

Navigating 'K-Land': A Qualitative Exploration of Participants' Experiences of Ketamine-Assisted Psychotherapy for Methamphetamine Use Disorder

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Background

- Methamphetamine use disorder (MAUD) is associated with substantial psychiatric and physical morbidity, and current treatment options remain limited [1,2].
- Psychosocial treatments are first-line, but their effects are often modest and time-limited [3].
- Ketamine-assisted psychotherapy (KAP) may offer a novel approach by combining ketamine-induced changes in psychological processing with structured psychotherapy [4,5].

Introduction

- Ketamine may facilitate neuroplasticity and learning, potentially creating a period of increased receptivity to psychological intervention [4-6].
- Emerging qualitative research suggests that subjective experience, therapeutic relationships and treatment context may be important in shaping outcomes [7-9].
- However, little is known about these processes in people with MAUD.

Aim

To explore how participants experienced, interpreted and evaluated KAP for MAUD.

Methods

- Qualitative study embedded within an open-label pilot trial of KAP for MAUD [10].
- Four-week intervention: 3 subanaesthetic ketamine doses alongside 4 sessions of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), with structured preparation and post-dose integration [10].
- Semi-structured interviews conducted 1-4 weeks post-intervention.
- Interviews explored motivations for participation, experiences of ketamine dosing and psychotherapy, and perceptions of change.
- Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis.

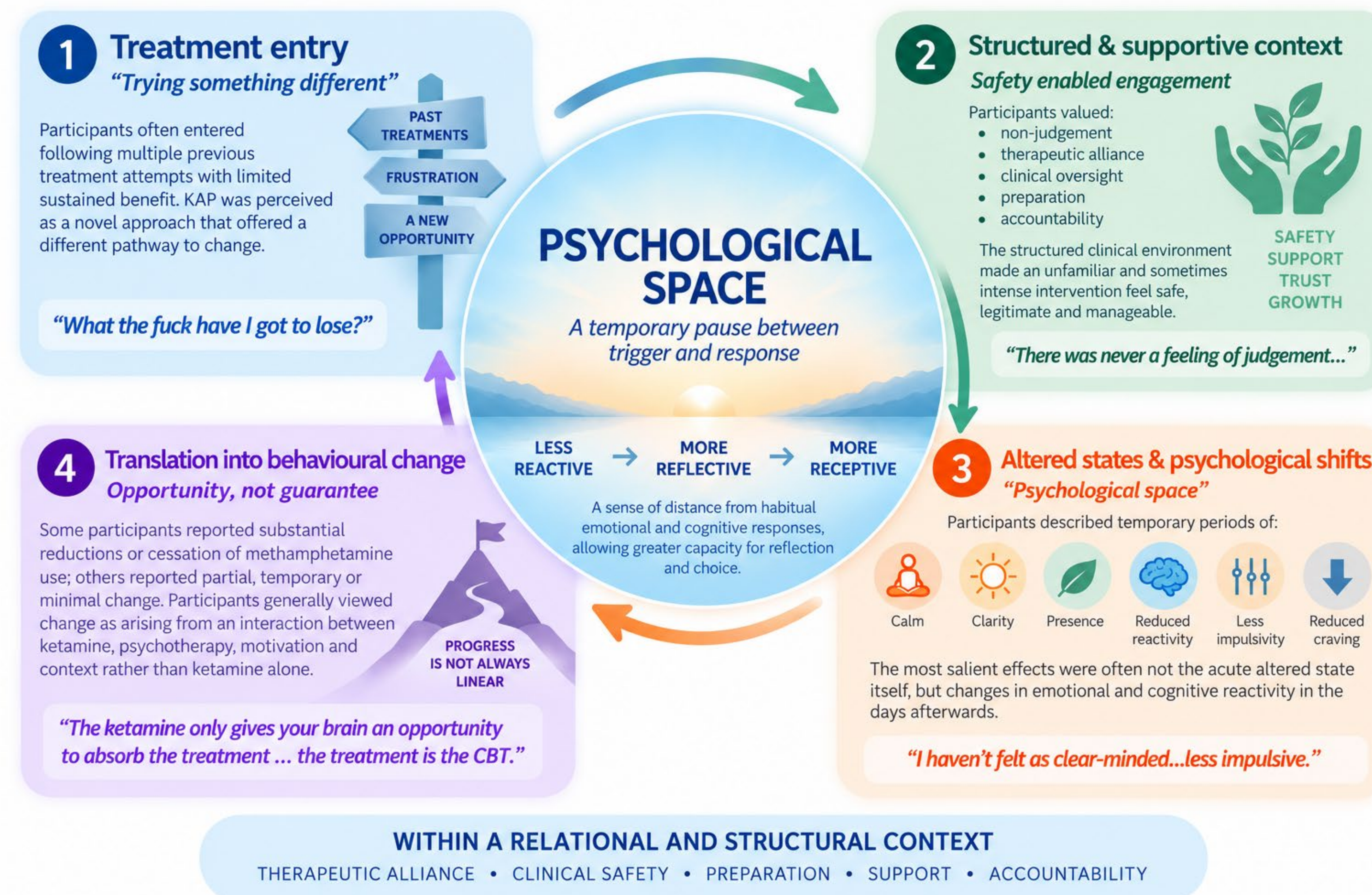
Results

N = 14 participants (11 men, 3 women)

Median age 44 years

Median regular methamphetamine use: 10 years

Four inter-related themes were identified:



Implications

01| WINDOW

Temporary psychological shifts may provide a therapeutic window.

02| CONTEXT

Safety and therapeutic relationships matter.

03| INTEGRATION

Transient shifts may require ongoing support to consolidate change.

04| MECHANISMS

Future studies need to disentangle ketamine, psychotherapy, expectancy and context.

Conclusions

- KAP was experienced as a **multi-stage, context-dependent** intervention, rather than a stand-alone pharmacological treatment.
- Ketamine was perceived to create a temporary **“psychological space”** characterised by reduced reactivity and increased receptivity to therapeutic input. However, sustained behavioural change was **variable and dependent on ongoing therapeutic engagement, motivation and context**.

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