A Pilot Study of Culturally-Informed Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for Puerto Rican Veterans with Fibromyalgia

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ABSTRACT
The aim of this pilot study is to examine the potential utility of an 8-week culturally-informed ACT group therapy for Puerto Rican veterans with Fibromyalgia (FM). 32 men and women who participated in the ACT group completed questionnaires on psychological flexibility, pain acceptance and valued living pre- and post-treatment. Results indicated significant changes in measures of psychological flexibility and pain acceptance pre- and post treatment. There were no significant changes in valued living.

OBJECTIVES
- To describe the demographic data of participants of culturally-informed ACT group therapy for veterans with FM.
- To explore and discuss the potential utility of culturally-informed ACT group therapy for Puerto Rican veterans with FM.

INTRODUCTION
- There is a strong research base supporting the effectiveness of ACT for chronic pain (Vowles, Wetherell, & Sorrell, 2009; Wetherell et al., 2013).
- A number of individuals seeking treatment for chronic pain are diagnosed with Fibromyalgia (FM). FM is characterized by chronic diffuse pain, sensitivity to pressure in specific areas of the body, fatigue and disrupted sleep (Taylor, Fridberg & Lason, 2001).
- There are a handful of studies that have demonstrated efficacy of ACT for FM (Wicksell et al., 2013; Steiner, Bogoch, & Bigatti, 2013).
- Despite ACT’s success, culturally diverse populations continue to be underrepresented in the ACT treatment literature (Woodneck, Pratt, Gundy, Nelson, & Towlah, 2012), and little is known on how ACT can be culturally adapted and implemented for use with Puerto Rican adults.
- The aim of this pilot study is to compare pre-treatment and outcome measures of relevant psychological variables to examine the potential utility of culturally-informed ACT group therapy for Puerto Rican veterans with FM.

GROUP DESCRIPTION
“Morivivi” is an 8-session ACT group therapy created by the primary author and trainees for Puerto Rican veterans with FM. It was based on the book Living Beyond Your Pain: Using Acceptance and Commitment Therapy to Ease Chronic Pain workbook by Dahl, Lundgren, Hayes (2006). Efforts to link cultural knowledge to the ACT intervention were performed, as a result a Spanish culturally-informed protocol was created, including Spanish translated materials and new metaphors ( Colon, Berrios, Sorrell, 2013). The group was named by the initial group members. Morivivi is a strong and resilient herb that grows abundantly in Puerto Rico. The curious aspect of the Morivivi plant (also known as: Mimosa Pudica) is the way the leaves protectively fold inward when touched and later reopen.

HYPOTHESES
Participants in ACT group therapy will show improvements in key variables from pre- to post-treatment.
1. Scores on the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire – II (AAQ-II) will demonstrate significant increases in psychological flexibility from pre- to post-treatment.
2. Scores on the Chronic Pain Acceptance Questionnaire (CPAQ) will demonstrate significant increases in pain acceptance from pre- to post-treatment.
3. Scores on the Valued Living Questionnaire (VLQ) will demonstrate significant increases in living according to one’s values from pre- to post-treatment.

METHOD
- Data from five different groups held between October 2012 and March 2014 were analyzed.
- As part of standard service delivery self-assessment measures were administered on the first and final days of the group. Spanish translations of all self-assessment measures were administered.
- All group meetings were held in the San Juan VA Medical Center, located on the island of Puerto Rico, a commonwealth of the United States.

PARTICIPANTS
- Gender
  - N = 32
  - 44% Males
  - 56% Females
- Groups varied in size from 3 to 15 participants.
- Ages ranged from 32 to 69 years old (M = 49.41).

RESULTS
- Psychological Flexibility AAQ-2 Means
- Pain Acceptance CPAQ Means
- Valued Living Consistency VLQ Means

DISCUSSION
- Results are consistent with existing research that points to changes in both psychological flexibility and chronic pain acceptance after psychological intervention [p < .01 (two-tailed)].
- While a slight increase in living according to ones values was noted, this change was not significant contrary to what was expected. A possible reason may be that the composite score was not utilized. The VLQ scale recommend the use of this score when conducting research (Wilson, Sandoz, Kitchens, & Roberts, in press).
- This is the first effort to explore changes in relevant variables targeted by culturally-informed ACT with Puerto Rican veterans. While we are not able to attribute changes in participant’s scores to the intervention, results provide fertile ground for future studies.

BENEFITS AND LIMITATIONS
- Benefits:
  - Study results provide initial support for the potential utility of culturally-informed ACT intervention for Puerto Rican Veterans.
  - Information obtained from this pilot study contributes to the discussion of prospective efficacy and feasibility studies.
- Limitations:
  - This is a retrospective study.
  - Study has a limited sample size.
  - Measures are not validated with Puerto Rican population.

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