

# The relationship between ACT processes and psychological functioning in postpartum women

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## Background & Rationale

- Perinatal mood and/or anxiety disorders (PMADs) are common and debilitating
- Improving psychological interventions to treat PMADs and reducing barriers to treatment during the perinatal period are crucial goals
- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) has shown promise as an intervention uniquely suited for women with PMADs

### Study Aims:

- To examine specific ACT processes (i.e., acceptance, mindfulness, and cognitive defusion) as predictors of psychological symptoms (i.e., depression) in a sample of postpartum mothers
- To explore barriers to treatment during the perinatal period



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## Hypotheses

1. It was hypothesized that psychological inflexibility, cognitive fusion, lack of acceptance and lack of present-moment awareness would predict higher levels of depression.
2. It was hypothesized that women would identify substantial barriers to treatment engagement during the postpartum period.



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## Methods

### Study Design and Procedures

- Cross-sectional, self-report survey design
- Online social media recruitment
- One-time completion of six measures

## Measures

**Sociodemographics:** Created specifically for this study

**Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (AAQ-II;** Bond et al., 2011).

**Philadelphia Mindfulness Scale (PHLMS;** Cardaciotto et al., 2008).

**Cognitive Fusion Questionnaire (CFQ;** Gillanders et al. 2014).

**Inventory of Depression and Anxiety Symptoms (IDAS;** Watson et al. 2007).

**Treatment and Barriers Scale (O'Mahen & Flynn,** 2008).

## Results

### Sociodemographics:

Majority of participants were:

- Caucasian ( $n = 248$ ; 93.2 %)
- Married ( $n = 250$ ; 94%)
- Employed full-time ( $n = 147$ ; 55.3%)

Participants were highly educated (87.9% with at least a Bachelor's degree) and of higher socioeconomic status (median annual household income = \$120k).

Average age: 32.6 years (range = 21-44).

### Significant Predictors of Depression:

Psychological Inflexibility	$t(229) = 2.65, p = .009$
Cognitive fusion	$t(229) = 4.19, p < .001$
Lack of acceptance	$t(229) = -2.977, p = .003$

Lack of present-moment awareness was not a significant predictor of depression.

### Most Frequently Selected Barriers to Treatment:

- Insurance does not cover/inability to pay
- Do not have the time

## Conclusions

- These preliminary findings indicate that psychological inflexibility, cognitive fusion and lack of acceptance predict depressive symptoms among postpartum women.
- These findings lend support for the use of ACT to treat PMADs and underscore the need to further evaluate whether targeting these areas through formal ACT intervention could improve psychological symptoms.

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