

Topical corticosteroid phobia in a cohort of caregivers of children with mild-to-moderate atopic dermatitis

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Learning objective: To evaluate change in caregiver topical corticosteroid phobia following structured eczema education within a randomised controlled trial.

Takeaway message: Structured eczema education may reduce caregiver misconceptions about topical corticosteroids but caregiver anxiety may persist.

Background

- **Topical corticosteroid phobia** refers to negative feelings and beliefs about topical corticosteroids
- Prevalence of topical corticosteroid phobia in atopic dermatitis ranges from **21-84%**
- Topical corticosteroid phobia is a **barrier to treatment adherence** in atopic dermatitis
- In children, understanding caregiver perceptions about topical corticosteroids helps to optimise therapeutic outcomes

unsafe

skin thinning

withdrawal

apply sparingly

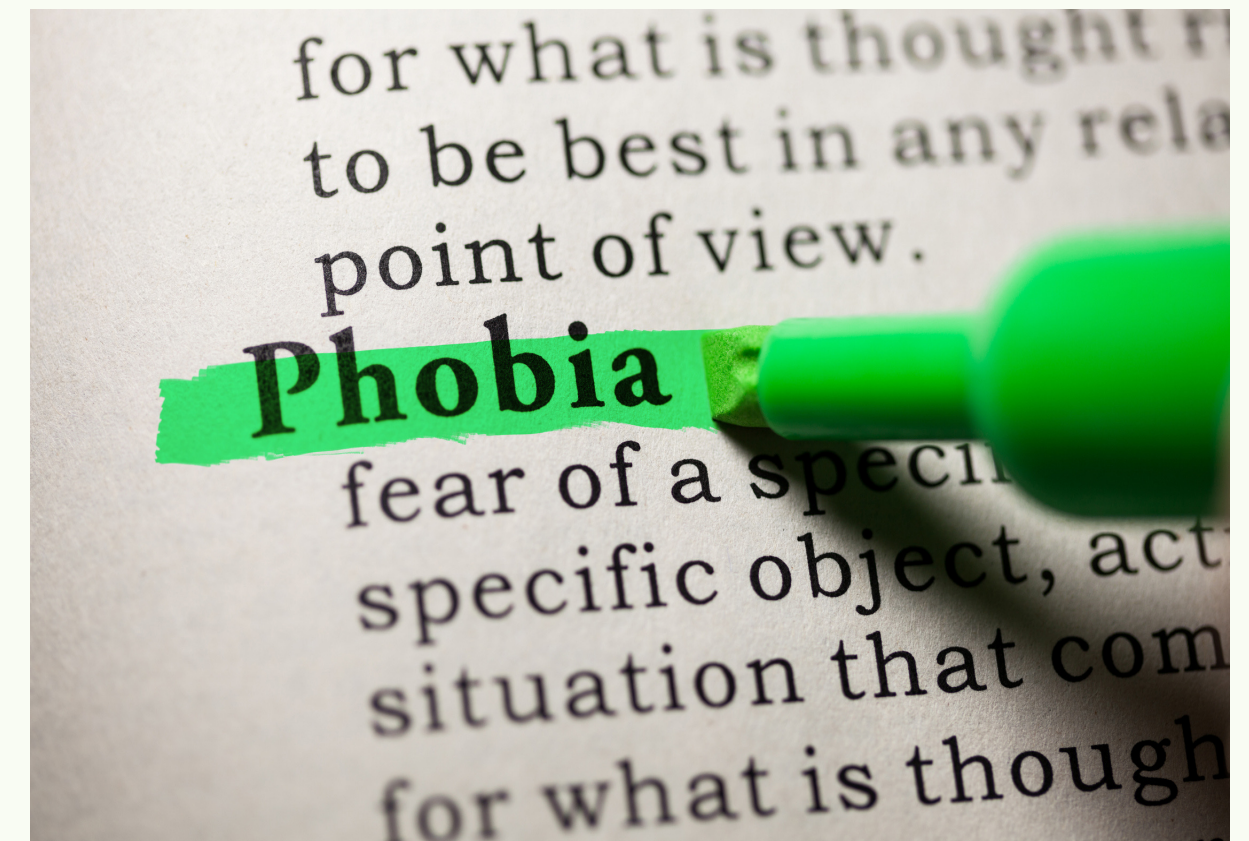
dangerous

systemic absorption

effect on growth

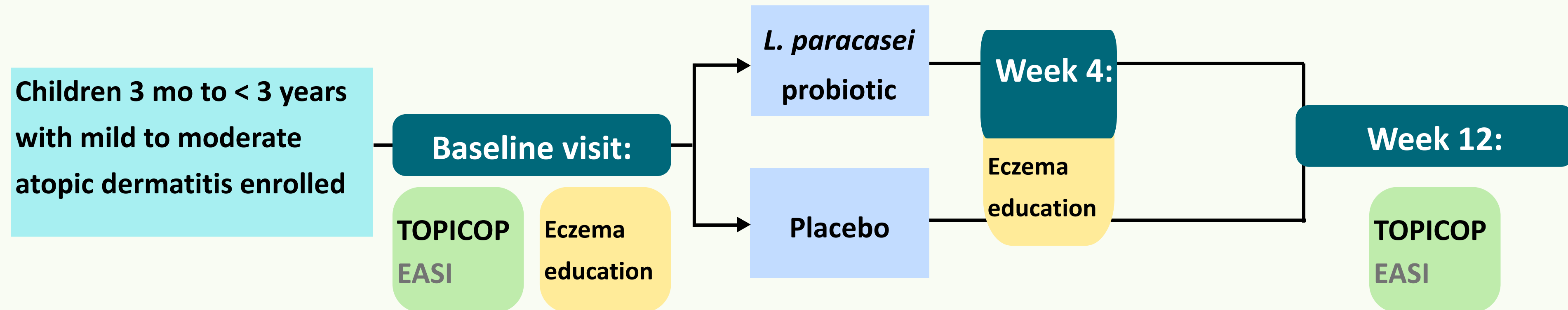
Aims

- To evaluate the severity and change in caregiver topical corticosteroid phobia over 12 weeks following structured eczema education.
- To identify whether topical corticosteroid phobia correlates with eczema severity or age.



Methods

- Study-within-a-trial of a 12-week randomised, placebo-controlled trial of probiotic *L. paracasei* in children aged 3 months to < 3 years with mild-to-moderate atopic dermatitis (LaCE trial)
- Trial number: NCT06584552
- Target sample size N = 100



Methods

TOPICOP questionnaire

Beliefs

1. TCS pass into the bloodstream
2. TCS can lead to infections
3. TCS make you fat
4. TCS damage your skin
5. TCS will affect my future health
6. TCS can lead to asthma

Worries

1. I don't know of any side effects but I'm still afraid of TCS
2. I'm afraid of applying too much cream
3. I'm afraid of putting cream on certain zones like the eyelids where the skin is thinner
4. I wait as long as I can before treating myself
5. I stop the treatment as soon as I can
6. I need reassurance about TCS

Results

N = 12 with complete TOPICOP data

Median age: 18.5 months (range 5-35 months)

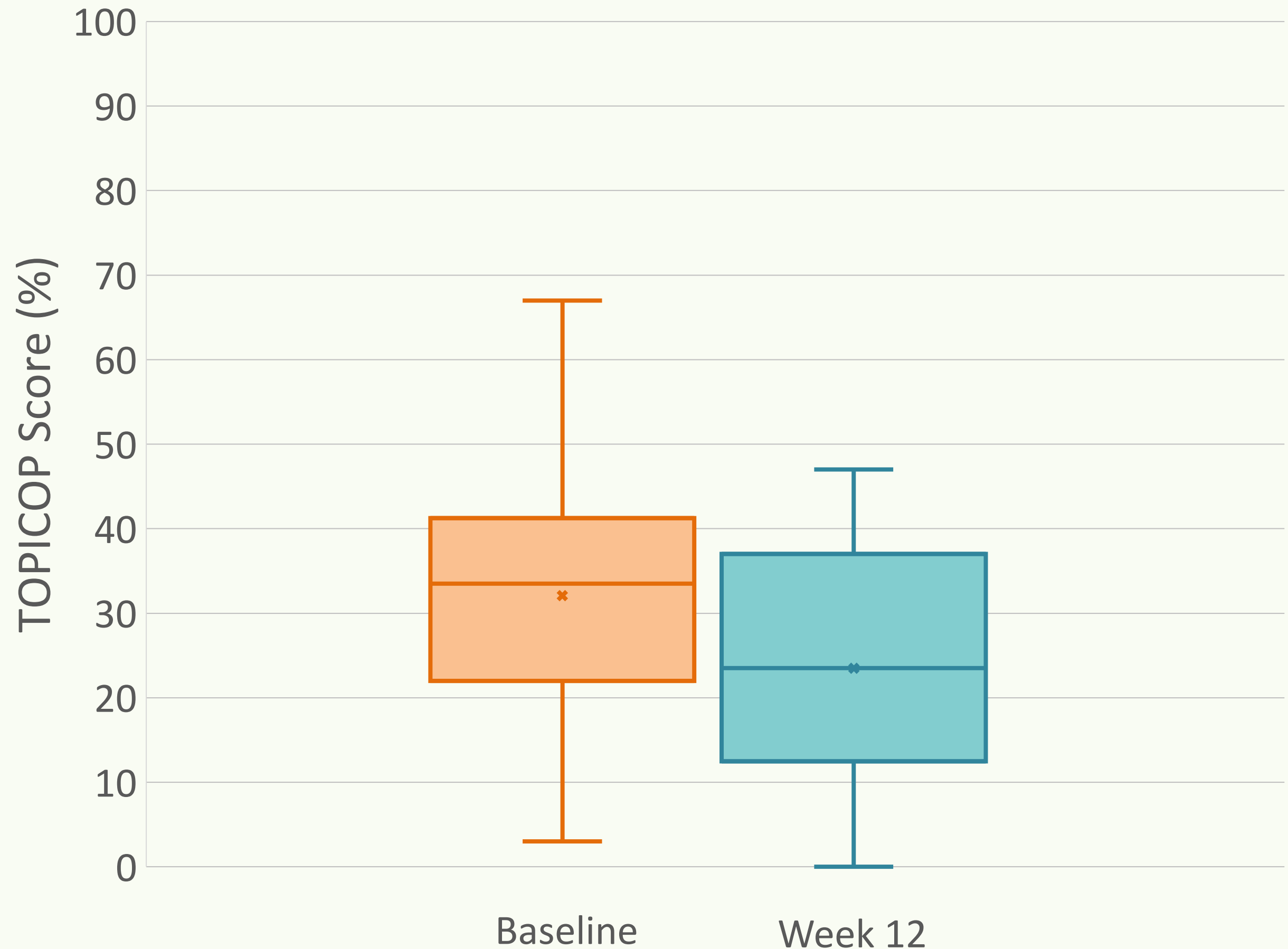
33% female

Median baseline EASI: 3 (range 1.2-10.3)

Results

Median TOPICOP score decreased from baseline **33%** (range 3-67%) to **24%** (range 0-47%) at week 12

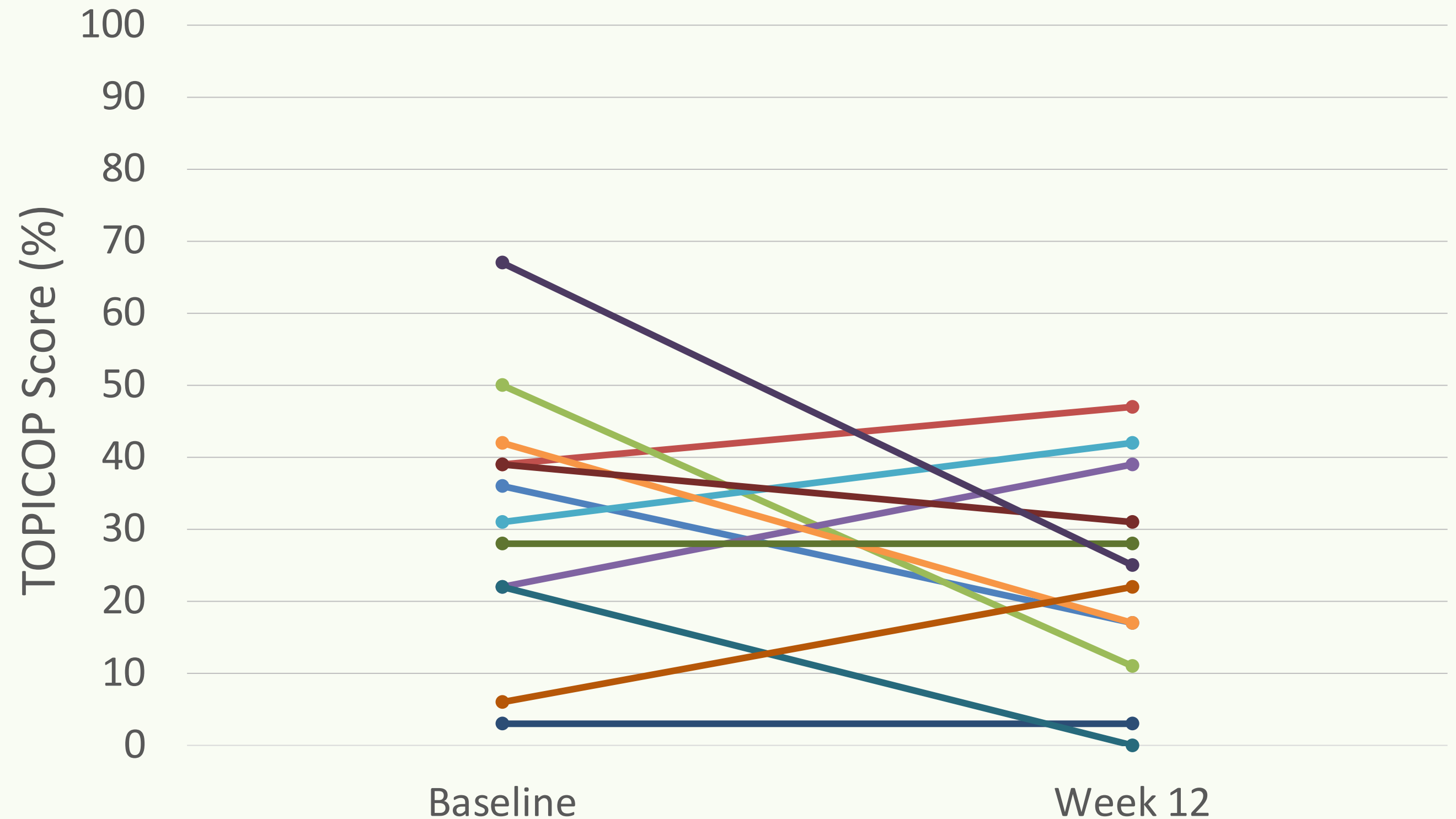
Distribution of caregiver TOPICOP scores at baseline and week 12



Results

TOPICOP score decreased in 6 caregivers, increased in 4 and was unchanged in 2

Individual caregiver TOPICOP scores at baseline and week 12

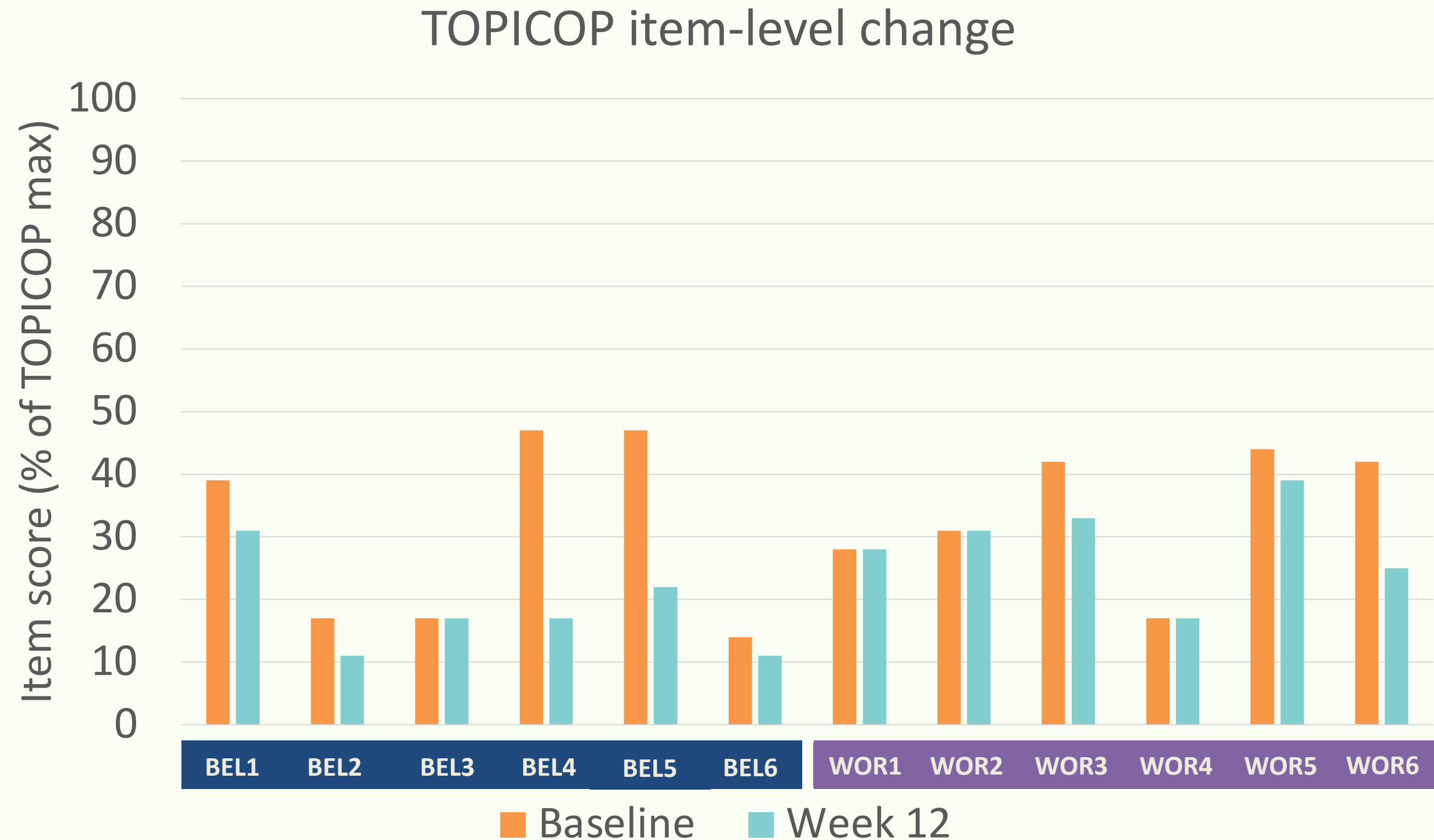


Results

Greatest reductions in
belief items

3/6 **worry** items were
unchanged

Baseline TOPICOP did not
correlate with baseline
EASI ($R_s=0.51$, $p=0.09$) nor
age ($R_s=-0.24$, $p=0.44$)



Discussion

- **The median TOPICOP score decreased with education**
 - Lee et al. (2015) also found that dermatologist-led education of caregivers reduced phobia index by 43%
- **Impact varied across caregivers**
- **Beliefs improved, worries persisted**
 - A randomised controlled trial by Choi et al. (2020) found that a single-session of targeted education reduced TOPICOP mainly in the belief domain and not in the fear domain
- **Baseline phobia did not correlate with eczema severity or age in our cohort**
 - In contrast, Lee et al. (2015) found that severe disease was a risk factor for phobia
- **Ongoing tailored education, support and reassurance are needed to counter misinformation and anxiety**



Lee (2015) *Ann Dermatol*
Choi (2020) *J Am Acad Dermatol*
Feldman (2020) *J Am Acad Dermatol*

Key points



Structured eczema education may decrease caregiver misconceptions about topical corticosteroids



Fears about topical corticosteroids may be more resistant to change with education



Education about topical corticosteroids alongside support is required to address misconceptions and anxiety

Acknowledgements

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