

The effect of group-based acceptance and commitment therapy on mental health of parents of children with autism spectrum disorder

Dr Amrapali Mahadev Jogdand^{1*}, Dr Amruta Ashok Magar²

ABSTRACT

The present study investigates the effect of group-based acceptance and commitment therapy on mental health of parents of children with autism spectrum disorder. **Hypothesis:** 1. Acceptance and commitment therapy would effective in reducing depression level among parents of children with autism spectrum disorder 2. Acceptance and commitment therapy would effective in reducing stress level among parents of children with autism spectrum disorder 3. Acceptance and commitment therapy would effective in reducing anxiety level among parents of children with autism spectrum disorder. **Sample:** The present study carried out on 30 parents of children with autism at Aurangabad city, ranging age between 25-30 years. Research design: Pre-test and post-test research design was used for present research. **Tool:** Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS) developed by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995) will be used. The Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-21) is a set of three self-report scales to measure the emotional states of depression, anxiety and stress.

Keywords: *Acceptance and commitment therapy, Mental health, Autism, Parents of children with autism*

In a given year, approximately 143.3 million new babies are born in the worldwide (Population Reference Bureau, 2000) and considerable amount of adults experience the transition to becoming a parent which represents an important life change. Becoming a parent has been described as a major life transition, as well as a major life crisis, a time of crucial psychological and social adjustment (McCourt, 2006). It is a tremendous and novel experience in which parents face; however, being a new parent can be really difficult, stressful and challenging in life, too. According to a recent nation-wide survey by Zero-to-Three -the National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families- parents of young children face a variety of challenges in today's world; temper tantrums (34%) and crying and controlling emotions (15%) top the list of childrearing challenges that parents identify (Zero

¹ Post-doctoral research fellow (ICSSR)

² Post-doctoral research fellow (ICSSR)

*Responding Author

Received: June 15, 2020; Revision Received: June 21, 2020; Accepted: June 25, 2020

The effect of group-based acceptance and commitment therapy on mental health of parents of children with autism spectrum disorder

to Three, 2009). From the day-to-day responsibilities to the larger pressures that affect many families, parents of young children face a variety of challenges in today's world.

The number of children diagnosed with autism has increased over the past decade. In 2006 on average, 1 in 110 children carried a diagnosis on the autism spectrum (Rice, 2009). When people think about ASD, most people think about the child who is affected by it. They may think about these children from that specific child's point of view and how they are perceived by others or what it would be like to not communicate effectively with others. Does anyone think about the parents of these children? The parents of children with ASD are often overlooked because everyone is focused on making the child "better." The amount of people diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is becoming more prevalent with each passing year. The CDC reports that of children born in 1992, 1 in 150 had a diagnosis of ASD by the age of 8 years old; for children born in 2002, 1 in 68 had a diagnosis of ASD by the age of 8 years old. As this generation of children with ASD begins to grow older, we will see an influx of adults with ASD. These adults will be looking for housing, jobs, recreational activities, and social supports just like other adults. Experiencing negative attitudes from other community members could severely affect an adult with ASD's ability to access the same opportunities that other adults have. When community members like landlords, employers, and authority figures hold negative attitudes towards individuals with disabilities, those attitudes affect the person's ability to have equal opportunities for housing, jobs, and recreation within the community (Corrigan, 2004); all of which are important for living a fulfilling, healthy life (World Health Organization, 1997).

Micali, Chakrabarti and Fombonne (2004) found arguably more reliable evidence of a genetic association between autism and parental mental health problems, finding a correlation between autism in the child and anxiety, depression and obsessive-compulsive disorder not only in parents but also in non-caregiver relatives.

WHAT IS ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT THERAPY?

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT; Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999) is described as one of the 'third-wave' of behavioral therapies and has been receiving a lot of attention in clinical, academic and research fields in recent years. ACT is a trans diagnostic approach. Rather than focusing on diagnostic classifications, it posits that there are common processes that underlie various psychological difficulties which become the target of therapy. ACT proposes that cognitive fusion and experiential avoidance, which lead to psychological inflexibility, are key in the etiology and maintenance of various psychological difficulties (Hayes, 2004; Hayes, Wilson, Gifford, Follette, & Strosahl, 1996). Cognitive fusion is described as the tendency to become entangled with the literal content of thoughts and using this to predominantly guide our actions (Hayes et al., 1999). Experiential avoidance refers to being unwilling to experience unpleasant internal events, such as thoughts, feelings, memories and physical sensations (Hayes et al., 1996). In addition, it involves attempting to avoid or alter the form of these unpleasant internal events, even though this can consequently lead to more distress (Hayes, 2004). Psychological inflexibility is characterized as being excessively entangled in cognitive fusion and experiential avoidance, which can lead to inflexible behavior that is not in accordance with an individual's values.

The processes of cognitive fusion and experiential avoidance are targeted in ACT to create greater psychological flexibility. This entails altering the relationship one has with one's thoughts, unlike other behavioral approaches which suggest that treatment should target

The effect of group-based acceptance and commitment therapy on mental health of parents of children with autism spectrum disorder

thought content (Hayes et al., 1999). ACT aims to help individuals be aware of private experiences in the present moment and respond to these without avoidance or struggling. Furthermore ACT entails taking committed action towards valued directions to contribute to a rich and fulfilling life (Hayes, 10 Luoma, Bond, Masuda, & Lillis, 2006). As can be seen, the primary aims of ACT involve valued based living rather than symptom reduction. This differs from many other mainstream therapies where the primary focus is often symptom reduction.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Mukharjee Ub (2015), found that effectiveness of ACT on parents of children and adolescents with ASDs. Materials and Methods: It followed a repeated measures design, comprising five parents having children and adolescents with ASDs receiving treatment from inpatient and outpatient services of Child Guidance Clinic, Central Institute of Psychiatry, to test the effect of 10 session protocol spanned over 2-month. Assessment measures were done along state anxiety, depression, psychological flexibility and quality of life using State-Trait Anxiety Inventory, Beck Depression Inventory, Acceptance and Action Questionnaire, the World Health Organization Quality of Life Assessment-BREF respectively. Baseline measures were taken prior to the treatment and follow-up measures were taken after nine treatment sessions. Results: Pre- to posttreatment improvements were found on state anxiety, depression, psychological flexibility and quality of life. Conclusion: Findings implied that ACT may have promise in helping parents better to adjust to the difficulties in rearing children diagnosed with ASDs.

Dewinta Larasati P.a, Sali Rahadi Asih (2018) research investigated that the reduce caregiver strain in mothers who care for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). This study was conducted based on the high caregiver strain experienced by mothers in the caregiving process. Such strain affects not only the mother's psychological well-being but also the child's. The current study was conducted using a one-group quasi-experimental, pretest-posttest design, in which the Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) intervention was individually implemented to four participants. Analyses were drawn from comparing quantitative and qualitative data from the pretest and posttest periods. Quantitative results showed that ACT reduced strain scores as measured by the modified caregiver strain index (MCSI). Qualitative results showed that ACT improved participants' ability to deal with caregiver strain. Participants reported having more positive feelings, ability to control negative emotions, and capability to deal with unpleasant events in their lives. Participants also obtained new knowledge and skills on how to deal with strain as a caregiver of a child with ASD. In conclusion, ACT is effective at reducing caregiver strain in mothers of autistic children.

Objectives of the research:

1. To analyse the mental health of parents of children with autism spectrum disorder.
2. To investigate the mental health of mother of children with autism spectrum disorder
3. To study the mental health of father of children with autism spectrum disorder.

Hypothesis of the research:

1. Acceptance and commitment therapy would effective in reducing depression level among parents of children with autism spectrum disorder
2. Acceptance and commitment therapy would effective in reducing stress level among parents of children with autism spectrum disorder

The effect of group-based acceptance and commitment therapy on mental health of parents of children with autism spectrum disorder

3. Acceptance and commitment therapy would effective in reducing anxiety level among parents of children with autism spectrum disorder

METHODOLOGY

Statement of the problem:

- To analyse effect of group-based acceptance and commitment therapy on mental health of parents and careers of children with autism spectrum disorder.

Sample:

The present study carried out on 30 parents of children with autism at Aurangabad city, ranging age between 25-30 years.

Variables:

Independent variables

- a) Acceptance and commitment therapy

Dependent variables

- a) Stress
- b) Anxiety
- c) Depression

Research Tool-:

Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS) developed by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995) will be used. The Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-21) is a set of three self-report scales to measure the emotional states of depression, anxiety and stress.

Procedure of data collection

Population of the parents of children with autism spectrum disorder (mother, father). Parents of children with autism spectrum disorder who are undergoing psychiatric treatment in various special child school and psychiatric hospitals in Maharashtra state since one year, will be chosen as sample. Sample will consist of 30 subjects. The age range of the subjects will be 25-30. Purposive sampling method will be used.

Research design:

For the present experimental study pre and post research design was use for session of Acceptance and commitment therapy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

Table no 1. show mean, SD, and t value for pre-test and post-test research design was use for depression and Acceptance and commitment therapy.

Therapy	N	mean	SD	t value	Sig. lev
Pre-test	30	45.53	4.50	5.15	0.01
Post-test	30	55.53	5.58		

Present study investigate the effect of group based acceptance and commitment therapy on mental health of parents and careers of children with autism spectrum disorder. The result table show that there is mean difference pre-test mean is 45.53 and SD is 4.50 and post-test mean is 55.53 and SD is 5.58 and t value is 5.15 which is significant at 0.01 level there for hypothesis Acceptance and commitment therapy would effective in reducing depression level

The effect of group-based acceptance and commitment therapy on mental health of parents of children with autism spectrum disorder

among parents of children with autism spectrum disorder was accepted. **Lake J (2018)**, examined interventions or therapeutic processes that may help parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) manage their stress. This study examines the impact of a brief Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) group intervention, led by parents, among a cohort of 33 mothers of children with ASD. Changes in ACT process measures (psychological flexibility, cognitive fusion, values) were evaluated at pre, post, and 3 months following the intervention. Mothers reported significant improvement post-intervention in psychological flexibility, cognitive fusion, and value-consistent activities in multiple life domains, including parenting, relationships, and self-care. These improvements were maintained at follow-up. The results provide preliminary evidence that improvements observed in depression and stress may be mediated by cognitive fusion and action-values consistency.

Table no 2. show mean, SD, and t value for pre-test and post-test research design was use for stress and Acceptance and commitment therapy.

Therapy	N	mean	SD	t value	Sig. lev
Pre-test	30	55.5	7.50	5.70	0.01
Post-test	30	60.53	8.40		

Present study investigate the effect of group based acceptance and commitment therapy on mental health of parents and careers of children with autism spectrum disorder. The result table show that there is mean difference pre-test mean is 55.5 and SD is 7.50 and post-test mean is 60.53 and SD is 8.40 and t value is 5.70 which is significant at 0.01 level there for hypothesis Acceptance and commitment therapy would effective in reducing stress level among parents of children with autism spectrum disorder was accepted. **Wallander JL (2016)**, suggested that one in 68 children is affected. With convincing evidence that parenting a child with ASD is associated with elevated distress and mental health problems, researchers have begun to investigate treatments that directly target parents' psychological wellbeing. We conducted a narrative review of studies that empirically tested the effects of interventions targeting improvements in the mental health of parents of children with ASD. Following a range of search strategies, a total of 13 studies, seven randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and six pre-posttest designs, met inclusion criteria. Researchers calculated and reported effect sizes for all RCTs. On average, treatment produced medium to large effect sizes with improvements in parenting stress and general health, and reductions in depression and anxiety. Interventions that appeared promising included: Stress Management and Relaxation Techniques, Expressive Writing, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. However, only one study conducted a follow-up assessment >3months post intervention. Study populations primarily consisted of English-speaking mothers, ages 39 to 42years. Conclusions were limited by small sample sizes, homogeneity of sample population, and reliance on self-report. Therefore, this body of research contains significant limitations in need of improvement for this field to move forward and benefit a sizable number of parents

Table no 3. show mean, SD, and t value for pre-test and post-test research design was use for Anxiety and Acceptance and commitment therapy.

Therapy	N	mean	SD	t value	Sig. lev
Pre-test	30	57.11	5.2	5.1	0.01
Post-test	30	60.18	6.4		

The effect of group-based acceptance and commitment therapy on mental health of parents of children with autism spectrum disorder

Present study investigate the effect of group based acceptance and commitment therapy on mental health of parents and careers of children with autism spectrum disorder. The result table show that there is mean difference pre-test mean is 57.511 and SD is 5.2 and post-test mean is 60.18 and SD is 6.4 and t value is 5.1 which is significant at 0.01 level there for hypothesis Acceptance and commitment therapy would effective in reducing Anxiety level among parents of children with autism spectrum disorder was accepted. **Shuvabrata Poddar (2015)** the present study aims at studying the effectiveness of ACT on parents of children and adolescents with ASDs. It followed a repeated measures design, comprising five parents having children and adolescents with ASDs receiving treatment from inpatient and outpatient services of Child Guidance Clinic, Central Institute of Psychiatry, to test the effect of 10 session protocol spanned over 2-month. Assessment measures were done along state anxiety, depression, psychological flexibility and quality of life using State-Trait Anxiety Inventory, Beck Depression Inventory, Acceptance and Action Questionnaire, the World Health Organization Quality of Life Assessment-BREF respectively. Baseline measures were taken prior to the treatment and follow-up measures were taken after nine treatment sessions. Pre- to post-treatment improvements were found on state anxiety, depression, psychological flexibility and quality of life. Findings implied that ACT may have promise in helping parents better to adjust to the difficulties in rearing children diagnosed with ASDs.

REFERENCES

- Abbeduto L, (2004) Psychological well-being and coping in mothers of youths with autism, Down Syndrome, or Fragile X Syndrome, *American Journal on Mental Retardation*, 109, 2004. 237-254.
- Abramson R, (2005) The relationship between restrictive and repetitive behaviors in individuals with autism and obsessive compulsive symptoms in parents, *Child Psychiatry and Human Development*, 36(2),155-165
- Ben Chaabane, (2008) The effects of parent implemented PECS training on improvisation of minds by children with autism, *Applied Behavior Analysis* 42, 671-677
- Bond F, (2011) Preliminary psychometric properties of the Acceptance and Action QuestionnaireII: A revised measure of psychological inflexibility and experiential avoidance, *Behavior Therapy*, 676-688
- Ciarocchi J, (2005) The role of cognitive fusion in impaired parenting: An RFT analysis, *Psychology and Psychological Therapy* 4(3), 469- 486
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Autism spectrum disorders, (2010). Retrieved from: www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autismiindex.html.
- Deater –Deckard, (1998) Parenting stress and child adjustment: Some old hypotheses and new questions. *Clinical Psychology, Science and practice*, 314-323
- Hayes, S. (1994) Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: An experiential approach to behavior change, altering the verbal support for experiential avoidance, 289-303.
- Hollon, S. (1980) Cognitive self-statements in depression: Development of an Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire, *Cognitive Therapy and Re-search*, 4, (1980). 383-39 10.
- Kowalkowski, J, (2012) The impact of a group-based Acceptance and Commitment Therapy Intervention on parents of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. Master's Theses and Doctoral Dissertations, paper 512
- Rapanaro C, (2008) Perceived benefits and negative impact of challenges encountered in caring for young adults with intellectual disabilities in the transition to adulthood. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 34-47

The effect of group-based acceptance and commitment therapy on mental health of parents of children with autism spectrum disorder

Urbi Mukherjee,(2017) Impact of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy on Valuing Behavior of Parents of Children with Neurodevelopmental Disorders, psychology and behavioral science international journal, 1-18

Wenzlaff R, (2002) Thought Suppression. Annual Review of Psychology, 59-91.

Acknowledgements

The author appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Jogdand, A.M, & Magar, A.A (2020). The effect of group-based acceptance and commitment therapy on mental health of parents of children with autism spectrum disorder. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 8(2), 1332-1338. DIP:18.01.152/20200802, DOI:10.25215/0802.152