

ACT dalam Terapi Kelompok untuk Fleksibilitas Psikologis dan Regulasi Emosi pada Penyintas ACEs

Group ACT for Psychological Flexibility and Emotion Regulation in ACEs Survivors

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Abstrak

Pengalaman kekerasan masa kecil atau *Adverse Childhood Experiences* (ACEs) dapat berdampak jangka panjang pada kesehatan mental dan strategi regulasi emosi individu. Di Indonesia, kasus ACEs masih sering terjadi dan terus meningkat setiap tahunnya. Individu dengan ACEs kerap mengalami kesulitan dalam menerima masa lalu dan menghadapi tantangan emosional saat dewasa. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguji efektivitas *Acceptance Commitment Group Therapy* dalam meningkatkan fleksibilitas psikologis dan strategi regulasi emosi pada individu dewasa muda yang memiliki pengalaman ACEs. Sampel dalam penelitian ini adalah individu berusia 18–30 tahun dengan riwayat ACEs yang mengikuti 4 sesi terapi kelompok berbasis ACT. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan *Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-2* (AAQ-2) dan *Cognitive Emotional Regulation Questionnaire* (CERQ), serta dilengkapi dengan wawancara kualitatif. Teknik analisis data menggunakan metode Repeated Measures ANOVA. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa terdapat penurunan signifikan dalam skor infleksibilitas psikologis setelah intervensi, sementara peningkatan strategi regulasi emosi positif dan penurunan strategi negatif tidak menunjukkan perbedaan signifikan.

Kata Kunci: *Acceptance Commitment Therapy* (ACT); Terapi Kelompok; Fleksibilitas Psikologis; Regulasi Emosi; *Adverse Childhood Experiences* (ACEs).

Abstract

Childhood abuse or Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) can have long-term impacts on an individual's mental health and emotional regulation strategies. In Indonesia, cases of ACEs remain prevalent and continue to rise each year. Individuals with ACEs often struggle to accept their past and face emotional challenges in adulthood. This study aims to examine the effectiveness of Acceptance and Commitment Group Therapy in enhancing psychological flexibility and emotion regulation strategies in young adults with a history of ACEs. The sample consisted of individuals aged 18–30 years with ACEs who participated in four sessions of ACT-based group therapy. Data were collected using the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-2 (AAQ-2) and the Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ), and were complemented by qualitative interviews. Data analysis was conducted using the Repeated Measures ANOVA method. The results showed a significant decrease in psychological inflexibility scores following the intervention, while increases in positive emotion regulation strategies and decreases in negative strategies were not statistically significant.

Keywords: *Acceptance Commitment Therapy* (ACT); Group Therapy; Psychological Flexibility; Emotion Regulation; *Adverse Childhood Experiences* (ACEs).

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INTRODUCTION

Childhood should be a safe and nurturing stage of life, yet the reality in Indonesia shows that parenting practices involving physical, verbal, and emotional violence remain common. Some parents still believe that such harsh discipline is effective for instilling obedience, although it actually poses a high risk of causing long-term trauma. These experiences fall under the category of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), which refer to traumatic events during childhood, such as abuse, neglect, or family dysfunction, that can severely affect an individual's mental and emotional development (Felitti et al., 1998; Anda et al., 2006; Shonkoff et al., 2012). In Indonesia, child abuse cases continue to rise each year. In 2023, the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (KemenPPPA) recorded 18,175 cases of violence against children, with the most common types being sexual, psychological, and physical abuse (KemenPPPA, 2024).

ACEs are known to have long-lasting effects on various aspects of an individual's life, ranging from physical and mental health to social and economic functioning in adulthood (Chapman et al., 2004; Anda et al., 2006). These effects are particularly significant during emerging adulthood (ages 18–30), a developmental stage characterized by exploration, instability, and self-focus (Arnett, 2000). During this period, individuals navigate career demands, complex social relationships, and major life decisions, which are central to the transition to adulthood (Arnett, 2004). Furthermore, unresolved childhood trauma exacerbates vulnerabilities in emerging adults, as they are still

developing emotion regulation strategies and a stable sense of identity (Arnett, 2000; Arnett & Tanner, 2006). This can lead to difficulties in self-esteem and interpersonal relationships, as the capacity to cope with past trauma is often intertwined with the psychosocial tasks of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2015). Therefore, since past trauma cannot be erased, individuals need to learn to accept and manage its impact through adaptive psychological strategies.

One approach that has proven effective in helping individuals come to terms with difficult experiences is Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). This therapy focuses on enhancing psychological flexibility through six core processes: acceptance, cognitive defusion, mindfulness, self-as-context, values, and committed action (Hayes et al., 2006). ACT encourages individuals to stop fighting against negative thoughts or emotions and instead live a meaningful life based on their personal values. It not only fosters acceptance of painful emotional experiences but also helps individuals act with awareness when facing challenges (Hayes et al., 2006; Russ Harris, 2009).

Previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of ACT in improving psychological flexibility and reducing psychological symptoms such as stress, anxiety, and depression (Amir et al., 2019; Khazraee et al., 2017; Zakiei et al., 2021; Gobel, 2023). However, research specifically exploring the effectiveness of ACT in a group therapy format for young adults with ACEs remains limited, particularly within the Indonesian cultural context. The studies found that any individuals in Indonesia with ACEs

struggle to express their past experiences due to social norms and fear of stigma. In this regard, ACT-based group therapy has the potential to provide a safe space for sharing, fostering social support, and facilitating more meaningful emotional healing.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the effectiveness of Acceptance and Commitment Group Therapy in improving psychological flexibility and promoting more adaptive emotion regulation strategies in young adults with ACEs. The findings are expected to offer both scientific and practical foundations for designing intervention programs that are more attuned to the psychosocial needs, particularly for those who have experienced childhood trauma.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a quasi-experimental design with a single-group pre-test, post-test, and follow-up approach to examine the effectiveness of Acceptance and Commitment Group Therapy (ACT) in enhancing psychological flexibility and emotion regulation strategies among individuals with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

Participants in this study were young adults in Indonesia aged 18 years and above who had experienced one or more types of ACEs, including physical, emotional, or sexual abuse and/or physical or emotional neglect during childhood. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on individuals with the highest scores from a needs analysis based on the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire – Short Form (CTQ-SF). A total of 14 participants were initially selected, but

only 10 completed the full course of the group intervention sessions.

Data were collected using two main instruments: 1) Acceptance and Action Questionnaire – Version 2 (AAQ-2): This tool measures levels of psychological inflexibility. It consists of 7 items rated on a Likert scale from 1 (never) to 7 (always). The Indonesian version, translated and validated by Permadi (2018), demonstrated excellent reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = 0.918$. 2) Cognitive Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ): This instrument assesses cognitive emotion regulation strategies, including both positive-focused and negative-focused strategies. The Indonesian adaptation by Prastuti et al. (2020) includes 17 items rated on a Likert scale from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always), with a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = 0.791$, indicating good reliability.

Hypothesis testing was conducted using Repeated Measures ANOVA to evaluate changes in scores before, after, and one week following the intervention. Assumptions of normality were tested using the Shapiro-Wilk test, while homogeneity was assessed using Mauchly's Test of Sphericity. If assumptions were violated, adjustments such as the Greenhouse-Geisser correction were applied. All data were processed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25.

This intervention was conducted in four sessions, held from September 4th to 15th, 2024, at the Faculty of Psychology, University of Indonesia. Each session lasted between 120 to 150 minutes and was offered in two time slots to accommodate participants' schedules. All sessions were facilitated by a lead

facilitator who delivered the core material, supported by two co-facilitators responsible for managing technical aspects of the sessions. The intervention content was delivered through presentations and experiential exercises, with each session concluding in a reflection period and completion of evaluation forms.

Ethical protocols were strictly maintained, including written and verbal informed consent procedures, confidentiality assurances, and participant freedom to withdraw. This research has received formal ethical approval (Certificate of Ethical Clearance No. 116/FPsi.Komite Etik/PDP.04.00/2024) from the Faculty of Psychology Ethics Committee at University of Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The normality test using the Shapiro-Wilk method indicated that the data from all instruments (AAQ-2, CERQ positive-focused, and CERQ negative-focused) were normally distributed ($p > 0.05$). In addition, the homogeneity test using Mauchly's Test of Sphericity showed that the data met the assumption of homogeneity of variances ($p > 0.05$). Therefore, the analysis done in this study proceeded using the parametric Repeated Measures ANOVA.

Table 1. Summary of AAQ-2 Scores

Variable	Time	Mean	SD	<i>p</i> -value
AAQ-2	Pre-test	39.7	3.97	0.000
	Post-test	31.4	8.98	
	Follow-up	30.7	7.59	

The results show a statistically significant decrease in psychological inflexibility scores from pre-test to post-test and follow-up ($p < 0.05$). This suggests that the Acceptance Commitment Group Therapy intervention was effective in

enhancing participant's psychological flexibility.

These findings support previous research indicating that ACT is effective in increasing psychological flexibility and individuals' capacity to face painful internal experiences without avoidance, while also helping them commit to meaningful life values (Hayes et al., 2006; Ong et al., 2019; Li et al., 2023). Furthermore, it can be emphasized that psychological flexibility is a crucial element in recovery for individuals with ACEs, enabling them to reconstruct meaning in life in a more adaptive manner.

Table 2. Summary of CERQ Positive-Focused Scores

Variable	Time	Mean	SD	<i>p</i> -value
CERQ Positive	Pre-test	32.20	4.37	0.328
	Post-test	33.80	6.55	
	Follow-up	34.30	6.09	

The mean value indicates an increase score in positive emotion regulation. Although there was an increase, the change was not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$).

Table 3. Summary of CERQ Negative-Focused Scores

Variable	Time	Mean	SD	<i>p</i> -value
CERQ Negative	Pre-test	27.80	3.46	0.204
	Post-test	26.80	4.13	
	Follow-up	25.00	3.77	

There was a decrease in the use of negative emotion regulation strategies seen in the mean scores at each time point, but the difference was not statistically significant.

This suggests that ACT in a group format is more effective in enhancing awareness and acceptance processes than in directly altering longstanding emotional regulation strategies. Shifting from maladaptive to adaptive emotion regulation patterns requires more time, consistent practice, and sustained support beyond the therapy sessions. This aligns with Aldao et al. (2010), who argue that

emotion regulation is a complex process involving cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions, thus requiring a longer intervention period to yield significant changes.

Qualitatively, many participants reported that cognitive defusion and mindfulness were the most helpful techniques in enabling them to accept and confront difficult thoughts and emotions. These experiences highlight the importance of decentering, the ability to observe thoughts as transient mental events rather than absolute truths, as a critical initial step in the recovery process. This awareness allows individuals with ACEs to recognize that they do not have to believe the negative narratives shaped by their early experiences. Such insight opens space for a healthy emotional distance from traumatic memories, reducing attachment to harmful thoughts and feelings. Group-based ACT allowed participants to experience social support, feel less alone, and encounter what Yalom & Leszcz (2020) refer to as universality and cohesiveness in group therapy.

While the study did not specifically yield significant quantitative changes in emotion regulation strategies, qualitative findings reveal that improvements in cognitive defusion and mindfulness equipped participants with essential skills to respond to emotions more intentionally and less impulsively. This marks an important initial step in developing more adaptive emotional regulation, which ultimately contributes to improved psychological well-being.

Although quantitative changes in emotion regulation strategies were not significant, the positive trend observed

suggests that the ACGT program holds strong potential, especially if extended over a longer duration, supplemented with out-of-session practices, and supported through booster sessions after follow-up. This is important because altering emotional regulation patterns, particularly among individuals with trauma histories, requires not only time but also a consistently safe, supportive, and meaningful environment.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Group Therapy using Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) significantly reduces psychological inflexibility among young adults with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in Indonesia. These results suggest that group-based Acceptance and Commitment Therapy can be a highly beneficial approach in helping individuals more adaptively and constructively accept and manage the lasting impacts of childhood trauma. Although the changes in both positive and negative emotion regulation strategies did not reach statistical significance in this study, the observed trend, an increase in positive emotion regulation and a decrease in negative regulation, indicates a promising potential for long-term benefits of the intervention.

Therefore, ACT in group therapy holds strong potential to be integrated into existing psychosocial intervention programs in Indonesia, particularly as a safe and supportive space for individuals with ACEs to share their experiences, build social support networks, and develop more effective coping mechanisms. However, to strengthen these findings and ensure the

sustainability of its positive effects, future research is needed with larger sample sizes and longer intervention durations. Such studies would provide more comprehensive and valid evidence regarding the impact of ACT in group therapy for emotion regulation.

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