

Outcomes of a Brief Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) Intervention among University Students with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) Symptoms

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- ACT could be an effective option for BPD in university setting.
- Future research is needed to better appreciate these results, maybe with a follow-up and ecological measures. It could be relevant to evaluate the mediating role of psychological flexibility and better understand the processes of change.

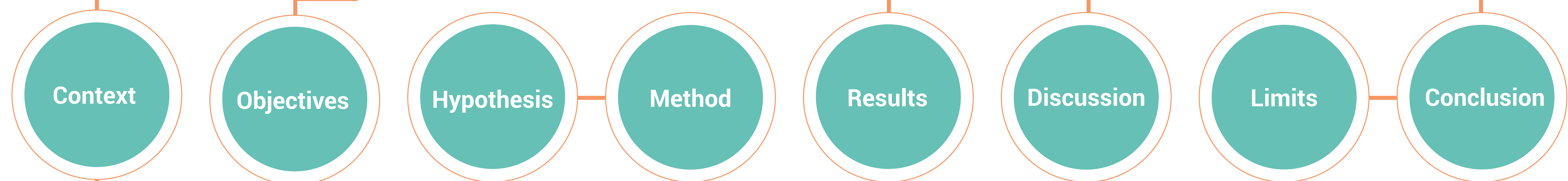
The intervention was expected to reduce experiential avoidance and cognitive fusion and to improve mindfulness. It is also expected to reduce impulsivity, improve problem-solving attitude and dysfunctional beliefs.

As shown in Table 1, all variables tested present significant results at $p < 0.05$. The observed effect sizes Cohen's d (Cohen, 1988) range from low-medium to high depending on the variable, which confirm the effect obtained.

Table 1
 Mean Scores at Pretest and Posttest, Significant Results in ANOVA and Effect Size (Cohen d)

Questionnaire	Pretest	Posttest	ANOVA $p < 0.05$	Effect Size Cohen's d
AAQ-II <small>(10 items, $\alpha=0.83$)</small>	40,3	45,7	<.000	0.82
WBSI <small>(15 items, α entre 0.87 et 0.89)</small>	56,9	51,7	.002	0.54
CFQ-28 <small>(28 items, $\alpha=s.o.$)</small>	72,2	62,1	<.000	0.77
MAAS <small>(15 items, $\alpha=0.84$)</small>	48,1	52,5	.004	0.49
BIS-10 <small>(34 items, $\alpha=0.82$)</small>	80,3	77,6	.040	0.34
QAP <small>(12 items, $\alpha=0.90$)</small>	37,3	30,9	<.000	0.72
PBQ <small>(BPD subscale 14 items, $\alpha=0.90$)</small>	22,5	18,6	.006	0.47

- ### Mental Health in University Setting
- In the last 5 years, an increase in severe psychological problems is noted by 88% of university mental health professionals (Pedrelli et al., 2015).
 - Among university students in Canada, 59% report feeling deeply depressed, 70% anxious and 24% report suicidal thoughts (MacQueen, 2016).
 - Research on borderline personality disorder (BPD) students are scarce. Effective treatments require long-term interventions (Maey et al., 2012).
 - There is a need for effective and short-term interventions with BPD students (David, 2016; Gratz et al., 2014).
- ### BPD Prevalence and Consequences
- BPD affects 1 to 2% of the general population (APA, 2013).
 - In half of cases, the age of onset is between 18 and 25; 75% engage in self-harm behaviors, 50% in suicidal attempts and 5% complete suicide (Baraldi et al., 2015).
 - BPD is characterized by instability in relationships, identity and affects.
 - Long-term difficulties in academic and professional achievement are common among people with BPD (Gunderson et al., 2011).
- ### BPD and ACT
- Recent studies link experiential avoidance and lack of psychological flexibility to emotional dysregulation inherent to BPD and to self-harm behaviors (Gratz et al., 2016).
 - Results reveal positive effects in ACT processes with specific outcomes on symptoms of BPD (Gratz et al., 2016) and overall quality of life for treatment-resistant patients (Clarke et al., 2014).
 - The effectiveness of ACT is well documented for a large spectrum of mental disorders (A-Tjak et al., 2015) but research on ACT and BPD is relatively new.



Evaluate the effectiveness of a brief ACT intervention on ACT processes and behavioral and cognitive aspects of BPD among university students.

- The intervention is expected to have effects on :
- ACT processes**
- Reduce experiential avoidance $\uparrow \downarrow$
 - Reduce cognitive fusion \downarrow
 - Improve mindfulness \uparrow
- Behavioral and cognitive aspects**
- Reduce impulsivity \downarrow
 - Improve problem-solving attitude \downarrow
 - Reduce dysfunctional beliefs \downarrow

- Pre-experimental design (pretest /posttest study).
- Participants: 85 students (102 enrolled, attrition 17%), 93% women, mean age: 25.
- Intervention: 6 week-group (2 hours/week) limited to 12 participants with BPD traits or disorder. Conducted by 2 psychologists trained in ACT.
- Detailed manual was developed for each topic: 1) the role of emotions, 2) emotional regulation skills, 3) thoughts and mind trap, 4) coping mechanisms, 5) distress tolerance 6) problem-solving attitude.
- Questionnaires :

AAQ-II Acceptance and Action Questionnaire	MAAS Mindful Attention Awareness Scale	PBQ Personality Belief Questionnaire
CFQ-28 Cognitive Fusion Questionnaire	BIS-10 Barrat Impulsiveness Scale	
WBSI White Bear Suppression Inventory	QAP Attitude Toward Problems Questionnaire	
- Statistical measures :
 Repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) and effect size (Cohen's d) was conducted. Prior assumptions were respected.

- The objectives of this study was to evaluate a brief ACT intervention designed for students with symptoms or BPD disorder on ACT processes as well as specific behavioral and cognitive aspects.
- Overall improvements in ACT processes are found and in line with the hypothesis.
 - As expected, reduction in impulsivity, positive change in attitude toward problems and dysfunctional beliefs were found.
- This exploratory study provides promising results about the ACT potential effectiveness for a short-term intervention among students with symptoms of BPD.

This study contains limitations that are worth noting: lack of a control group and randomization and no follow-up measures.

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