

A Critical Systematic Review of ACT Interventions for Developmental Service Workers and Teachers to Address Work-Related Challenges

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Introduction

- Development Service Workers (DSWs) and Teachers are essential workers who are at high risk for work-related challenges such as burnout (Biglan et al., 2012)
- Burnout leads to challenges in worker's mental health and well-being such as depression and anxiety (Maslach & Jackson, 1986), chronic illness (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993), and issues with memory and alcohol consumption (Peterson et al., 2008)
- Burnout contributes to industry stressors such as high staff turnover (Emery & Vandenberg, 2010), absenteeism (Hastings et al., 2004), and reduced commitment to profession (Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997)
- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) has been effective in reducing burnout in DSWs and Teachers (Reeve et al., 2018), and demonstrated feasibility during the COVID-19 pandemic (Benhamou & Piedra, 2020)

Burnout Symptoms:

- Emotional exhaustion
- Depersonalization
- Reduced personal accomplishment

(Maslach & Jackson, 1986)

ACT Model:

- Six core processes (acceptance, defusion, self-as-context, committed action, values, contact with the present moment)
- Aim to develop psychological flexibility

(Hayes et al., 2006)

Purpose of Review

- Examine the **volume** of peer-reviewed literature on ACT interventions for DSWs and Teachers.
- Identify **patterns/trends** in the publication of literature on ACT interventions for DSWs and Teachers.
- Identify **conceptual and methodological issues** that require further exploration.

Methods

Inclusion criteria for research articles:

- Peer-reviewed
- Empirical research
- Applied at least one of the six core ACT processes
- Populations: DSWs and Teachers

Measures used must include at least two out of the following:

- Psychological flexibility core process measure
- Burnout or burnout-related constructs
- Work performance

Key words/phrases searched:

- Acceptance and commitment therapy, Burnout, Psychological flexibility, Work performance, Developmental service workers, Intellectual disability workers, Teachers, Special education teachers

Results

Review yielded a **total of 10** peer-reviewed empirical studies from 2010-2020 (7 studies evaluated DSWs, 3 studies evaluated Teachers)

Burnout-related measures used:

- Maslach Burnout Inventory* (MBI) (n=4)
- Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21) (n=1)
- Job-Related Tensions Index (JRTI) (n=1)
- Burnout Believability Scale* (BBS) (n=1)
- Staff Stressor Questionnaire SSQ (n=3)
- Shirom-Melamed Burnout Measure* (SMBM) (n=1)

Psychological flexibility-related measures used:

- Acceptance and Action Questionnaire* (AAQ) (n=2)
- Acceptance and Action Questionnaire II* (AAQ-II) (n=5)
- Valuing Questionnaire (VQ) (n=1)
- Valued Living Questionnaire (VLQ) (n=1)
- Support Staff Values Questionnaire (SSVQ) (n=2)

Work performance measures used:

- Interview questions (n=1)
- Conducted 5 observations of work-performance (n=1)

Discussion and Implications

- **6 out of 10** studies utilized measures that specifically assessed the construct of burnout (i.e., MBI, BBS, SMBM)
- **7 out of 10** studies utilized a measure that specifically assessed construct of psychological flexibility (i.e., AAQ/AAQ-II)
- **2 out of 10** studies utilized a work performance measure in their assessment of attenuating work-related challenges (i.e., interview/observations)

Figure 2. Proportion of studies utilizing burnout, psychological flexibility, and work performance measures.

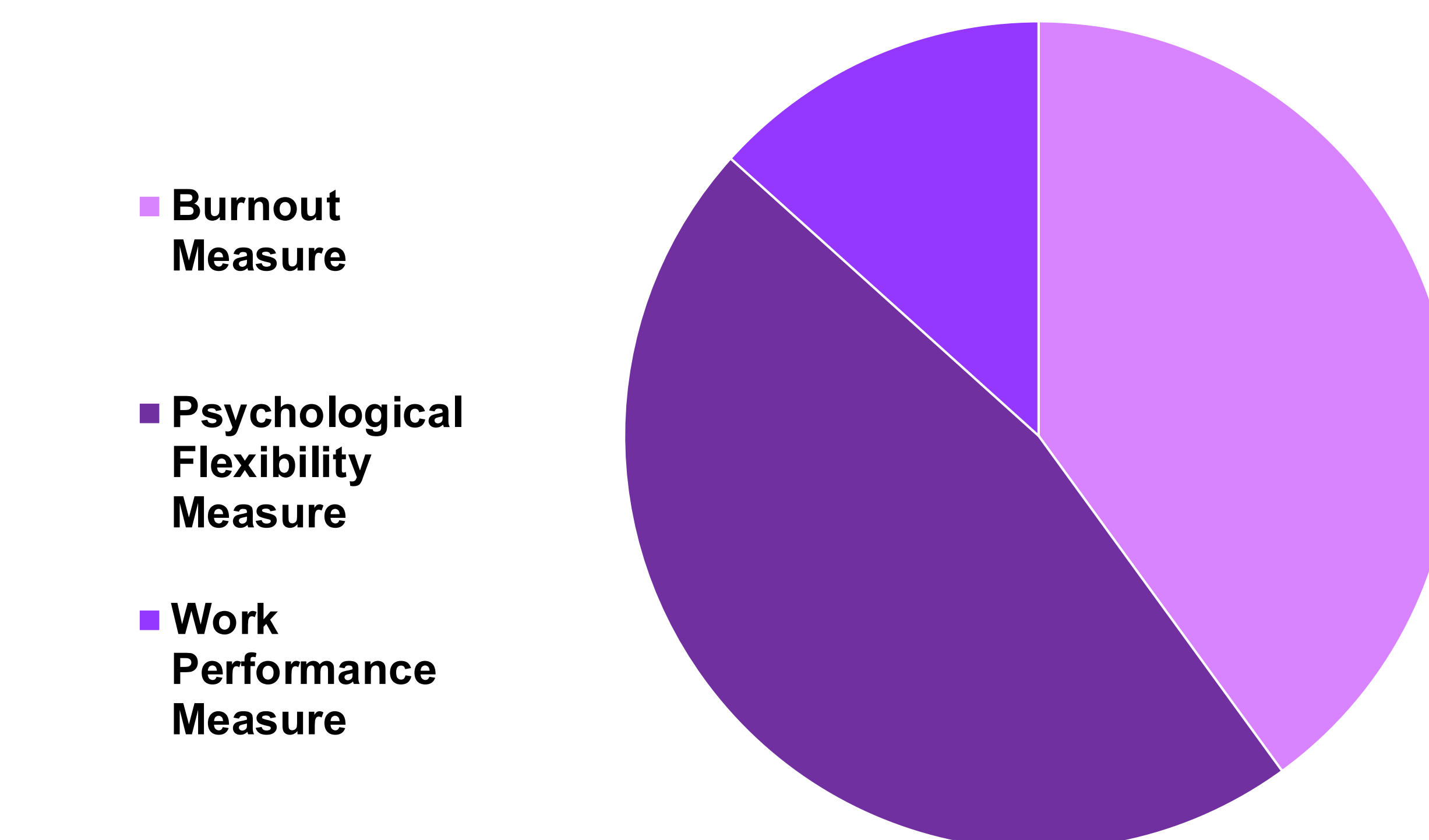
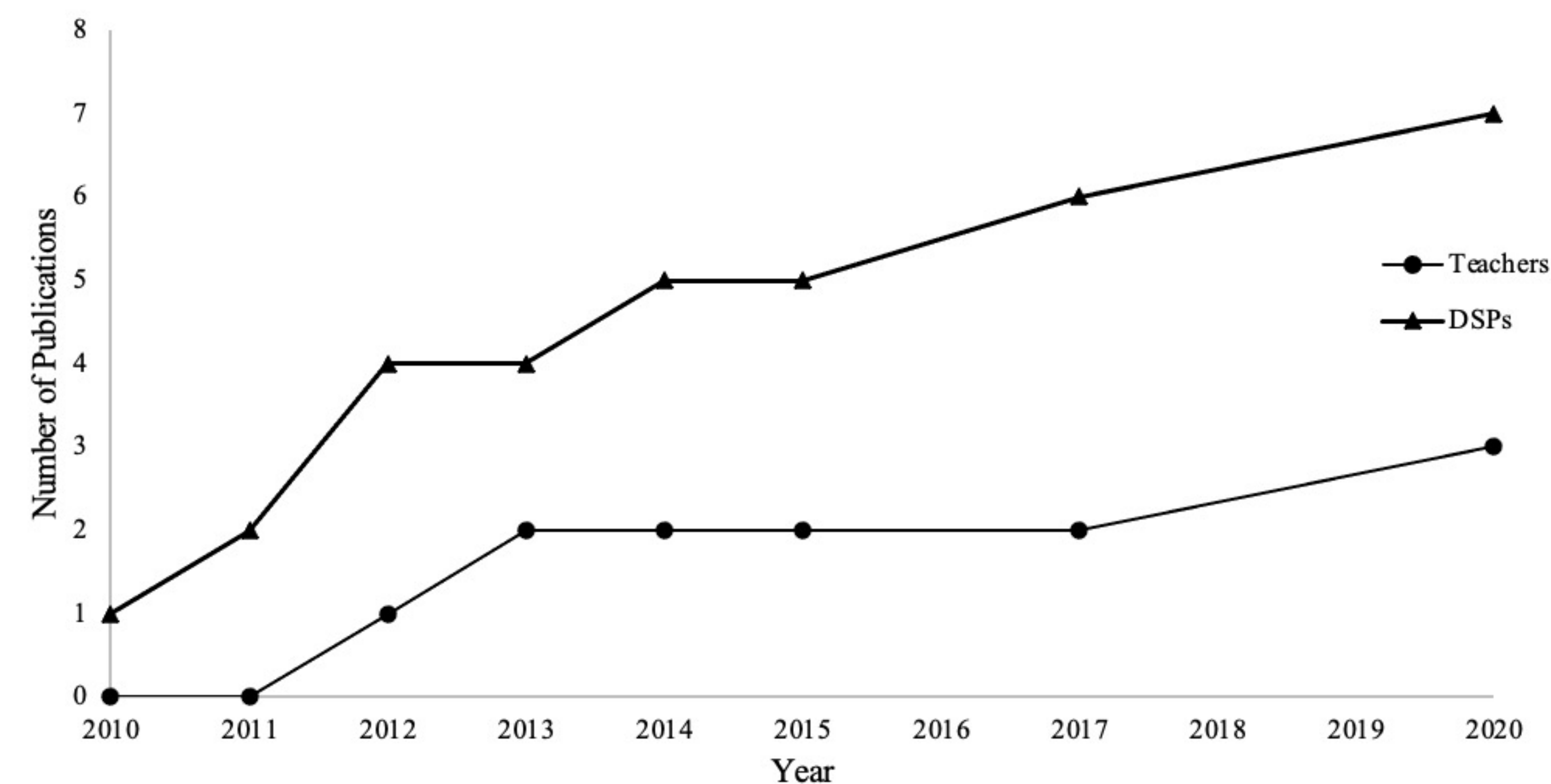


Figure 1. Cumulative peer-reviewed publications on ACT interventions for DSWs and Teachers



Future ACT research would benefit from:

- More focus on teacher populations. Only three studies were published over the last decade with teachers as participants.
- Implementing more objective work performance measures to assess the behavioral outcomes of ACT for work-related challenges (i.e., burnout)
- Utilizing measures that directly assess burnout (i.e., MBI) over measures that evaluate burnout-related constructs (i.e., work stress, depression, and anxiety)
- Incorporating this intervention to address work-related challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic in essential workers

References

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