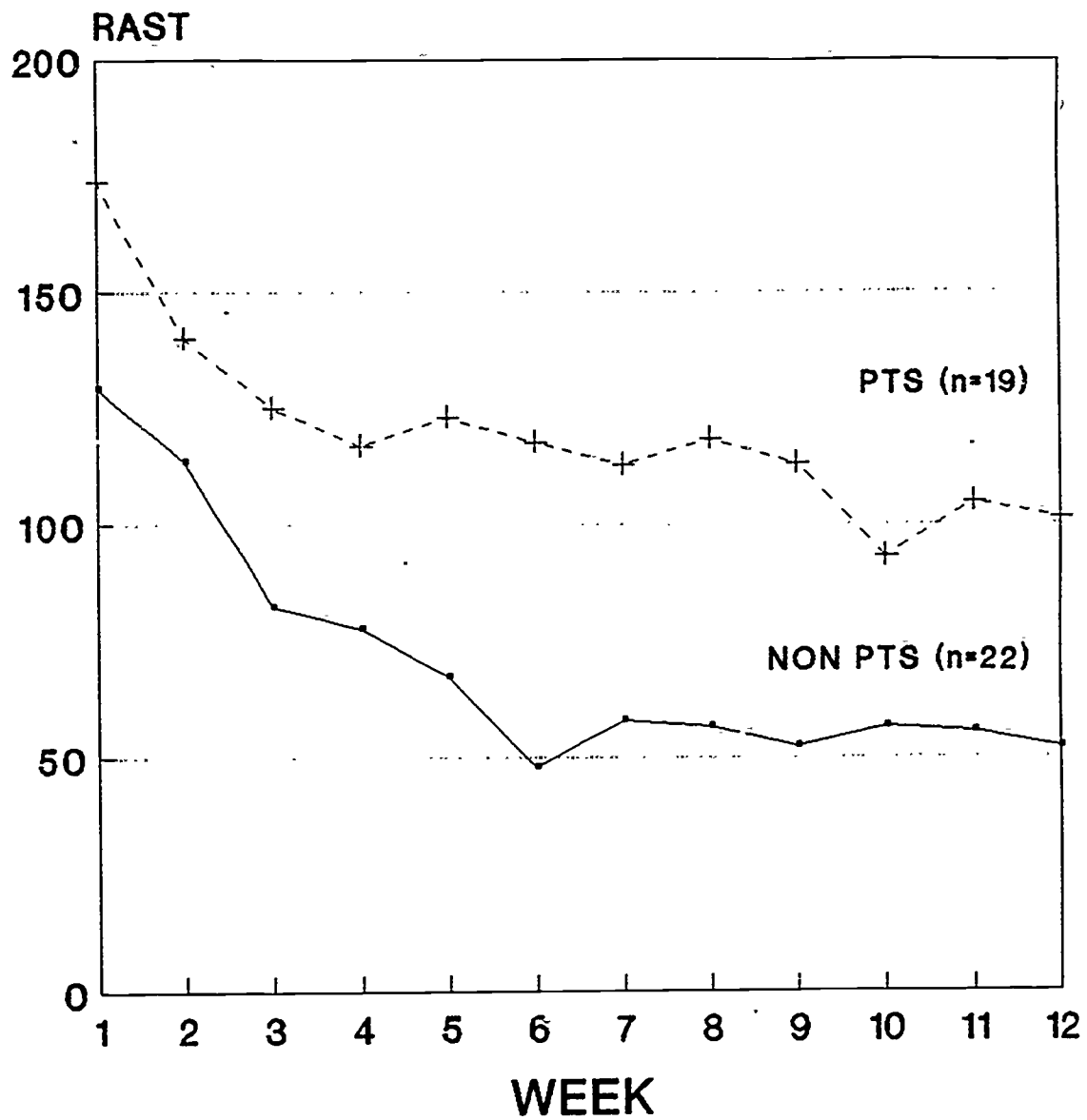
Using the method described above, subjects were divided into those with and without PTSD at week 9. A comparison between groups revealed that the scores of the PTSD rape victims on non-PTSD symptoms (e.g., depression) diverge from those without PTSD and remain consistently elevated throughout the 12 weeks post-rape.

Conclusion

These results indicate that post-rape reactions can be construed as PTSD and that non-sexual crime is less likely to produce PTSD than rape. The retrospective analysis performed to examine prevalence of PTSD is limited because the items used did not correspond exactly to the DSM criteria.

Rape Aftermath Symptom Test

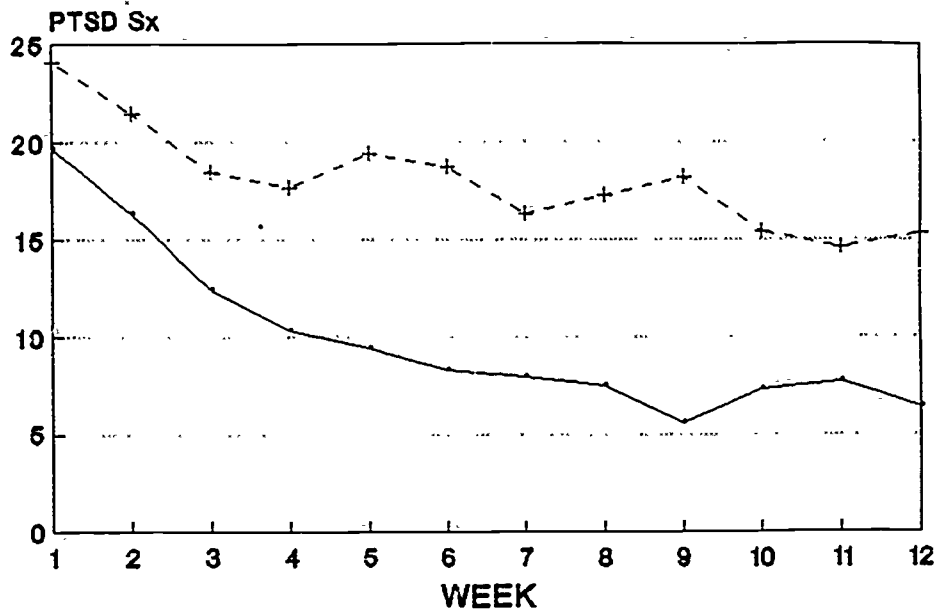
Rape Victims Only



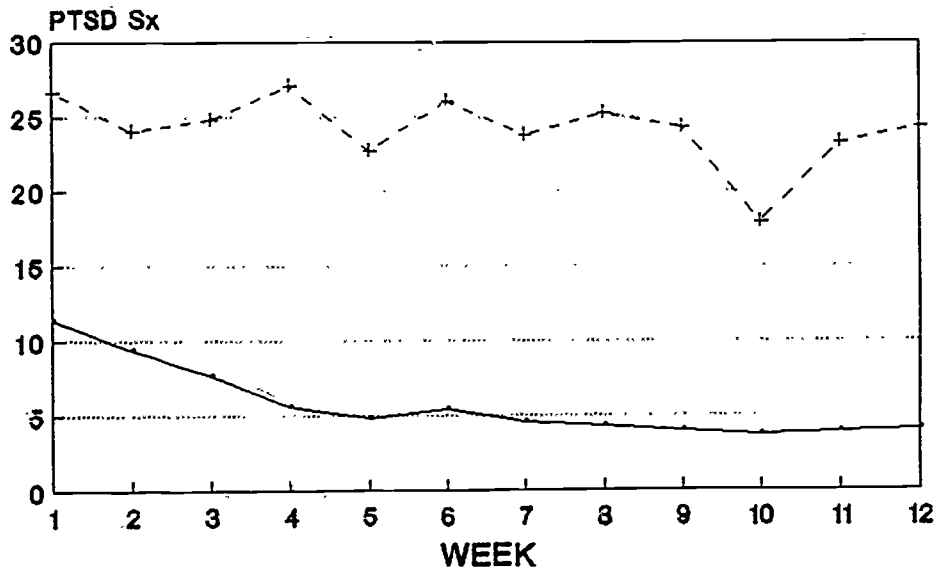
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Assessment of PTSD Symptoms

Rape Victims



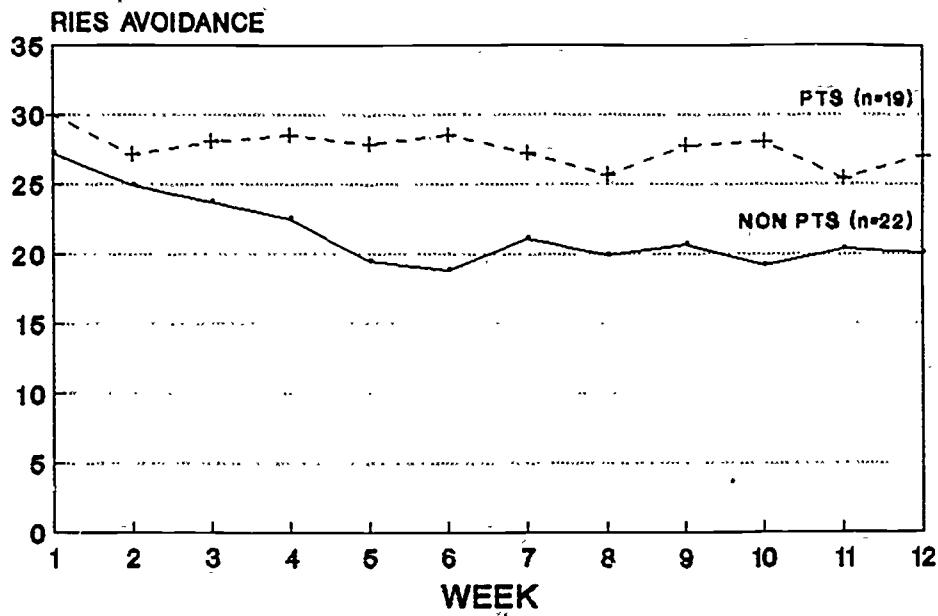
Crime Victims



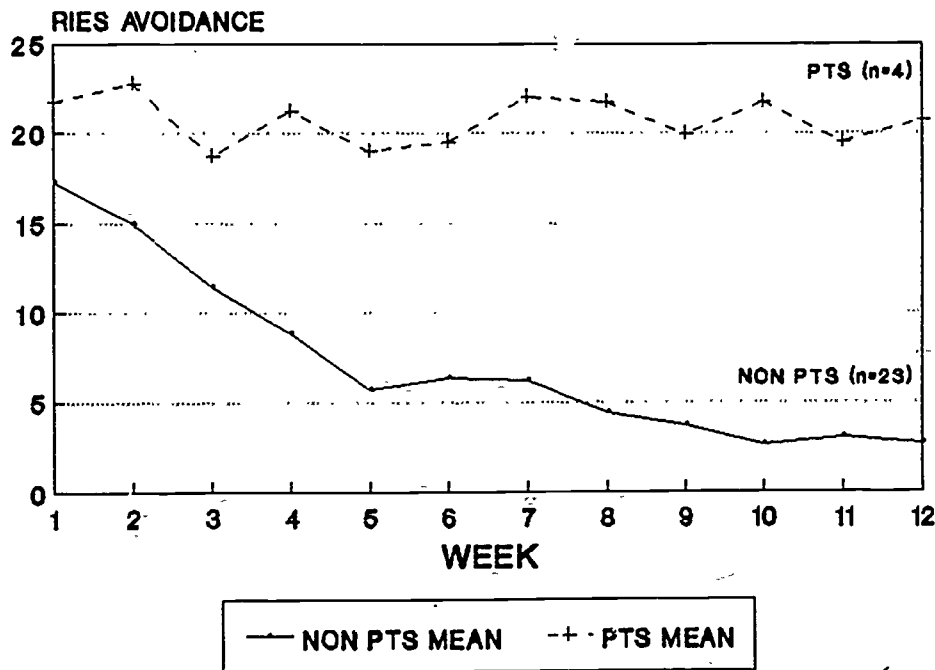
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RIES Avoidance

Rape Victims

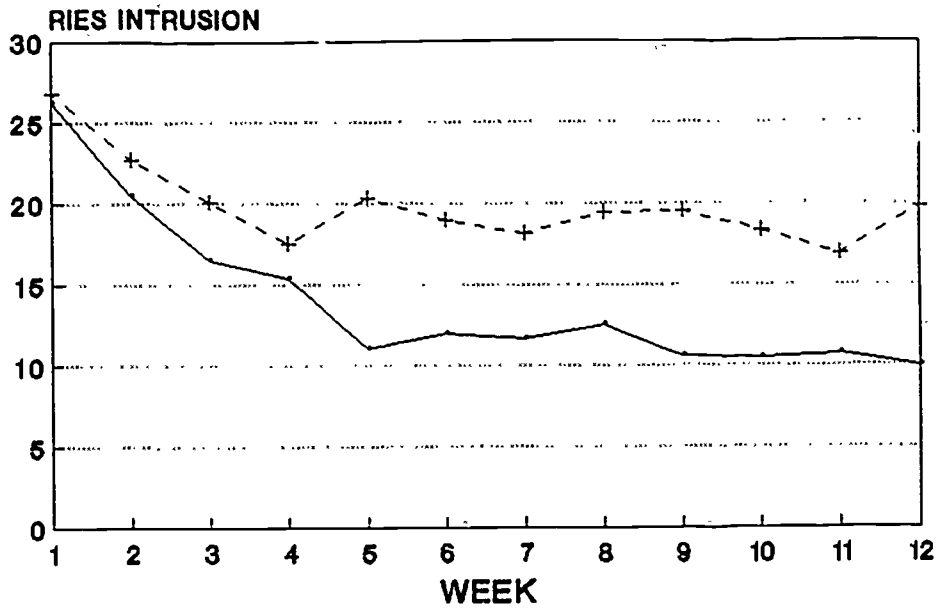


Crime Victims

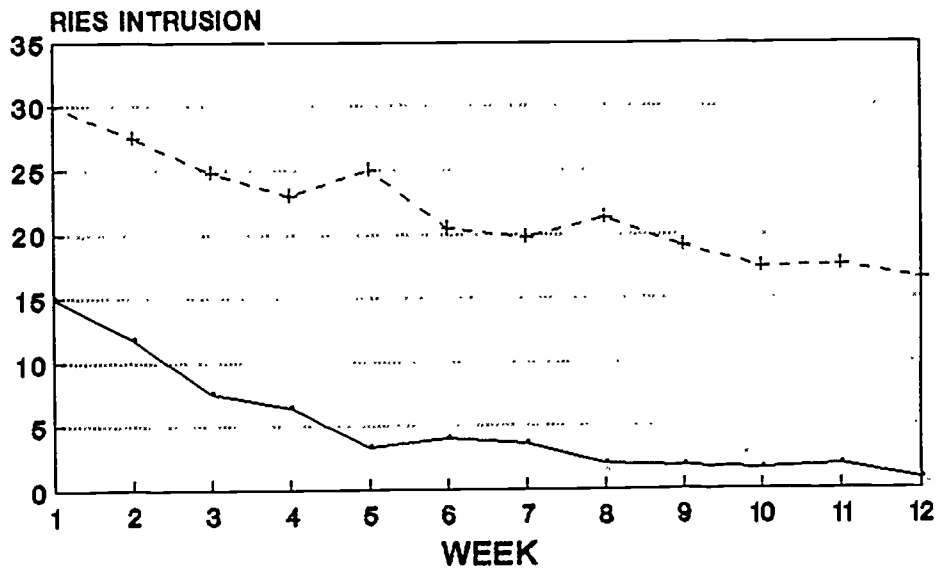


RIES Intrusion

Rape Victims



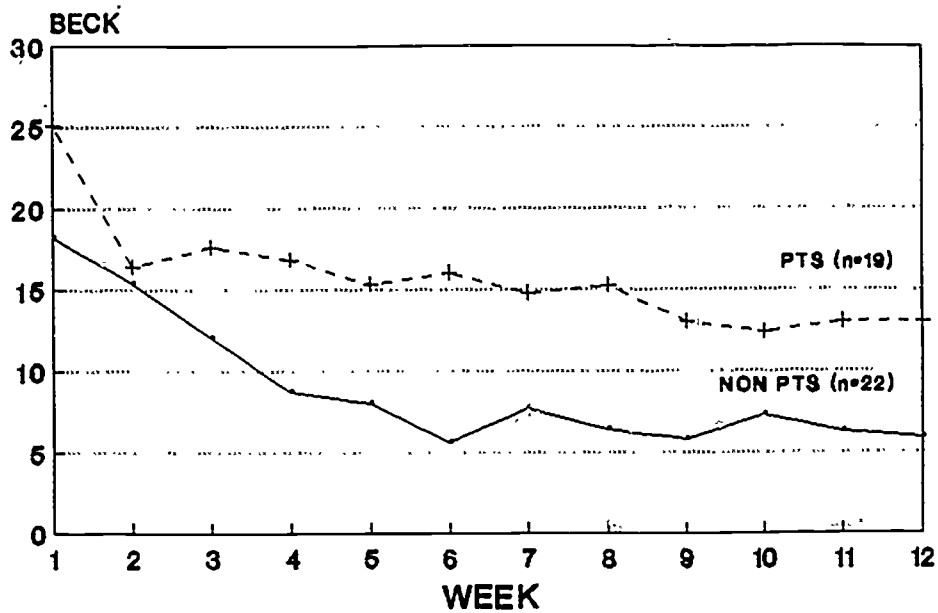
Crime Victims



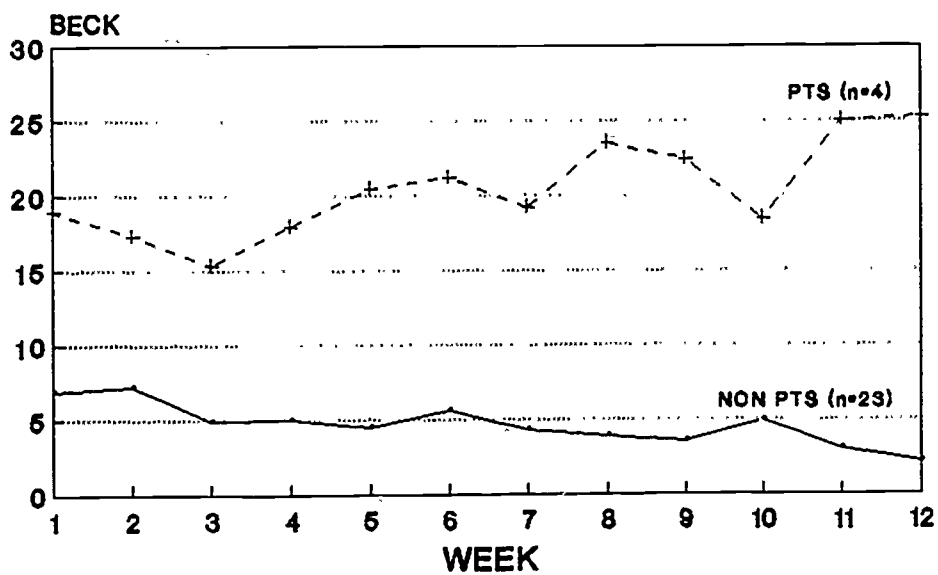
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Beck Depression Inventory

Rape Victims



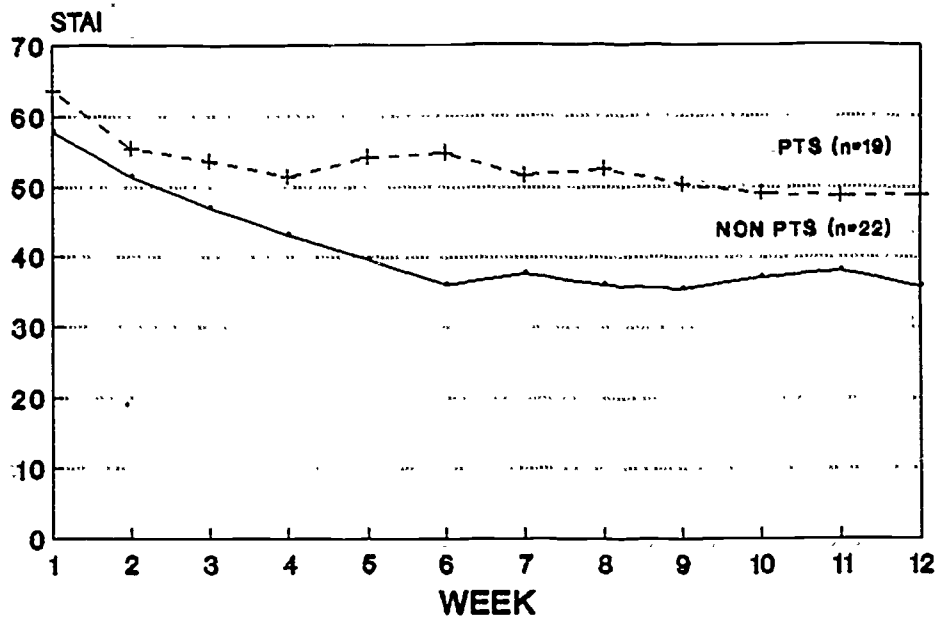
Crime Victims



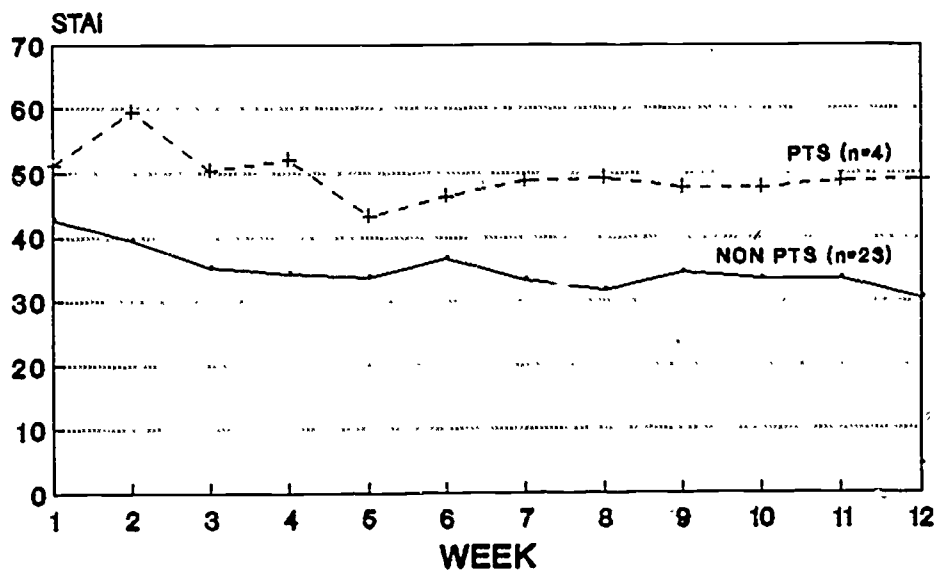
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Spielberger State Anxiety Inventory

Rape Victims



Crime Victims



— NON PTS MEANS +- PTS MEANS