

A brief Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) – based group program for unemployed individuals with mental health problems

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BACKGROUND

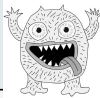

Unemployed people with mental illness often choose not to use mental health services and not to seek help with jobsearch and rehabilitation. This has harmful consequences for individuals, their families and society, such as poor clinical outcomes, continuing unemployment and productivity losses (WHO, 2008). There are effective treatments and interventions available for depression (Cuijpers et al., 2008), unemployment and sickness absenteeism (Wesson & Gould, 2010), when dealing with each problem considered separately. Swedish studies (Dahl et al., 2004, Folke et al., 2012;) found that unemployed individuals with mental disorders who participated in a Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) - based program improved significantly on measures of depression, general health, and quality of life.

AIM

To evaluate the acceptability, feasibility and efficacy of a brief ACT-based group program for unemployed individuals with mental health problems. Program participants can learn to behave flexibly in different situations and can decide whether to live a value-based life. This is expected to reduce barriers to help-seeking among unemployed people with mental health problems. Additionally it is expected to support taking a decision for or against disclosure.

METHODS

A pilot randomized controlled trial (RCT) with approximately 100 unemployed people with mental health problems is currently conducted in southern Germany. Interested individuals are screened via telephone. Inclusion criteria are being between 18 and 64 years of age, currently unemployed (persons receiving full disability pension are excluded) and psychological distress as indicated by a score ≥ 13 on Kessler's K6 Psychological Distress Screening Scale. Participants are randomly allocated to the ACT intervention or a TAU control group. The ACT-based intervention consists of four sessions, covering the following topics: awareness, acceptance of unemployment and/or mental illness, values, disclosing mental health problems, and help-seeking. Assessments take part at baseline (t0), and 3 (t1), 6 (t2) weeks after baseline and 6 months after baseline (t3).

	ACT		Disclosure and help-seeking
Session 1	DNA-V Present-Moment-Awareness Acceptance (Tug-of-War with the mental monsters)		Disclosure: Advantages and disadvantages; Levels of disclosure
Session 2	Present-Moment-Awareness Values (values cards, Hayes) Matrix (Acceptance & Values)		Disclosure: Levels of disclosure and testing a person out for disclosure
Session 3	Present-Moment-Awareness Matrix (Acceptance & Values)		Help-seeking: Informations, materials and case-studies Disclosure: Write your own story
3 weeks break			
Session 4	Present-Moment-Awareness Matrix (Acceptance & Values) Acceptance of thoughts and emotions		Disclosure: Tell your own story

CONCLUSION

The pilot-RCT will show whether a short ACT-based group program improves the motivation for mental health treatment and jobsearch among unemployed individuals with mental health problems by increasing value orientation and psychological flexibility.

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