



Assessing progress in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) with older adults: A literature review of existing measures

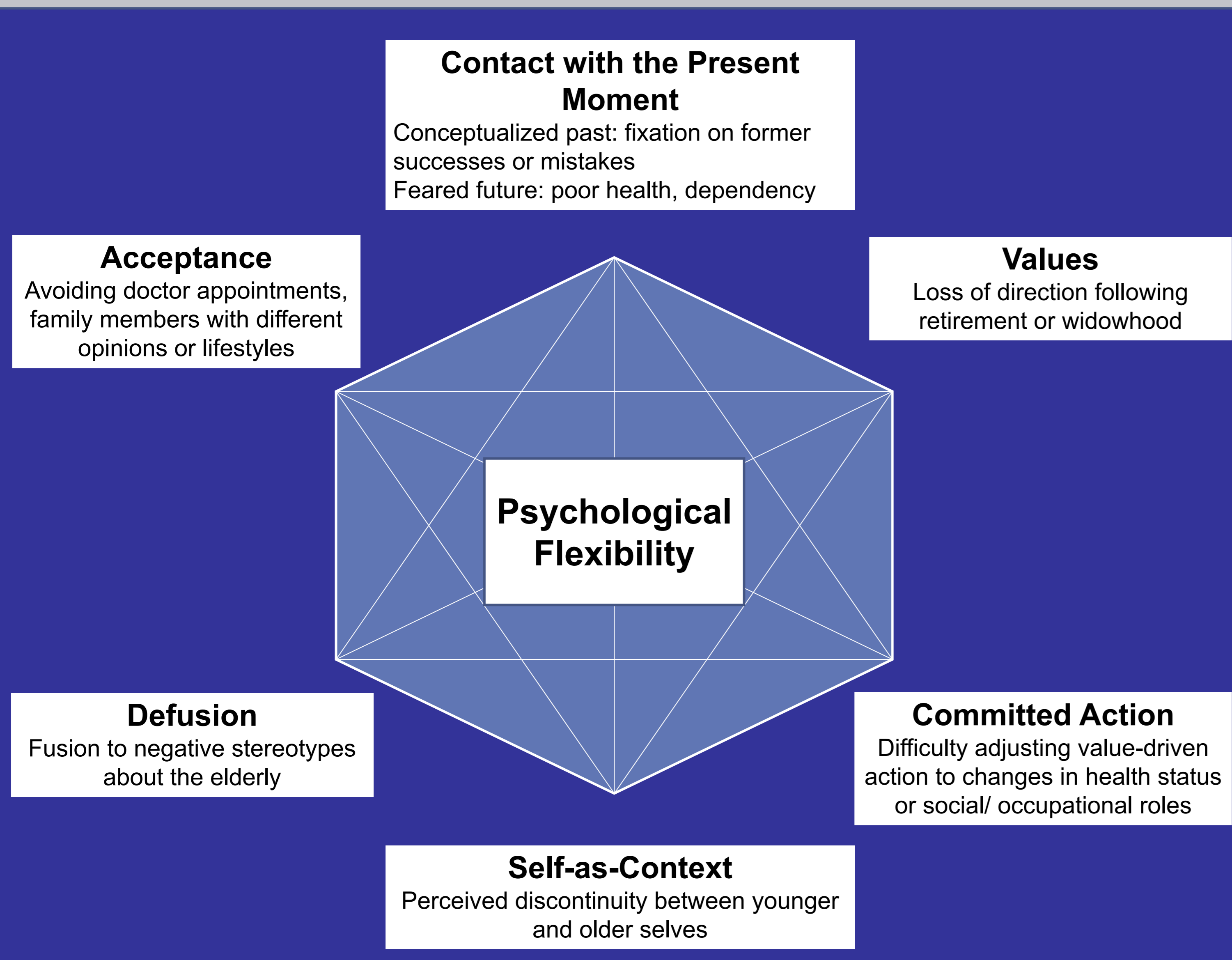
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Introduction

- Populations of older adults (aged 65+) are growing fast, both in the United States and internationally.
- While older adults experience similar or even lower rates of mental health problems compared with younger adults, they are less likely to receive mental health treatment.
 - Treatment is more likely to be pharmacological and less likely to be provided by a mental health specialist.
 - Late-life depression and anxiety are associated with greater functional decline and increased mortality.
 - Older age is a risk factor for suicide.
- This discrepancy may result from several factors, such as:
 - Differing conceptions about what constitutes a mental health problem
 - Lack of knowledge about mental health services
 - Stigma
 - Provider misconceptions about normal aging
- Common issues affecting mental health and quality of life for older adults include:
 - Deaths of family and friends
 - Retirement
 - Medical illness
- Successful aging requires adapting to these changes and losses that are a natural part of late-life development. Individuals who struggle to adapt may develop problems such as anxiety, depression, and loneliness.
- ACT may be particularly well-suited to help older adults navigate and adapt to the challenges of aging given its focus on increasing flexibility and de-emphasis on diagnoses and symptoms.
- Empirical support for ACT with older adults is growing, but to accurately investigate the treatment effects of ACT in older adults requires measures capable of assessing the core concepts and processes of the treatment.
- While measures have been developed, it is unclear how many have been validated with older adults.

Example ACT Case Conceptualization for an Older Adult



Purpose & Methods

Purpose

- To identify existing measures of ACT-relevant concepts and processes.
- To determine whether these measures have been validated in older adult samples.

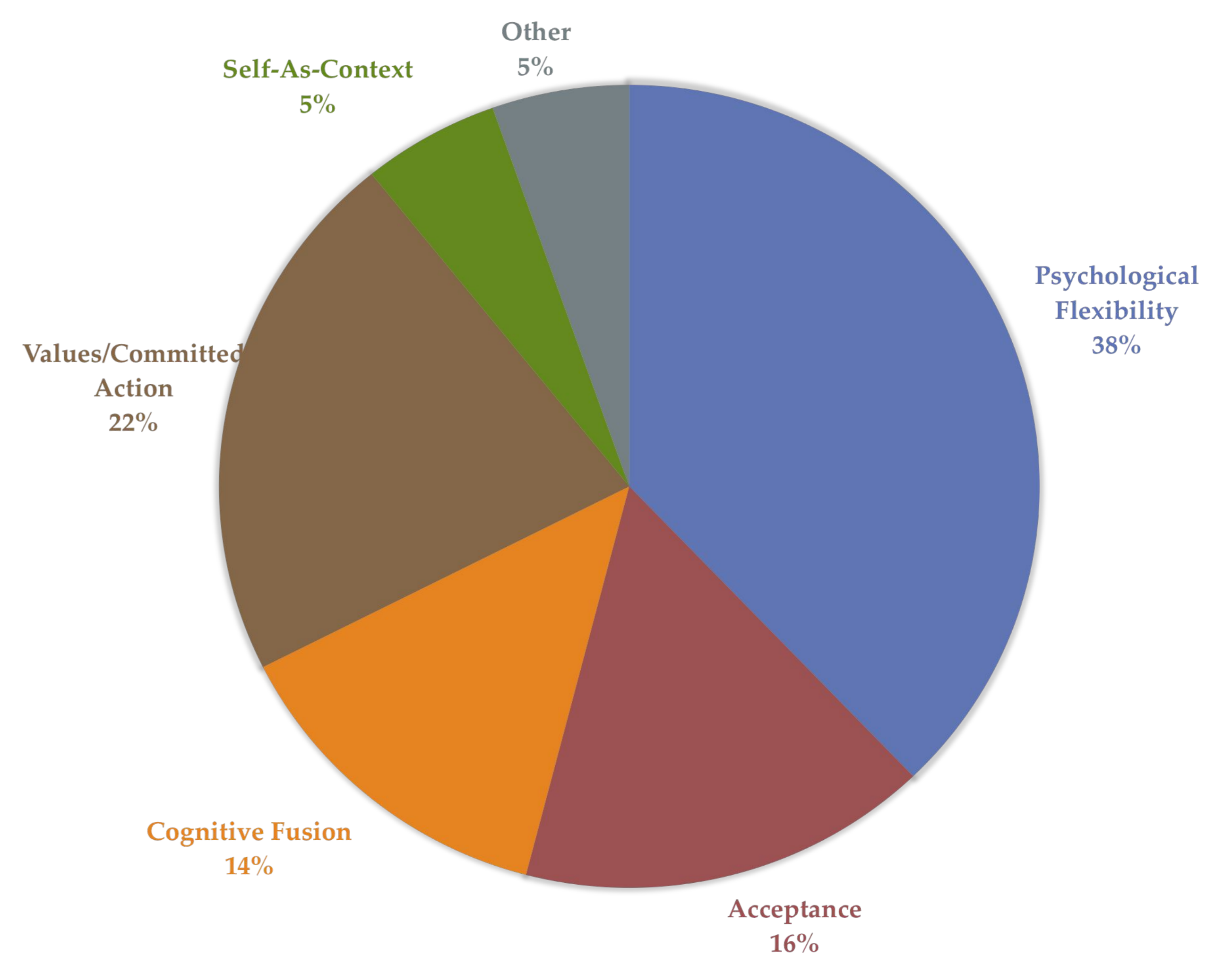
Methods

- We conducted a review of the literature by searching three databases (PubMed, MEDLINE, and PsychINFO) for combinations of ACT-related terms.
 - ACT terms: "acceptance and commitment therapy"; "cognitive fusion"; "psychological flexibility"; "committed action"; "thought suppression"
 - Measurement terms: "measure"; "measurement"; "assessment"; "instrument"; "questionnaire"
- While mindfulness is a core component of ACT, measures of mindfulness have previously been reviewed elsewhere and were excluded from this search.
- Irrelevant and duplicate results were excluded.
- The authors met to reach consensus on which measures were "ACT-relevant," defined as rooted in the theoretical foundations of ACT.
- Adaptations and short-form versions of the same measure were consolidated to create a final list of measures.

Acknowledgement

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Constructs Measured



Results

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

	Number	Proportion
Total articles	127	N/A
Total unique measures described in articles	37	N/A
Measures developed for use in children and youth	4	*10.8%
Measures developed for use in older adults	0	*0.0%
Articles that reported age range of participants	55	43.3%
Articles that reported including participants > 65 years old	21	16.5%
Articles with at least one sample where mean age > 50	15	11.8%
Articles with at least one sample where mean age > 60	2	1.6%
Articles with a sample with a mean within 1 SD of 50	52	40.9%
Articles with a sample with a mean within 1 SD of 60	21	16.5%
Articles that included only samples of college students	24	18.9%

Note: All proportions calculated out of total of 127 articles except for those marked with an asterisk*, which are calculated out of total of 37 measures.

Table 2. List of most studied ACT measures

Measure	# Articles	> 50*	> 60**
Acceptance and Action Questionnaire	38	2	0
Cognitive Fusion Questionnaire	14	2	1
White Bear Suppression Inventory	10	0	0
Chronic Pain Acceptance Questionnaire	8	3	0
Committed Action Questionnaire	8	2	0

* Articles containing at least one sample with a mean age > 50 years old
** Articles containing at least one sample with a mean age > 60 years old

Conclusions

- While four ACT measures were developed specifically for children and youth, no measures were created for an older adult population.
- Very few studies of ACT measures tested them in at least one sample that included a significant proportion of older adults.
- Future research should evaluate the psychometric properties of commonly used and promising ACT measures in older adult populations. Researchers may also consider creating measures of ACT concepts and processes specifically for older adults to increase comprehension and relevance for this population.
- Developing and validating ACT measures for use in older adults will enable investigators to examine the efficacy of this transdiagnostic treatment for this growing segment of the population.

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