

Preliminary Review on Implementation of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy on Students with Dating Violence Experiences

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Abstract. This paper focused on looking at the effectiveness of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) on students who experienced intimate partner or dating violence. The data were acquired by searching relevant information about occurrences or variables from books, journal articles, and other relevant sources. Based on the research results of the literature review on intimate partner violence experienced by students in ACT perspective, it could be concluded that this form of therapy could effectively reduce symptoms of depression such feelings of worthlessness, irritability, social withdrawal, restless thoughts, high anxiety level, high stress symptoms, and violent behavior. ACT was able to improve the welfare of students and encourage them to commit more on positive things. Students who experienced intimate partner violence, both as victim or perpetrators, could be treated by using ACT, because it could reduce the repercussions of intimate partner violence, which were various psychological and social consequences.

Keywords: acceptance and commitment therapy, intimate partner violence, students, well-being

1 Introduction

Lover is defined as boyfriend/girlfriend or a friend of opposite sex who has lasting special relationship based on love or affection [1]. Dating relationship is also defined as dating relationship period between individuals of the opposite sex, which is characterized by having mutual acquaintance of both individuals, and by understanding the weaknesses and strengths of each other [1]. Dating or having a romantic relationship usually involves the process of finding a special person who will accompany him/her and later become a partner in marriage. During dating, both individuals will try to build the relationship, which aims to build a sense of trust, comfort, security, and worth [2]. In the process of building relationships during dating, many things could happen. These could be positive and fun, but sometimes, negative things could also occur which will trigger various kinds of conflict. If conflicts or tensions start to occur in dating

relationships, one of the things that often happens is the use of violence by a partner. The use of violence is considered as a way to resolve interpersonal conflicts that occur [3].

Intimate partner violence (IPV) or dating violence is a social phenomenon that occurs quite frequently and the victims tend to be female [4]. Few people realize that dating before marriage is very vulnerable to violence, and some even consider that it is a consequence in dating [5]. Many attempts were made to overcome the occurrence of violence in dating. The government also pays attention to this issue by cooperating with the community through socialization with families, especially parents, to reduce the number of intimate partner violence. However, there are still many obstacles that arise such as lack of participation from family and parents in preventing intimate partner violence cases [6].

Intimate partner violence is violent behavior done to a partner, which can be physical violence, sexual violence and psychological violence [4]. Ferlita [7] said that dating violence is a behavior that occurs when one party feels forced, offended, and hurt by his/her partner. Violence in dating relationships includes all forms of coercion, pressure, destruction, and physical and psychological abuse. From various research results, Murray [1] concluded that the definition of dating violence as intentional actions, which are carried out using tactics of physical injury and coercion, to gain strength and control over their partner or boyfriend.

National Clearing on Family Violence and Dating Violence and the American Psychological Association [8], specifically defining dating violence as a sexual, physical, or emotional attack carried out on a partner, during dating relationships. In line with that, the American Psychological Association (APA) also mentions dating violence as psychological and physical violence committed by one of the parties in a dating relationship, in which this behavior is intended to gain control, power and strength over their partners.

There are forms of dating violence proposed by Rifka Anissa Foundation [9], namely physical violence such as hitting, slapping, kicking, pushing, and gripping hard on a partner's body, and a series of other physical actions. Psychological violence such as threatening, calling the term that embarrasses the couple, mocking and others. Economic violence such as asking a partner to fulfill all their needs (exploiting or blackmailing a partner). Sexual violence such as hugging, kissing, touching, until the act of sexual relations under coercion and threats. Stalking actions such as following, stalking, and a series of activities that interfere with privacy and limit the daily activities of the couple.

The number of intimate partner violence from 2008 to 2019 continued to increase. The findings of violence rate in 2019 as mentioned in the 2020 Annual Report from *Komnas Perempuan* [10] found that there were 431,471 cases of violence against women reported and handled throughout 2019; this was a 6% increase from the previous year (406,178 cases). These cases of violence against women consisted of 14,719 cases handled by 239 partner service agencies spread across 33 Provinces; 421,752 cases came from those handled by the Religious Courts, and 1,277 cases were the ones that reported directly to *Komnas Perempuan* (National Commission on Violence against Women).

Many negative impacts caused by violence in dating relationships. The following are some of the effects of violence during dating relationship. According to Sari [11], among others, psychological impacts namely trauma, anger, and hating men. As a result, women become afraid to establish relationships with men, and causing deep anxiety for them when they need to interact with men. Social impact, namely the loss of confidence when interacting with men, loss of self-

confidence, and loss of confidence towards others in general. This will directly or indirectly impact work productivity or achievement in a negative way. Physical impacts such as having minor and/or severe injuries. Other negative impacts such as unwanted pregnancy, the perpetrator leaves victims alone during pregnancy, and if there is a sexual coercion, the victim will be more vulnerable to having sexually transmitted diseases.

Ayu, Hakimi, and Hayati [12] found that victims who experienced intimate partner violence had variety of psychological reactions such as feeling scared, frequent crying, insomnia, hating men, distrust towards men, and gradual suspicion towards men. This was corroborated by research on psychological reactions occurring immediately after an individual experienced sexual violence. Several forms of emotions they experience included shock, distrust, denial, fear, confusion, anxiety, and withdrawal [13].

Other psychological repercussions on victims of violence were low self-esteem, feeling guilty, ashamed, experiencing sleep disorders, experiencing symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, and sexual problems [14]. Dewi [15] stated that a possible consequence occurring on adolescent victims of intimate partner violence included high possibility to experience severe psychological disorders. If such psychological trauma was not managed as soon as possible, various post-traumatic reactions would also affect rapidly to other aspects of life, and would affect their well-being. Therefore, assistance was needed during the recovery period.

This phenomenon can be viewed from the perspective of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory [16]. Ecological theory [16] consists of four systems that are interconnected with each other, namely: 1) Microsystems (the deepest layers in ecological theory that comprise the environment in which individuals interact directly with them), 2) Mesosystems (interrelationships and interactions of two or more microsystems, such as interactions between the home and school environment). 3) Exosystems (environmental contexts where individuals do not have direct contact with this context, but have an impact on the individual such as the wider community where individuals live), and 4) Macrosystems (the outermost layer in ecological theory consisting of cultural values in the context of a more general society). In 1995, Bronfenbrenner [17] added a fifth system to this theory, the Chronosystem, which described historical events and transition periods that could have an impact on other systems.

In microsystems, there are several factors in this system that have an impact on dating violence. According to Foshee et al. [18], family environment and the functioning of relationships in the family are two important factors in the microsystem. This shows factors such as high levels of conflict in the family, divorce of parents, relationship between parents and children who are not harmonious, lack of support and monitoring from parents to children, associated with an increased risk of violence in dating relationships in children after adolescents or adults young. According to Vagi et al. [19], the exposure of children to violence in the family environment in the form of experiencing direct violence from parents, or witnessing directly the occurrence of violence can increase the risk of children to commit violence in dating relationship or become victims of violence in the future dating relationship.

The peer group environment can also influence the occurrence of violence in dating relationship, especially in microsystems. According to Foshee et al. [20], involvement in peer groups who also commit violence in dating relationship, or are in peer groups who commit acts of violence in any form, correlates with the increased risk that individuals become violent perpetrators in dating relationship.

Interactions between several microsystems above can be called mesosystems. According to Vagi et al. [19], interactions between microsystems in the context of dating violence can affect individual behavior and cause the individual to become accustomed to conflict in terms of relationships with others, have an aggressive nature, have poor communication skills, and lack good skills in terms of conflict resolution. These factors can be risk factors that cause conflict in relation, including dating relationships. Conflict in dating relationships can be a trigger for violence in dating relationships [19].

In the next system, which is exosystem, there are several factors at the community level related to dating violence. Previous research has found that exposure to violence in the community, for example in the neighborhood or workplace, is associated with an increased incidence of violence in dating relationship in the community [18], [19].

The next system is the macrosystem. According to Connolly et al. [21], exposure to images and news about violence in the mass media can affect an individual's perception of dating violence. Connolly et al. [21] also argued that violent behavior and aggression towards others displayed in the mass media can be a negative model for individual adolescents and young adults in terms of behavior. According to Connolly et al. [21], this has the potential to increase acceptance of norms of violent behavior and can increase the risk of violence.

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is considered as an appropriate therapy to solve depression problems and improve mental health in general [22]. ACT aims to produce a meaningful life by accepting the unavoidable pain [22]. ACT enables a person to accept their traumatic experience and return to their routine by functioning normally in accordance to their values and life goals [23].

In general, individuals come to therapy for emotional control. They want to eliminate emotions such as depression, anxiety, traumatic memory, fear of rejection, anger, grief, and other emotions [22]. However, in implementing ACT, there is no attempt to reduce, change, avoid or control personal experiences [22]. By applying this technique, individuals learn to eliminate the effects and influences of unexpected thoughts and feelings through the effective use of mindfulness [22].

ACT is more concerned with quality of life than reducing psychological symptoms. ACT focuses on how individuals relate to their inner experiences and how these relationships function in various areas of their lives [22]. Instinctively, individuals often respond to unwanted thoughts, feelings, and bodies by trying to reduce the intensity or frequency of these experiences [24]. These efforts are made to avoid or change uncomfortable internal feelings. Experience often leads to further personal disruption or further danger. ACT refers this as a phenomenon of avoidance of experience, and claims that avoidance of experience is central to human suffering and psychopathology [25].

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy has identified six interrelated and connected processes with psychological flexibility, and various behavioral and experiential techniques are used in therapy to target these core processes. Techniques targeting acceptance help an individual learn to be willing to experience an uncomfortable inner event rather than trying to control or fight such experience. Defusion techniques aim to reduce the impact of thoughts that have an influence on one's actions. Self-as-context involves learning to see oneself as the context in which these inner experiences occur, rather than defining oneself by the contents of thoughts, feelings, and so on. This strategy helps an individual's awareness to selectively learn to deal with existing internal

conditions and external experiences as they occur. ACT also emphasizes the identification of values, as personal values provide life direction and function to motivate change. Finally, committed actions are targeted and these involve taking effective actions that consistent with values, regardless of the existence of inner experiences that are negatively occurred and evaluated [25].

It is important to also have assistance during recovery period to ensure clients undergo the recovery process properly and increase effectiveness in recovery. ACT offers alternative psychotherapy designed to regulate and influence emotion and behavior. This therapy would help to thin out the impact of unpleasant emotions and behavior. For example, avoidance behavior patterns can hinder and prevent client to achieve pleasant emotions that can lead to improvement in behavior patterns. Thus, the focus during treatment is to facilitate the client to move towards more valuable actions and to personally fulfilling actions in life in an unpleasing context and manner; and in this case, emotions, whether positive or negative, will no longer function as a barrier to achieve valued and meaningful life [22]. The purpose of this literature review is to firstly, explain the mechanism of acceptance and commitment therapy. Secondly, the purpose of this review is to explain how to implement this therapy to help students who become victim of intimate or dating violence.

2 Research Methods

The research method used in this research is literature review method. This method is a data collection method conducted by doing a thorough study of various books, literature, notes, and reports relating to the problem being solved [26]. This literature review method was used to compile a comprehensive description of the effectiveness of intervention using acceptance and commitment therapy in students who experienced intimate partner or dating violence. Data collection technique used in literature research were through documentation. This step was done by looking for various of data on relevant information and variables in the form of notes, books, papers or articles, and journals [27].

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is a therapy that aims to improve more flexible psychological aspects or the ability to undergo the occurring changes with better respond. The counselee is helped to accept unwanted events, identify and focus on the action directly in accordance with the desired goals [25]. In implementing ACT, there are several skills that need to be trained [22]. These skills are self-acceptance, cognitive defusion, being present, self as a context, the value of life, and committed actions.

Self-acceptance. Self-acceptance means accepting thoughts and feelings even though there are unpleasant emotions/experiences such as guilt, shame, anxiety and so on. According to Hayes [25], acceptance involves a direct skill to counter self-avoidance done by the counselee for the suffering they experience. It aims to help the counselee to remain active and aware of their memories, thoughts and feelings without manipulating the frequency and arrangement of experiences. Counselees are trained to try to accept what they possess, with an objective to end the long-term suffering they experienced without changing or discarding the unwanted thoughts, by doing various training methods to reach awareness. Willingness/acceptance and openness are the keys in the acceptance stage, in which someone chooses an action according to the values they hold [25]. Acceptance helps the counselee to learn to live by experiencing bad events, but not focusing on the problem; rather, to make the problem a part of their life and take value of it [25]. The purpose of this acceptance process is to increase one's willingness to deal with thoughts, feelings and experiences that they avoid [25].

Cognitive defusion. Cognitive defusion is a skill to reduce rejection of unpleasant thoughts or experiences. Hayes [25] revealed that cognitive defusion is an attempt to find a way to connect a thought by rearranging cognition and reducing impractical function. This skill aims to reduce emotional rejection which can occur when someone refuses to acknowledge a bad experience. Research results show that avoidance behavior through thoughts, feelings and behavior can influence a person's coping mechanism, in which the attempts to avoid having bad experience could have a conflicting or paradoxical effect [22]. This technique is done through repeated and continuous practice until finally the stressor has no meaning for the counselee. Cognitive defusion will help the counselee to recognize that these are only thoughts, not an evaluation of their abilities. They can then choose to recognize the mind as a mental process rather than allowing it to dictate feelings or behavior. This cognitive defusion skill is also to reduce thoughts or feelings and beliefs of the counselee. Cognitive defusion ultimately helps the counselee to recognize the truth of their thoughts which usually comprise of negative thoughts [22].

Being present. To acquire this skill, the counselee is taught to experience the whole event without having to fight when an incident arises. The counselee recounts their experience and learn to identify and explain thoughts and feelings so that they can understand themselves properly. Hayes [25] revealed that being in contact with the present involves awareness of the mind and the physical environment. The counselee is assisted to gain more targeted experience so that the exhibited behavior becomes more consistent according to their adopted values. They are encouraged to choose proper life direction by identifying and focusing on what they want and what values they will choose for their lives so that they can achieve more valuable life goals. By acquiring this skill, the counselor can help the counselee to face the world more directly so that they could generate more flexible behaviors which are more consistent with the values they have. The counselees are encouraged to examine their efforts to determine whether or not the actions they take are already consistent with the life values they possess.

Self as Context. By seeing self as context helps the counselees to see themselves without having to judge or consider oneself within the mold of right or wrong. According to Hayes [25], observing oneself or self as context refers to as a self-perception of the world, regardless of the

current behavior and personal experience. Harris [22] described self as context as a point in which we observe our personal experiences. ACT helps the counselee to focus more on themselves by means of mind training and experience training. For example, by using an analogy of the counselee as a chessboard and their thoughts to be the pawns. To move the pawns, the chessboard needs to stay in place. This means that when the counselee thinks of bad or unpleasant thoughts, this will not affect their lives. Therefore, whether or not they experienced or conjured up negative thoughts, it will not affect the counselee [22].

Life values. This skill is used simultaneously or alternately to help the counselee to clarify the existing values and help the counselee to make decisions or actions that support the existing values. According to Hayes [25], in ACT counseling, values indicate the quality of the counselee's life background and can be life picture in the present moment. The counselee is aided to use the existing values to overcome their current problem. Clarifying these values will help the counselee increase the desire for new adaptive behaviors [25].

Committed action. After the counselee learns to identify and recognize their inner values, they begin to write a plan that they will do. According to Hayes [25], this serves as an act of the counselee's commitment. On verbal and action, on the activities to be chosen, including steps taken to achieve more valuable life goals. The counselee is ready to solve their problems by committing themselves and carrying out various activities that can develop their existing inner values.

3.2 The Implementation of ACT to Students who Experienced Dating Violence

The American Psychological Association [28] stated that intimate partner violence is psychological and physical violence committed by one of the parties in a dating relationship, in which this behavior is intended to gain control, power and strength over their partner. Psychological and social repercussions that occur as the result of intimate partner violence includes stress, depression, excessive anxiety, difficulty in concentrating, difficulty in sleeping, and low self-esteem [13]. From the results of various studies on the successful implementation of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) in adolescents, it is known that ACT is proven to reduce depressive symptoms. Several clinical studies [29]–[31] mentioned that ACT effectively reduced symptoms of depression such as feelings of worthlessness, irritability, social withdrawal, and restless thoughts. The studies also found that it improved the students' welfare and well-being.

In addition, ACT can reduce anxiety. The results of two studies conducted by Murrell and Scherbarth [32] and Sari and Nuryono [33] showed that ACT could reduce anxiety level and the counselees were able to commit to their wellbeing. In these cases, parents conducted functional assessments appropriately, provided reinforcement and discipline, and taught various skills to their children. Additionally, parents significantly contributed to the environment in which their child grew.

Three studies conducted by Nikkhah and Arefi [34], Woidneck [35], and Prasastisiwi and Nuryono [36] showed that ACT can reduce stress. The intended stress also includes academic

stress. Furthermore, a research by Sulistiowati, Keliat, and Wardani [37] showed that ACT can reduce violent behavior.

The implementation of acceptance and commitment therapy in counseling is considered to be very effective, because the counseling considers any bad experiences faced by the counselee as instruments to be used as a learning process, in which the counsees are trained to accept unpleasant situation or past experience and use it as a learned knowledge. Finally, after counseling sessions with acceptance and commitment therapy, the counselee will be able to make a decision and commit to improve their self-quality and make more positive changes in them.

In accordance to the successful implementation of acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) discussed above, Hayes and Pankey [38] explained the purpose of ACT as a comprehensive treatment model. ACT seeks to enhance valuable actions in one's life and to reduce maladaptive control strategies that try to reduce or eliminate personal experience. This can strengthen the results of the study, if the application of acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) is effective to increase valuable actions in oneself and reduce problems that occur in an individual without eliminating the experience they have experienced. Students who experienced intimate partner violence, either as a victim or perpetrator, can be helped by using Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) counseling because it can reduce the repercussions of intimate partner and dating violence experiences.

4 Conclusion

Based on the literature review of intimate partner and dating violence experienced by students/adolescents through ACT perspective, it can be concluded that Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) effectively reduces symptoms of depression such as feelings of worthlessness, irritability, social withdrawal, restless thoughts, anxiety level, stress symptoms, and violent behavior. ACT is able to improve students' welfare and encourage them to be able to commit to themselves. Students who experienced intimate partner violence, either as a victim or perpetrator, can be helped by using Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) counseling because it can reduce the psychological and social repercussions of intimate partner violence experience such as stress, depression, excessive anxiety, difficulty in concentrating, difficulty in sleeping, and low self-esteem. As per implication of this review, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is recommended to be applied in schools. ACT can be applied as an approach in helping students who had experienced intimate partner and dating violence; especially for counseling guidance teachers because it provides significant improvements through the process of ACT implementation and intervention. As per direction for future research, it is necessary to conduct an empirical study testing the efficacy of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy to help adolescents and/or students who become victims or perpetrators of intimate partner or dating violence.

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