

Prevention and Treatment of Psychosomatic and Psychosocial Symptoms among Unemployed Individuals at Times of Socioeconomic Crisis: A Pilot Study of an ACT-based Group Intervention

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Introduction

- An ACT-based group intervention was developed and implemented in two municipalities of Thessaloniki, Greece.
- The intervention included basic ACT techniques, including mindfulness, adapted for the specific population. The aims were: 1. the prevention and the treatment of common psychosomatic and psychosocial problems, most likely to be incurred by the unemployed, and 2. coping skills training for the practical/economic and time-management issues associated with unemployment. It was assumed that ACT's promotion of a flexible and open stance towards the devastating consequences of unemployment, as well as the emphasis on self-determination, through values clarification and commitment action, would be empowering.

Participants and Procedure

- Participants were community members who had been informed about the study by the Municipality Counselling Services Office in two regions of the city
- Group coordinator was a doctoral student and certified cognitive behavioral therapist with a special interest in ACT.
- Group members were assessed before and after the intervention. In addition, they were assessed on process measures before and after each session.
- Unemployed individuals who met the eligibility criteria and were interested in the intervention participated in a screening session in order to be informed of the study details, to provide informed consent and to complete the first assessment.
- Nine individuals enrolled in two groups (five and four)
- Mean age = 46.5 (range = 42-50)
- Mean unemployment duration = 27 months (range = 5-74)
- 100% Females
- The intervention consisted of nine weekly sessions lasting two hours each, conducted in two groups.

Measures

Outcome variables

- General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-28) (Goldberg, 1978).
- Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS 21) (Henry & Crawford, 2005).

- Pearlin Mastery Scale, (Schooler, 1978).
- The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS-X) (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). We used only the positive scale.
- Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scales. We used only items measuring personal growth, positive relations with others and purpose in life (Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

Mediating variables

- Acceptance and Action Questionnaire II (AAQ-II) (Bond et al., 2011).
- Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS), (Brown & Ryan, 2003).
- Cognitive fusion questionnaire (CFQ) (Gillanders et al., 2014).
- Self-Compassion Scale (SCS). We used a short form consisting of eight items measuring the self-kindness and common humanity subscales (Neff, 2003).

Moderating variable

- Conservation of Resources Evaluation (COR-E). We used a 15 items subscale regarding adequacy of material resources (Hobfoll, Lilly & Jackson, 1992).

Results

Outcome variables

We used t-tests for paired samples to compare the variables at pre- and post- group

- GHQ-Social scores decreased significantly, $t = 2.47$ $p < 0.05$
- GHQ-Depression scores decreased significantly, $t = 2.87$ $p < 0.05$

Trends

- DASS-Stress scores decreased but were not significant, $t = 2.24$ $p = 0.055$

Mediating variables

We also used t-tests for paired samples to compare the variables of process measures prior to the first and prior to the last (9th) session

- "During the past week, how effective were your efforts to improve aspects of your life that you value", $p < 0.05$

- "During the past week, how eager were you to do the things that you did, regardless of the degree to which you felt distress", $p < 0.05$
- "During the past week, how effective were your efforts to manage the things that you did, regardless of the degree to which you felt distress", $p < 0.05$

Trends

- "During the past week, to what extent did you confine yourself at home or abstain from activities due to physical discomfort (e.g. pain, disease)", $p < 0.06$
- "During the past week, how effective were your efforts to do things for a better, more energetic and quality life", $p < 0.1$

Conclusions

- These results support the hypothesis that an ACT-based group intervention designed for the unemployed decrease depressive symptoms and social dysfunction.
- In addition, the results suggest that the intervention may have been successful in increasing one's willingness to experience difficult emotions and one's commitment to values, both goals of the intervention.
- Overall, the results suggest that the intervention had an impact on the participant's level of behavioral activation in a manner consistent with their values. In addition, the intervention appeared to have a positive impact on social functioning. These results are consistent with ACT's emphasis on creating a quality life despite the emotional pain experienced by all people.
- Study limitations: 1. the sample was extremely small ($N=9$) and consisted exclusively of women, 2. we did not include a control group, and 3. we conducted multiple comparisons, thus increasing the probability for Type I error.

Contact

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