

Abstract

This study examined the effects of a self-stigma reduction program using Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) among people in recovery (PIR) of mental illness. In total, 78 PIR joined the ACT group or waitlist control group. Participants in the treatment group attended a 5-week ACT program consisting of five 2-hour weekly sessions focusing on the reduction of experiential avoidance and cognitive defusion, especially in self-stigmatizing thoughts. The program also aimed to foster participants' psychological flexibility, mindfulness, as well as commitment to valued-based behaviours. Pre-, post-, and 2-month follow-up assessments were administered to both treatment and control groups. Thirty-nine participants who attended the intervention and 39 control participants were selected for analyses with intent-to-treat analysis. Among this sample, 26 participants had completed all ACT sessions so a separate analysis was conducted for this group with a matched control group. Repeated measures ANOVAs showed no significant main or interaction effects on the four outcomes variables, namely self-stigma, psychological inflexibility, valued living, and mindfulness. Small effect sizes were observed for self-stigma and valued living, while small-to-medium and medium effect sizes were obtained for psychological inflexibility and mindfulness. Expected trends were also observed for all variables at the pre-post comparison. Though the changes were not statistically significant, the current study suggested some potential salutary effects of ACT on self-stigma reduction. Limitations of the current study and directions for future research are discussed.