

Vipassana Meditation

A program for inmate rehabilitation



A Presentation for the
ANZ Society of Criminology
Conference 2008

*Doing Time,
Doing Vipassana*

The essence of Vipassana

Vipassana works on the premise that all suffering, and therefore the cause of all crime, begins within



Vipassana: risk/needs matching and responsiveness

- Offenders, especially high-risk offenders, often work the hardest and demonstrate the **highest responsiveness** to the Vipassana course because of their intense experience of suffering as a result of their underlying crime, state of mind and period of incarceration

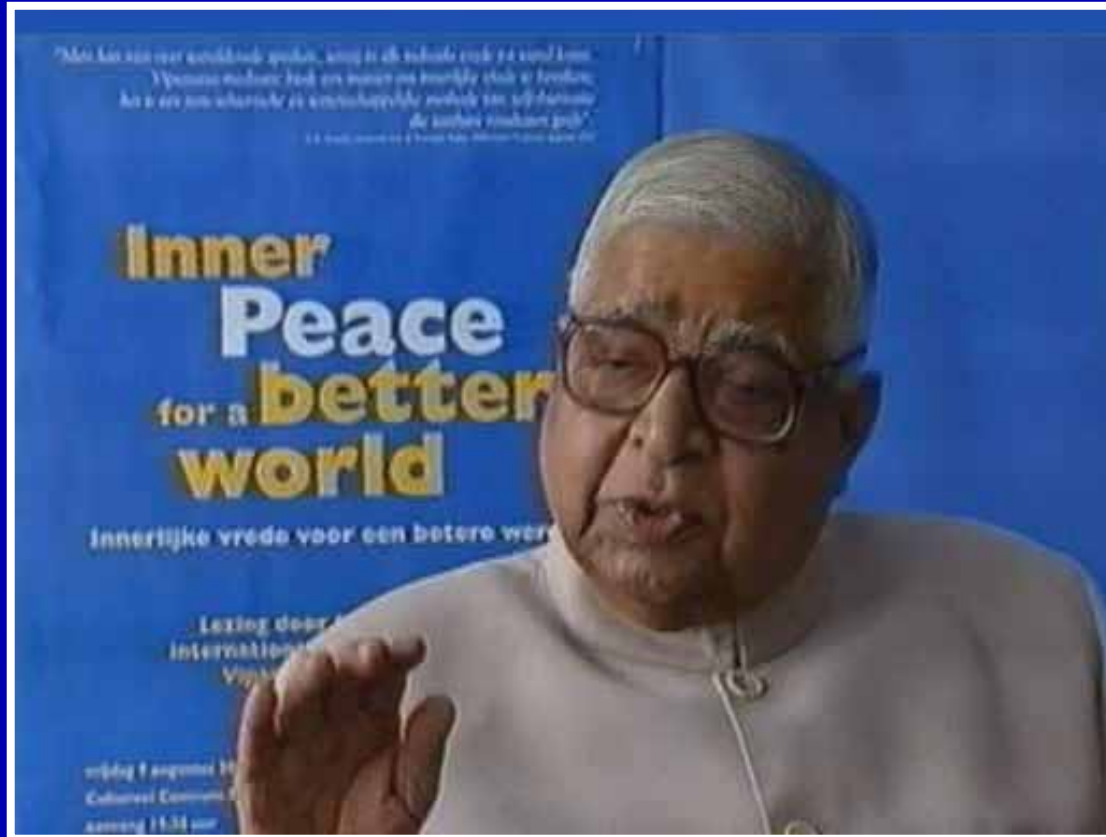
Vipassana: risk/needs matching and responsivity

- Vipassana is ideal for most offenders, including and especially high-risk, high needs offenders
- It works directly with the ultimate underlying cause of high-risk offences such as violence, sex and drug-related offences
- It works directly with the ultimate underlying cause of drug and alcohol addiction
- It works directly with the ultimate underlying cause of other repeat-offences such as theft and robbery

Criminogenic needs: why Vipassana is so effective

- Traditionally recognised criminogenic needs are only superficial consequences of a deeper set of mental phenomenon, not the underlying cause of crime
- Crime and other immoral actions ultimately occur because of deep mental cravings and aversions: i.e. reactions occurring within the subconscious mind
- Vipassana works at the **depth of the subconscious mind**, by retraining the mind not to react and also by removing old mental reactions from the past
- This process brings about real, lasting change in awareness, attitude, responsibility and behavior

Criminogenic needs: why Vipassana is so effective



*Mr S. N. Goenka
Founding Teacher*

The Vipassana course is unique:

- Ten continuous days of meditation, segregated from other inmates for the complete duration of the course
- A disciplined timetable of 10 to 11 hours meditation each day from 4.30am to 9pm
- No reading, writing, music, radio, television, no sense pleasures; no contact with the outside world
- No talking or communicating with fellow inmates (they may talk to the teacher if necessary)
- Voluntary only
- There is no cost for the Vipassana prison course:

The Vipassana course is unique:

All Vipassana courses are held free of charge.

The teacher, the course manager or others serving on the course or assisting prison staff to organise the course do not receive any form of remuneration

Dispelling myths

- There are many forms of meditation. Vipassana works directly with deep mental reactions by retraining the mind not to react according to very old habit patterns
- Vipassana does NOT involve imagination
- It is NOT a relaxation technique
- It is definitely NOT a holiday from regular prison life
- The Vipassana course is a very intense and challenging experience
- Inmates who undertake the course must be very committed and determined

Dispelling myths



History of Vipassana in prisons

- 1975: First prison course conducted at the Jaipur Central Jail in India, for 120 inmates
- 1993: first course for 96 inmates in Tihar prison, the largest prison in India with more than 10,000 inmates
- 1994: a course for 1,004 inmates at Tihar prison
- Since then two 10-day courses held at Tihar each month
- Around 80 Vipassana courses are held each year in Indian prisons.



Prison courses in North America

- 1997: First course at the North Rehabilitation Facility (NRF), near Seattle. **Twenty Vipassana courses were held at NRF over five years**
- 2001: San Bruno Prison, San Francisco
- Jan 2002: The first course in a (Level 6) maximum security state prison in the US was held at the W.E. Donaldson Prison for 20 inmates
- May 2002: Second course at Donaldson for 18 inmates
- 2005: the first course in a federal prison, the Federal Medical Center (FMC), Devens, for 18 inmates



Alabama Department of Corrections

Richard Allen
Commissioner

Vernon Barnett
Chief Deputy Commissioner

Bob Riley
Governor



A Proud Past
A Bright Future

- January 2006: W.E. Donaldson Prison began an ongoing program of Vipassana courses implementing two 10-day courses a year
- May 2006: Hamilton Aged and Infirm Correctional Facility, a medium-security state prison in northern Alabama, inaugurates an ongoing Vipassana program twice a year
- The Alabama Dept of Corrections is also looking to implement Vipassana programs into a women's correctional facility in the near future



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A Proud Past
A Bright Future

“The Dhamma Brothers”

*A documentary about inmates
who undertake the
Vipassana course
at the Donaldson Prison
in Alabama*



Other prison courses worldwide

- Lancaster Prison, United Kingdom
- Te Ihi Tu Rehabilitation Centre, New Zealand
- CPB Prison, Spain
- Courses have also been held worldwide in Israel, India, Thailand, Taiwan, Mexico, Argentina and Mongolia

Research Findings India

Research on inmate populations in India indicates that Vipassana meditation results in:

- Increased positive behaviour / significant reduction in hostility and anger
- Increased cooperation with prison authorities
- Reduced psychological symptoms
- Reduced recidivism
- Inmates admitting to their crime, willing for reparation

The government of India has formally recommended Vipassana courses as a rehabilitative treatment program to **all of its jails and prisons.**

Research Findings: USA

North Rehabilitation Facility (NRF)

- Minimum-security detention facility specializing in substance abuse recovery.
- NRF's population consisted largely of chronic re-offenders (about 75% were returnees).

At the experiential level, addiction is a deeply felt craving – not for a substance but for the sensations associated with the substance (i.e. how it feels).

Vipassana works by training one's mind to observe the link between sensation and craving and, rather than reacting to it, learning to diminish it progressively.

Research Findings:

USA

- Two major studies were conducted on post-course inmates at NRF:
- a four-year internal study and evaluation that focused on **recidivism**. The results of this study were so impressive it led to a Government grant for:
- a two-year research study conducted by the University of Washington's Addictive Behaviors Research Centre that focused on **post-release substance abuse....**

Research Findings: USA

North Rehabilitation Facility (NRF)

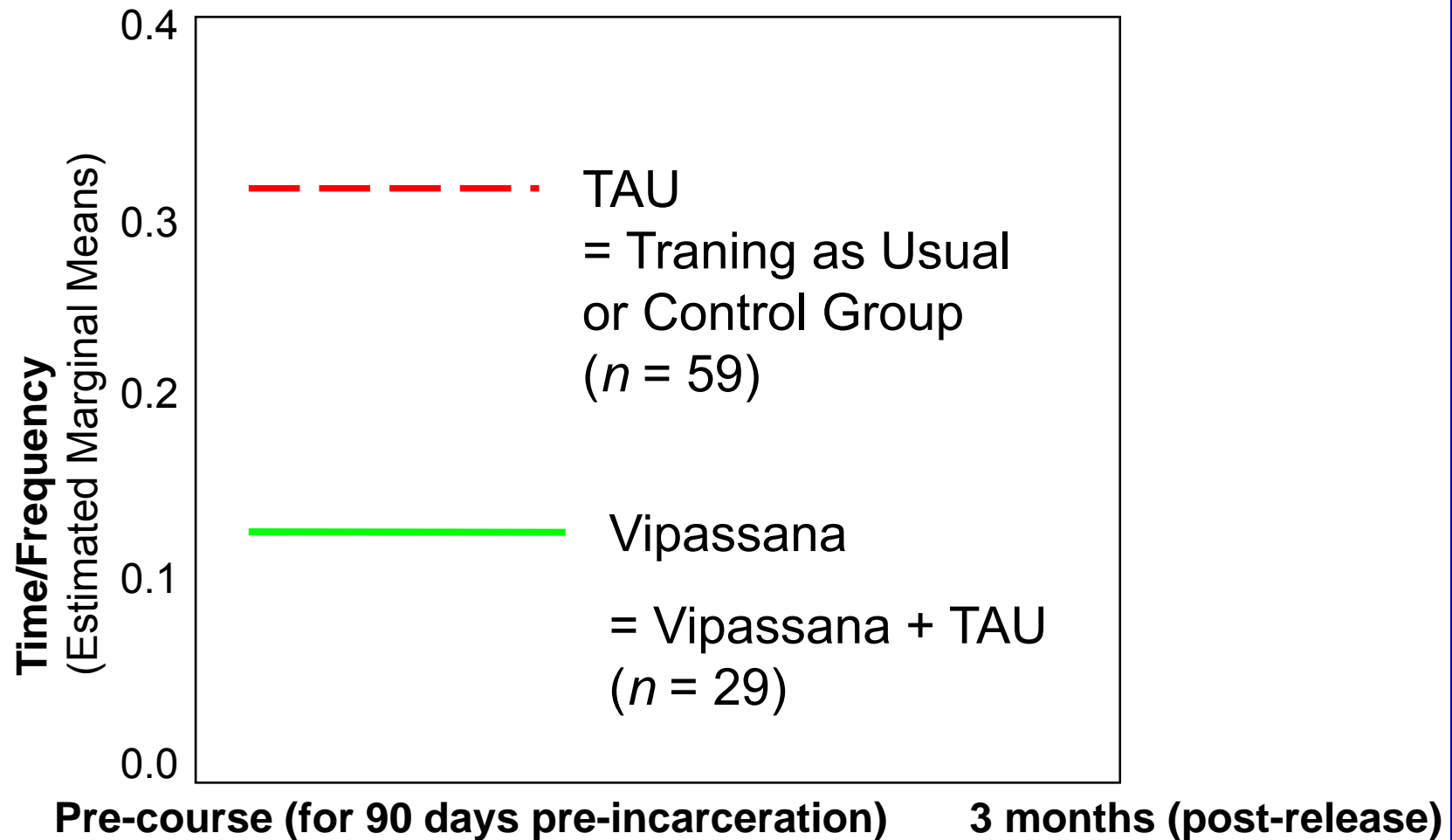
The internal study reported a 25% fall in recidivism from 75% to 56% among NRF inmates who participated in just one 10-day Vipassana meditation course.

David Murphy, former Program Manager at NRF, stated that “these results are truly extraordinary given such a brief, albeit intense, intervention. Moreover, the Vipassana Meditation Program changed the very fabric of the facility literally from within, for inmates and staff alike.”

Research Findings:

USA

NRF/UOW

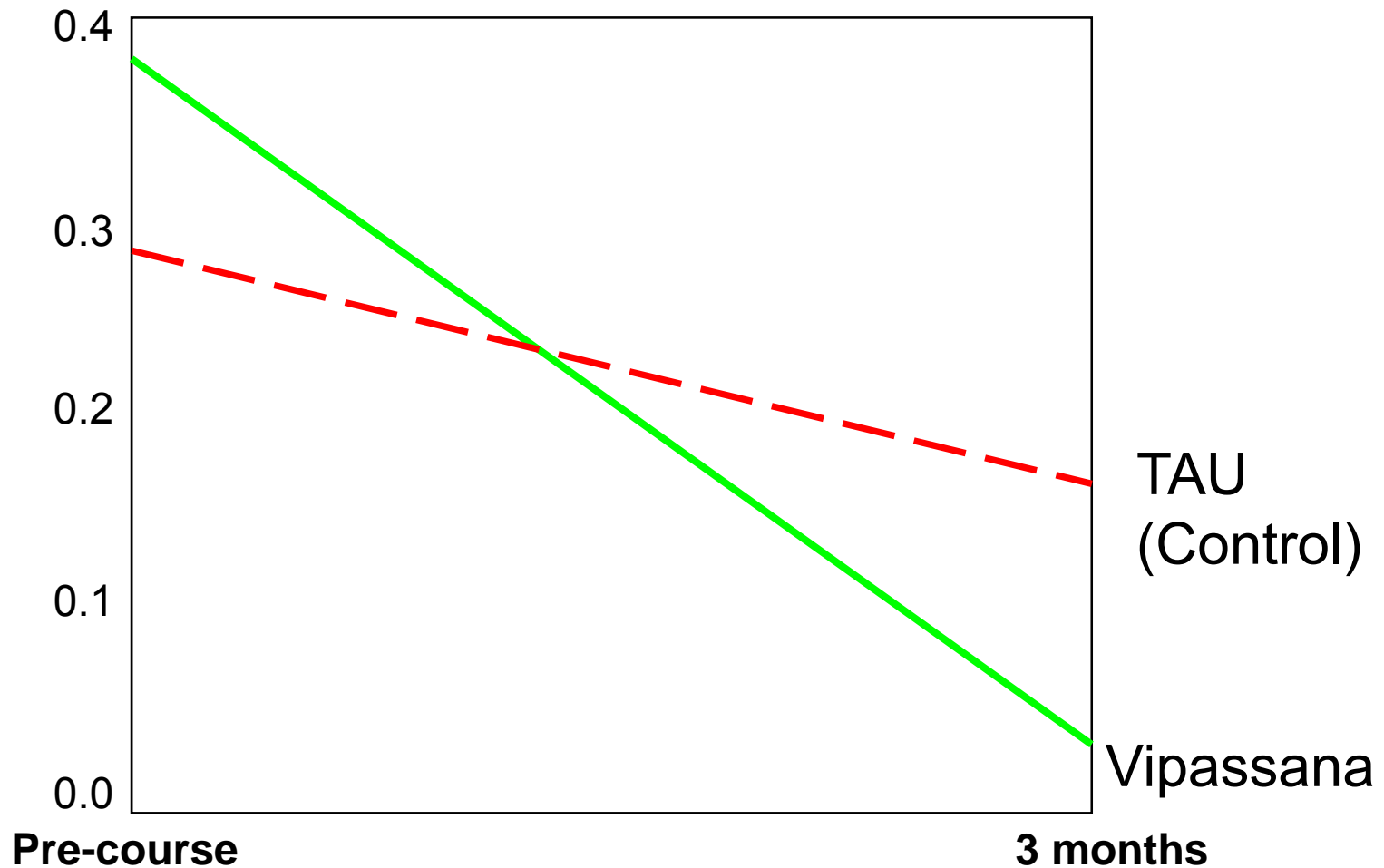


Research Findings:

USA

NRF/UOW

Peak Weekly Marijuana Use

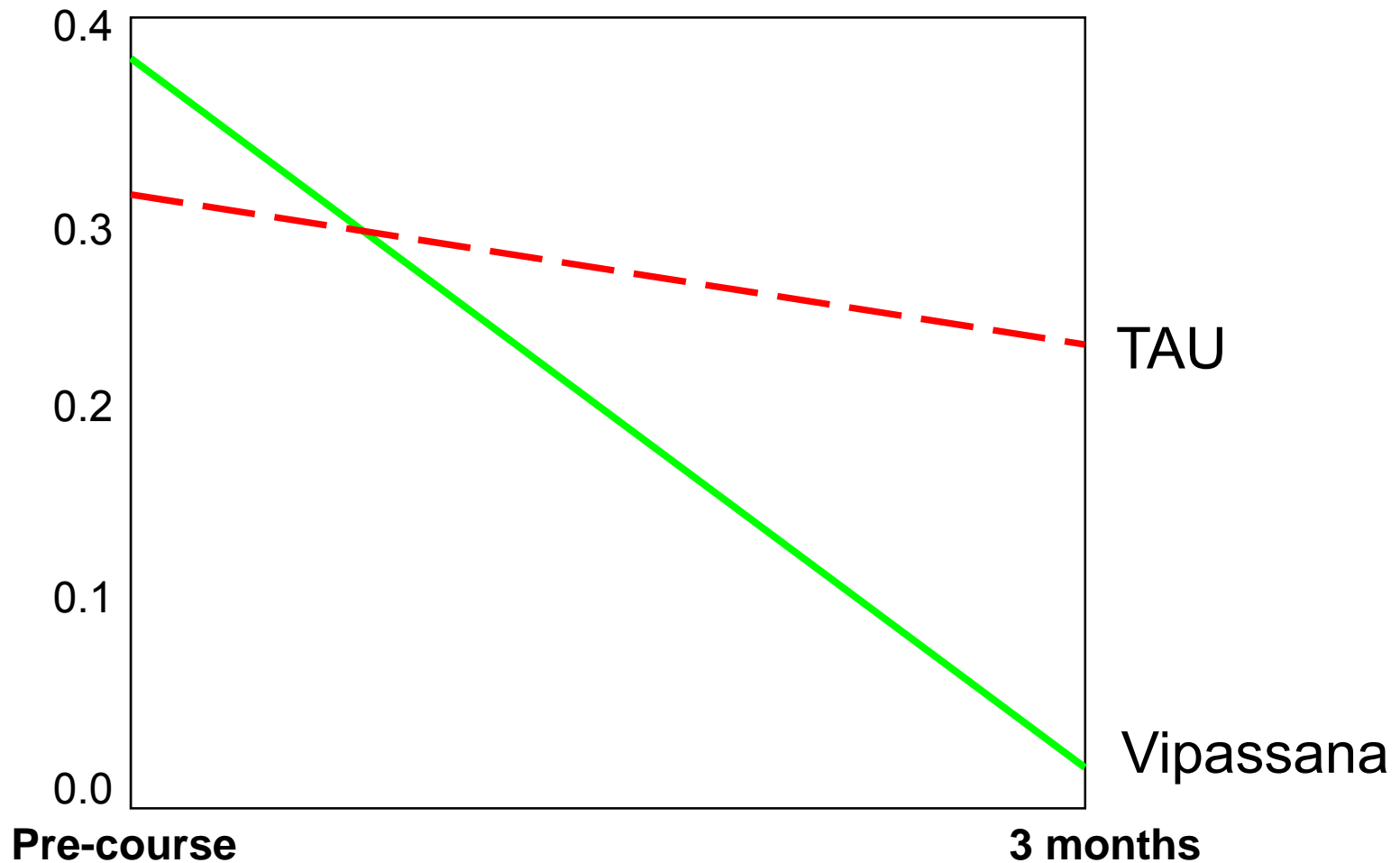


Research Findings:

USA

NRF/UOW

Peak Crack Cocaine Use

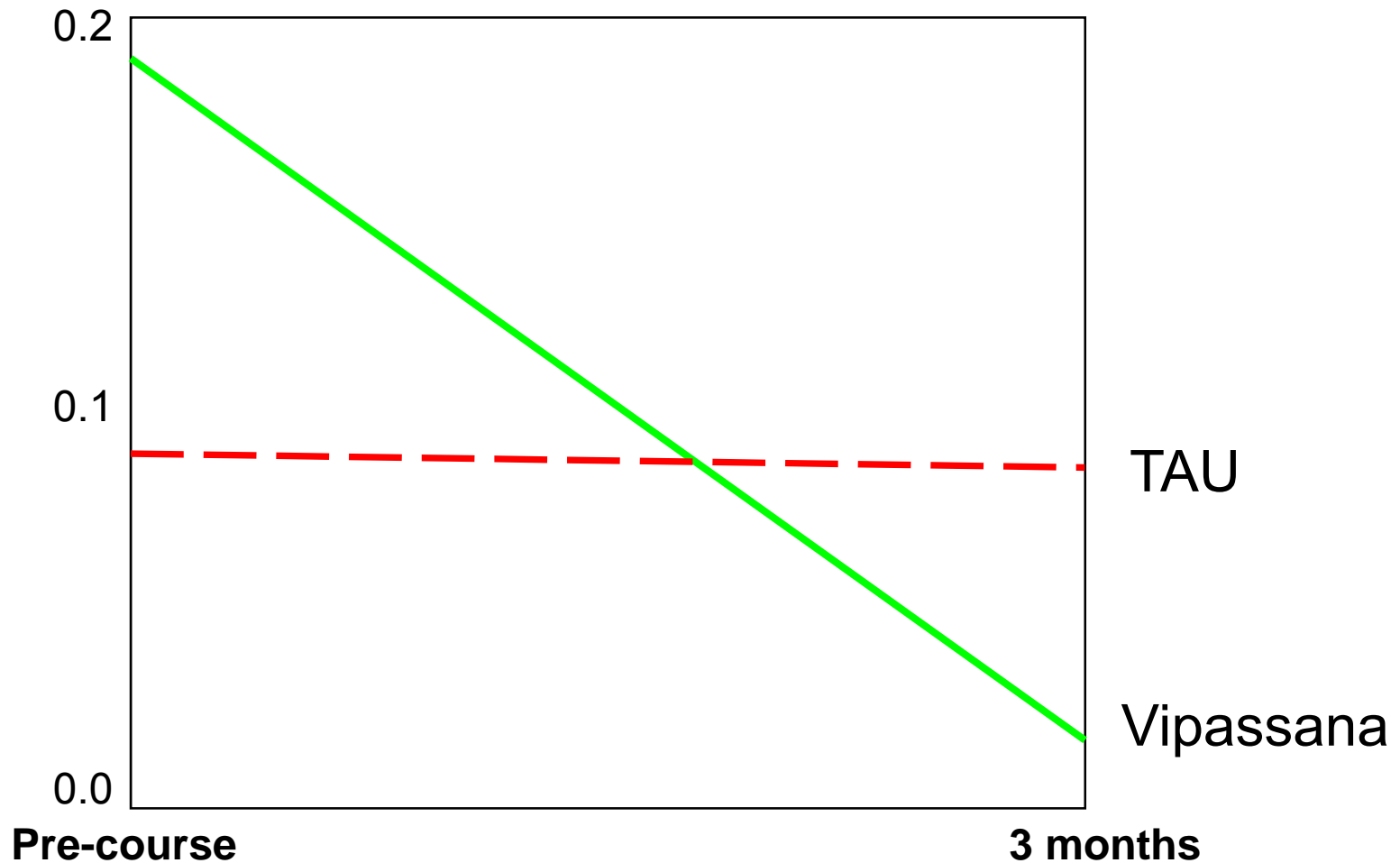


Research Findings:

USA

NRF/UOW

Peak Powdered Cocaine Use

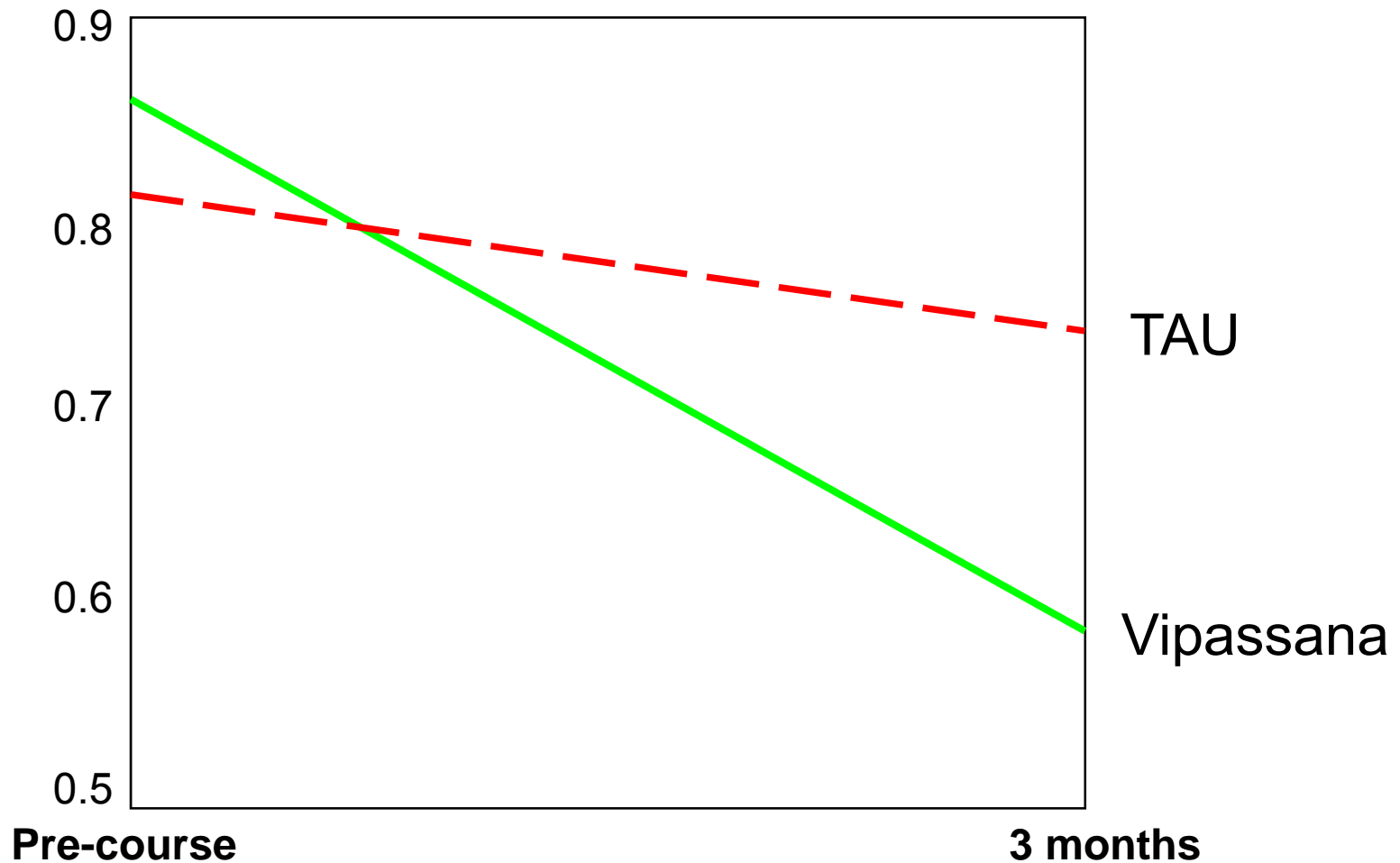


Research Findings:

USA

NRF/UOW

Peak Weekly Tobacco Use

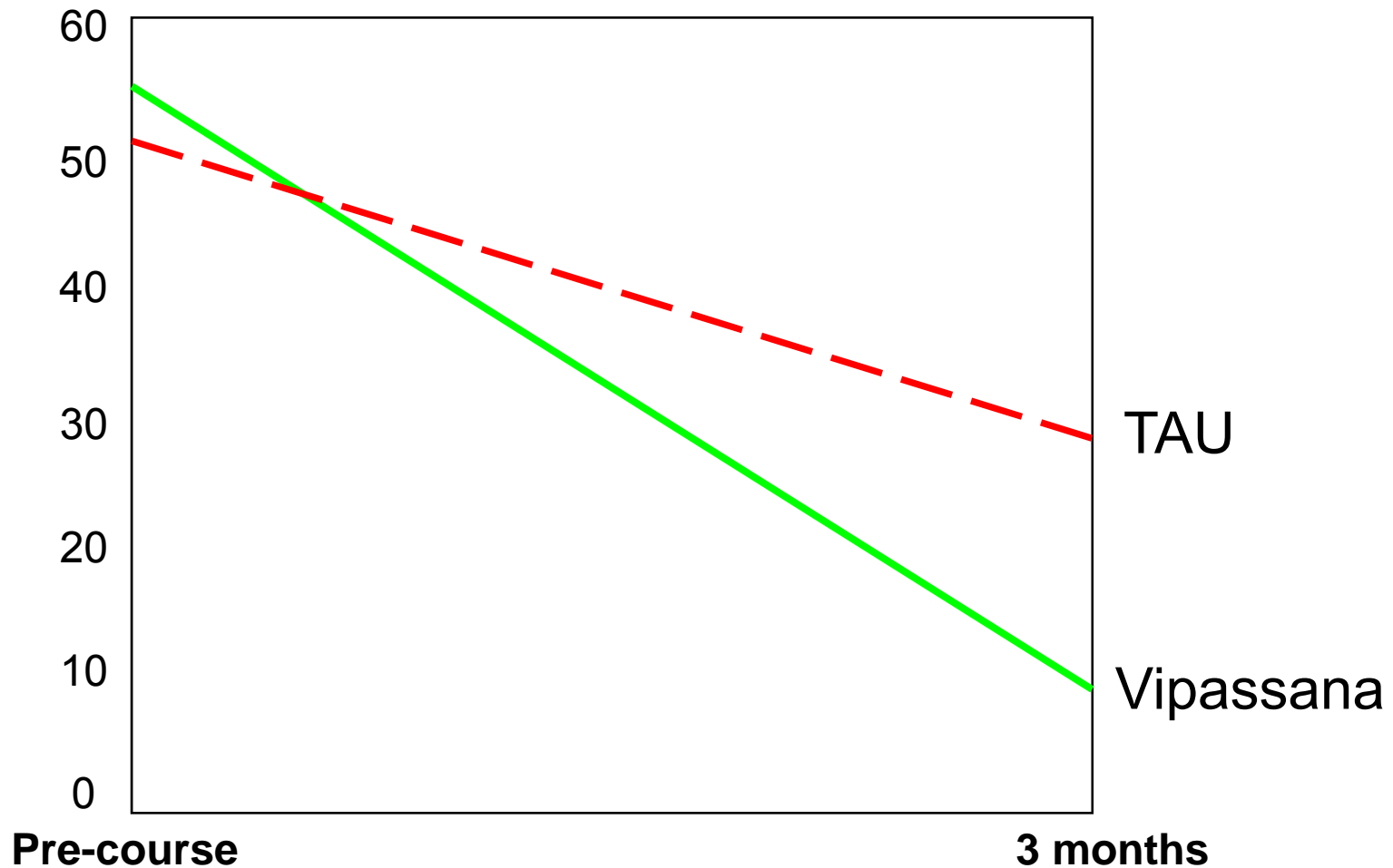


Research Findings:

USA

NRF/UOW

Peak Weekly Alcohol Use

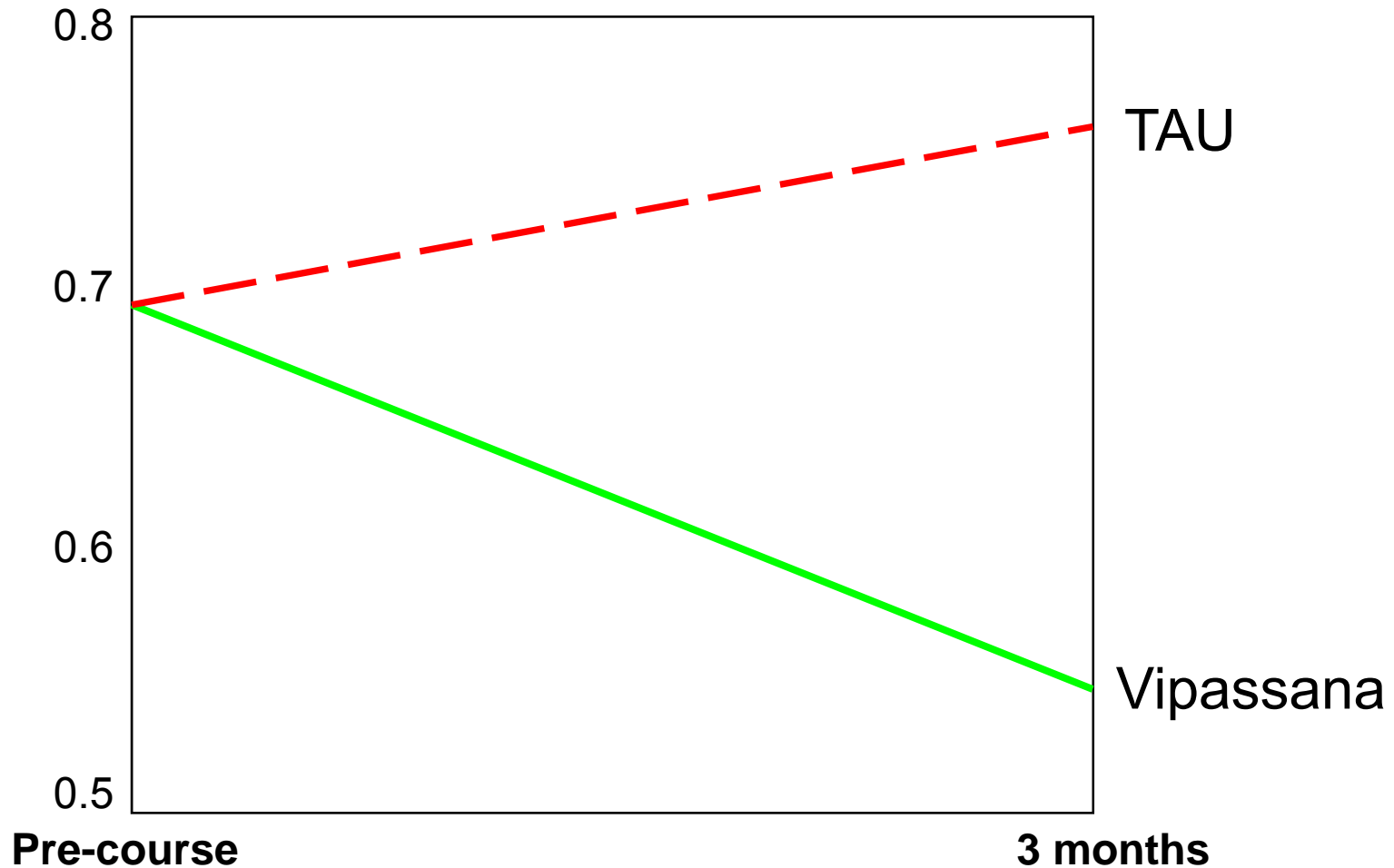


Research Findings:

USA

NRF/UOW

Brief Symptom Inventory

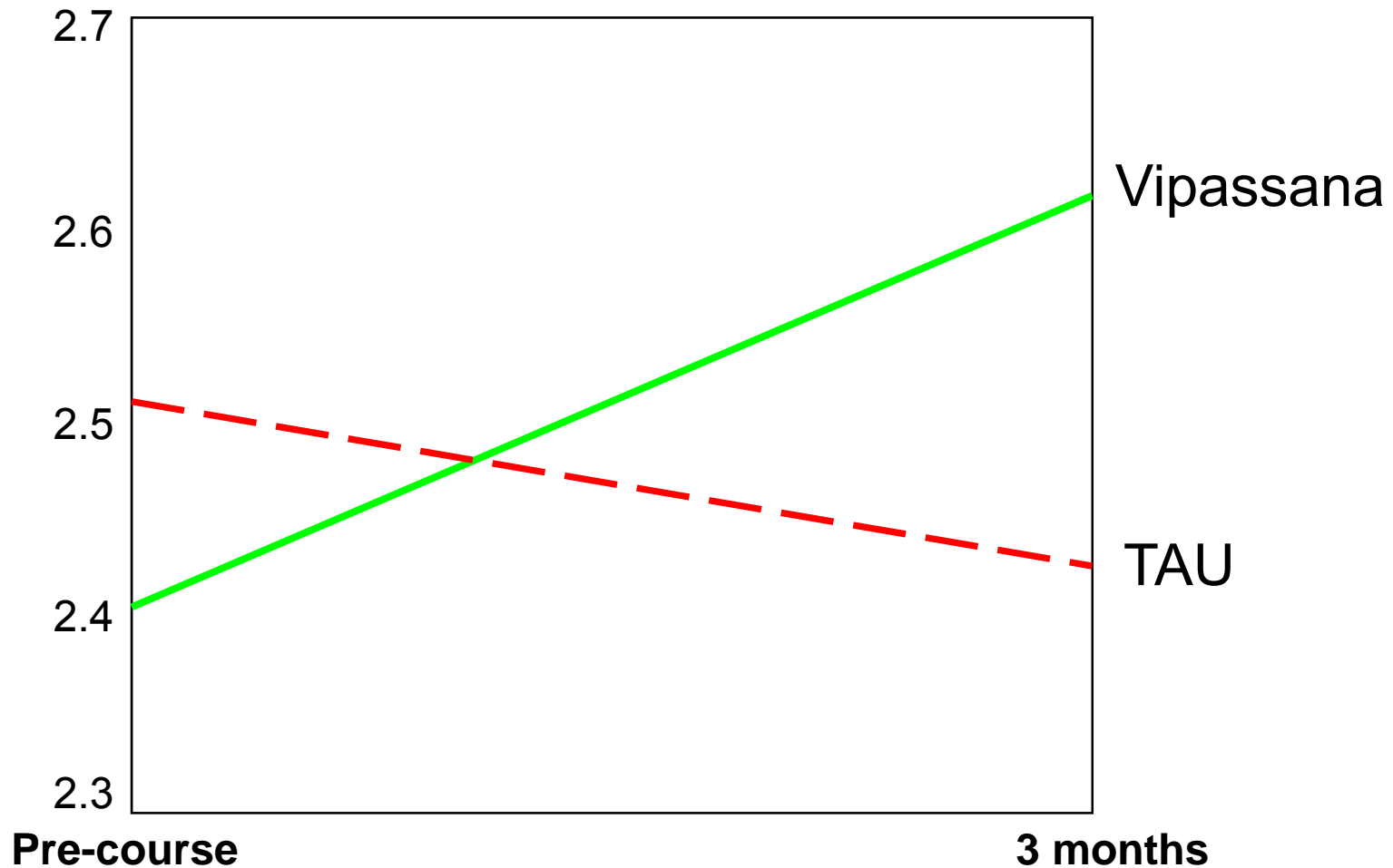


Research Findings:

USA

NRF/UOW

Level of Optimism

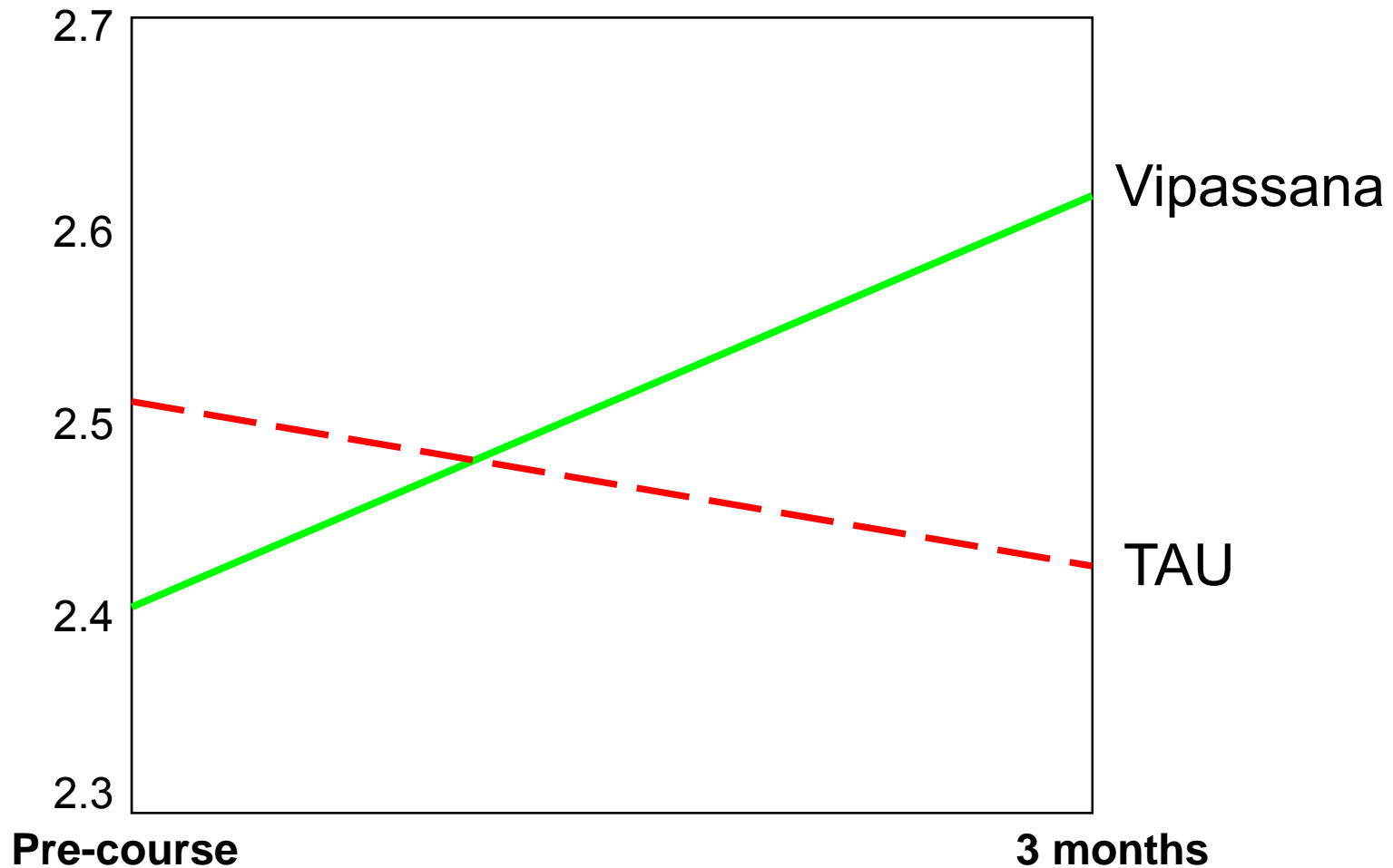


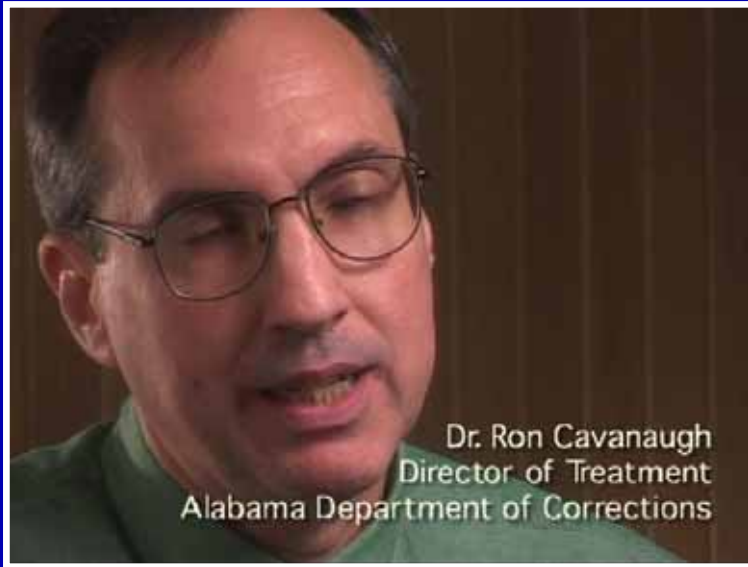
Research Findings:

USA

NRF/UOW

Level of Optimism





Lucia Meijer (Former Administrator NRF) and Dr Ron Cavanaugh (Director of Treatments, Alabama DCS) are scheduled to give a presentation to **US Congress** in early 2009 about the remarkable effects of Vipassana on inmates.



Referring to a 10-year trial of holding Vipassana courses in prisons in the United States and to research programs conducted in the US and elsewhere, they will suggest that Vipassana meditation is likely to result in:

- Reduced negativity in inmates;
- Improved behaviour;
- Increased responsibility;
- A greater desire for real change;
- Reduced rates of recidivism.

Australian Program Standards

The 10-day Vipassana meditation course is consistent with the Accreditation Criteria for Australian Offender Program Standards and Clinical Governance:

1. Program theory & model of change ✓
2. Program facilitation ✓
3. Program evaluation ✓
4. Participant selection, assessment and evaluation ✓
5. Program materials ✓
6. Facilitator requirements ✓
7. Organisational support & risk management ✓
8. Program evaluation ✓

For a course to take place

- Correctional personnel from administrative, security and treatment departments attend a 10-day course
- A site within the correctional facility that is completely separated from the general population for 10 days
- Permission for Vipassana staff to be in residence at the facility for the 10 days of the course
- Orientation classes for participating inmates prior to the course

Conclusion

The benefits of Vipassana are immediate, observable and significant, but for the course to succeed, it requires a serious effort from both the inmate and the correctional facility.

**Vipassana has the
potential to change the
lives of inmates**

Web sites

Vipassana for Prisons (International): www.prison.dhamma.org

Vipassana for Prisons (Australia): www.dhamma.org.au/prisons/

Vipassana meditation (General Website): www.dhamma.org

Dhamma Books (prison DVDs & books): www.dhammadbooks.com

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