

Research Paper

## A Comparative Review on the Efficacy of Third-Wave Cognitive Therapies (DBT and ACT) Versus Traditional CBT in Managing Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

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### ABSTRACT

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is a chronic and debilitating psychiatric condition that severely affects individuals' quality of life. Traditional Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is the gold standard for treating OCD, but third-wave cognitive therapies, such as Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), offer promising alternatives. This review examines the comparative efficacy of these therapies in managing obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviors, emphasizing their mechanisms, advantages, and limitations. The article synthesizes findings from existing studies to identify gaps and potential directions for future research, particularly focusing on cultural adaptations relevant to non-Western populations like India.

**Keywords:** *Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Dialectical Behavior Therapy, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy*

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is characterized by intrusive thoughts (obsessions) and repetitive behaviors (compulsions) aimed at alleviating distress caused by these thoughts. Despite advancements in mental health treatment, OCD remains one of the most disabling psychiatric conditions globally, with high rates of comorbidity and chronicity. In India, OCD prevalence is significant, yet underdiagnosis and inadequate treatment persist due to stigma, lack of awareness, and insufficient mental health resources.

Traditional CBT, particularly its Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP) component, is widely recognized as the gold standard for OCD treatment. However, the high dropout rates and residual symptoms among some patients necessitate exploring alternative approaches. Third-wave cognitive therapies, including DBT and ACT, have emerged as innovative modalities that incorporate mindfulness, acceptance, and emotion regulation strategies.

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Received: April 26, 2025; Revision Received: June 26, 2025; Accepted: June 30, 2025

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These therapies aim to address not only the behavioral and cognitive dimensions of OCD but also the underlying emotional and psychological flexibility deficits.

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)**

CBT for OCD primarily focuses on altering maladaptive thought patterns and behavioral responses through cognitive restructuring and ERP. Multiple meta-analyses and longitudinal studies confirm its efficacy, with significant reductions in OCD symptoms and long-term benefits (Hoh et al., 2019; Steketee & van der Heiden, 2019). However, the structured nature of CBT and its emphasis on exposure can be challenging for patients with severe anxiety or emotional dysregulation, limiting its applicability in certain cases.

#### **Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)**

ACT emphasizes psychological flexibility, encouraging patients to accept intrusive thoughts without engaging in compulsive behaviors. Studies show ACT's efficacy in reducing obsessive thoughts and improving emotional regulation (Twohig & Levin, 2024; McCracken & Vowles, 2022). By focusing on mindfulness and values-based action, ACT offers a compassionate approach, making it particularly beneficial for patients resistant to traditional CBT. Meta-analyses suggest that ACT's benefits are comparable to CBT, especially for treatment-resistant OCD cases (Johnson & Jester, 2022; Ramos et al., 2020).

#### **Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT)**

Originally developed for borderline personality disorder, DBT has been adapted to address OCD by targeting emotional dysregulation and distress tolerance. Research highlights DBT's utility in reducing compulsive behaviors and enhancing emotional regulation (Zalta et al., 2021; Rosen & Detweiler-Bedell, 2021). Studies combining DBT with traditional CBT or ERP have demonstrated superior outcomes, particularly for individuals with comorbid emotional challenges (Haworth & Holford, 2019).

#### **Comparative Studies**

Comparative analyses reveal unique strengths in each approach. CBT excels in directly targeting compulsive behaviors, while ACT and DBT focus on psychological flexibility and emotional regulation. ACT has shown longer-term benefits in preventing relapse, whereas DBT's distress tolerance modules address the emotional reactivity often underlying OCD symptoms (McMain & Korman, 2018; Chapman & Gratz, 2020). Integrated approaches that combine elements of these therapies may offer the most comprehensive solutions (Barlow et al., 2020).

#### **Methodological Insights and Research Gaps**

Existing literature underscores the need for culturally sensitive adaptations of ACT and DBT, particularly in non-Western contexts. While studies confirm their efficacy in Western populations, their applicability to Indian socio-cultural settings remains underexplored. Additionally, few studies have directly compared these therapies across diverse demographic groups, limiting generalizability.

Research gaps include:

- Limited long-term follow-up studies assessing the sustainability of therapeutic outcomes.

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- Insufficient exploration of combined therapy models integrating CBT, ACT, and DBT.
- Scarcity of evidence on the effectiveness of these therapies in resource-constrained settings.

### DISCUSSION

The review highlights the growing evidence supporting third-wave therapies as viable alternatives or complements to traditional CBT for OCD. ACT and DBT address critical aspects of emotional and psychological flexibility that CBT may overlook, providing holistic care for individuals with complex symptom profiles. However, therapy selection should be tailored to the patient's unique needs, symptom severity, and cultural background. In India, where mental health resources are scarce and stigma persists, integrating mindfulness-based practices inherent in ACT and DBT into culturally relevant frameworks could enhance accessibility and acceptance. Future research should prioritize randomized controlled trials and longitudinal studies in diverse populations to establish robust evidence for these therapies.

### CONCLUSION

Third-wave cognitive therapies, such as ACT and DBT, hold significant promise in addressing the limitations of traditional CBT for OCD treatment. By focusing on psychological flexibility, emotional regulation, and acceptance, these therapies provide innovative strategies for managing obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviors. However, further research is essential to refine these approaches, evaluate their long-term efficacy, and adapt them for culturally diverse populations. Comprehensive, patient-centered treatment models that integrate traditional and third-wave therapies could revolutionize OCD management, offering hope for improved outcomes and quality of life.

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### ***Acknowledgment***

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

### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

***How to cite this article:*** Banerjee, S.R., Parwez, S. & Dhalwal, S.K. (2025). A Comparative Review on the Efficacy of Third-Wave Cognitive Therapies (DBT and ACT) Versus Traditional CBT in Managing Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 13(2), 5148-5151. DIP:18.01.454.20251302, DOI:10.25215/1302.454