

Background

- Parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) experience higher levels of parenting stress than other parents¹.
- Having a child with ASD is also associated with difficulties in terms of parental mental health, marital relationships, and overall family wellbeing², indicating a need for efficacious interventions.
- This systematic review aimed to identify and collate published studies (in English, any year) of ACT-based interventions for this population.

Method

- Electronic databases (PubMed, Embase, Scopus, PsychInfo and PsychArticles), ACBS website, and references lists were searched.
- Screening was completed blind by 2 reviewers.
- Methodological quality was assessed using the Psychotherapy Outcome Study Methodology Rating Form (POMRF)³.
- Narrative synthesis used due to limited reporting of effect sizes and heterogeneity of studies.

Results

- 10 eligible papers were included (9 studies).
- 4 group programmes (12 sessions to 8 sessions), 3 workshops (14 hours to 4 hours), 1 individually administered programme (9 hours), 1 online group intervention (4.5 hours).
- Sample sizes were small; n=3 to n=43.
- Total sample=199; 84.4% mothers, 15.6% fathers.
- Methodological quality was variable but generally low. Most studies were pre-test post-test designs, only 2 RCTS and 1 active comparison (non-randomised TAU).
- Heterogenous outcomes were measured.
- Evidence of improvement in depressive symptoms^{4,5,6,7,8}; cognitive fusion^{4,5,9}; experiential avoidance^{4,6,10}; psychological flexibility^{5,8,9}; values consistent action^{5,9,10}.
- Also reported improvements in cognitive emotion regulation¹¹; parent related health and social isolation⁷; shame⁵; self-compassion¹⁰.
- Mixed and contradictory findings regarding general stress^{6,7}; anxiety^{6,8}; mindfulness^{5,12}; parenting stress^{12, 13}; quality of life^{6, 8}.
- 1 study reported child outcomes: improvements in prosocial behaviour and hyperactivity, no change in emotional or peer problems¹³.

Discussion

- Evidence for ACT-based interventions with this population is not yet well established, though there are promising findings across a range of key parent outcomes.
- More research is needed with greater and more diverse samples (including fathers), higher quality designs, and comparisons with other treatments.
- Further research may also help to better understand the processes which are beneficial.
- Future reviews could: include papers published in other languages; include grey literature; utilise other quality assessment tools.

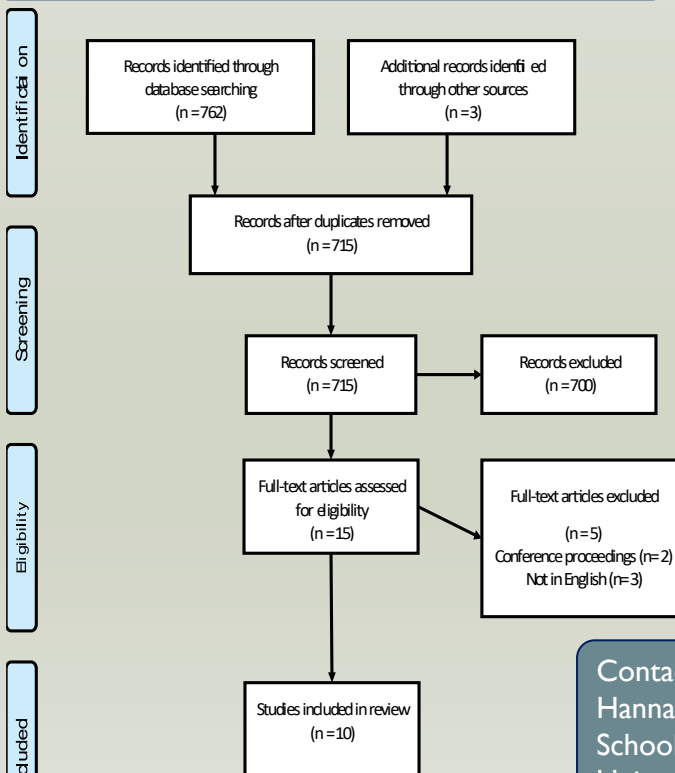


Figure 1. PRISMA flow chart

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References:

