

## Is Acceptance and Commitment Therapy Effective in Improving Emotion Regulation in Single Mothers?

Aulia Tiffany<sup>1</sup>, Badrut Tamam Nur<sup>2</sup>, Dwi Ratna<sup>3</sup>, Novika Putri<sup>4</sup>,  
Pingkan Putri<sup>5</sup>, Abdul Haris Fitri Anto<sup>6</sup>

*Faculty of Psychology and Health, Sunan Ampel State Islamic University, Surabaya, Indonesia*  
[11010120007@student.uinsby.ac.id](mailto:11010120007@student.uinsby.ac.id), [11010120008@student.uinsby.ac.id](mailto:11010120008@student.uinsby.ac.id), [11010120012@student.uinsby.ac.id](mailto:11010120012@student.uinsby.ac.id),  
[11010120024@student.uinsby.ac.id](mailto:11010120024@student.uinsby.ac.id), [11010120026@student.uinsby.ac.id](mailto:11010120026@student.uinsby.ac.id), [abdul.haris.fitri.anto@uinsby.ac.id](mailto:abdul.haris.fitri.anto@uinsby.ac.id)

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**Abstract :** Being a single parent is not an easy challenge. The ability to manage emotions in single mothers who play the role of caring for children, carrying out domestic household affairs, and working to meet family needs must be truly organised so that all agendas run as planned. However, the reality shows that many single mothers physically and emotionally struggle. This research aims to determine the effectiveness of the ACT (acceptance and commitment therapy) method in improving emotional regulation in single mothers. This research applied a one-group pretest-posttest experimental design involving ten single mothers who were selected randomly. Pretest-posttest data collected using the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS) by Gratz and Roemer (2004) showed a decrease in the mean. This means that there is an increase in the ability to regulate emotions. In addition, the results of the paired t-test showed that the decrease in score was significant ( $p$  0.00 ( $<0.05$ ). With these results, ACT intervention can significantly improve emotional regulation in single mothers. The results of this research will be discussed further.

### INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, many people face various psychological challenges related to emotional regulation. Emotion regulation refers to a person's ability to recognise, understand, and manage feelings effectively. Impaired emotional regulation can lead to mental well-being problems, such as depression, anxiety and chronic stress (Zulaikhah, 2022). Garofalo, Velotti, and Zavattini (2018) stated that one of the characteristics of people with good emotional regulation is a higher tolerance for frustration and anger management, decreasing levels of violence, both physical and verbal, and more positive feelings about oneself and the environment (Garofalo et al., 2018). Young, Sandman, and Craske added that individuals with good emotional regulation are demonstrated by being better at handling conflict

and reducing negative emotional feelings such as excessive anxiety (Young et al., 2019).

Castella et al. (2018) suggest that individuals with low emotional regulation tend to involve emotions that are too strong compared to the situation that triggers them. This makes individuals unable to calm down, avoid difficult emotions, or focus on negative things (De Castella et al., 2018). Good emotional regulation is crucial for single mothers. The ability to recognise, understand, and manage feelings effectively can help them cope with stress, avoid mental exhaustion, and maintain their and their children's well-being. Divorce or the death of a husband causes family conditions to change. During the transition period of changes in the family, single mothers are vulnerable to experiencing a series of intense negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, sadness, depression and frustration. Feeling alone, lonely,

and lost without a partner to rely on is a draining experience, making single mothers feel helpless (Mohamad et al. 2020).

Research from Meier et al. (2019) states that single mothers are emotionally less capable than intact couples; for example, single parents have higher levels of depression, less satisfaction in parenting and lower levels of happiness. Single mothers receive less social support yet experience more significant strain than married mothers. Research by Thompson (Yanti et al., 2019) stated that single mothers feel pressure within themselves, so they find it tough to control their negative emotions. Meanwhile, research from Giriskan (2021) states that single mothers who work also feel extremely tired and lose their personality. According to Giriskan, emotional exhaustion increases with age, while depersonalisation is higher in younger age groups.

According to Larasati, Hidayat, and Muliadi (2022), single mothers suffer from downturns and traumatic conditions when separated from their partners. Thus, it causes negative emotions. Some single mothers are burdened by their situation. They endure negative emotions and physical fatigue (Zuhdi in Aryani, 2019). Some others experienced difficulties raising their children alone without the presence of their husbands (Sari et al., 2019). Emotional regulation in single parents tends to fluctuate because they are easily provoked by emotions when raising their children alone (Mariana et al., 2022). In Indonesia, data on women as heads of households is 15.46%. Mothers who are single parents act as head of the household to keep the household running well, especially to meet the family's economic needs (kemenppa.go.id, 2020).

Single mothers are vulnerable to stress and depression, especially during the post-divorce phase. Those who do not receive strong support from their surrounding will find it very difficult to live their daily lives because they have to divide their time between working, taking care of the house, and taking care of their children. (Astuti, 2022). According to kumparan.com, divorce cases have the potential

to result in suffering from marriage trauma, feelings of guilt, anxiety, fear and unhappiness for women (kumparan.com, 2022). Based on interviews conducted by researchers with three single mothers with the initials Y, B and S in a Surabaya nursing home it shows that they often experience difficulty in managing their emotions due to economic limitations and being a single parent for their child.

According to research by Meier et al. (2019), single mothers tend to show lower emotional regulation than those whom their husbands still accompany. Single mothers suffered higher levels of depression, felt discontented with their way of parenting, and had lower levels of happiness. Many single mothers experience distress and emotional damage in carrying out multiple roles in the family. Interviews conducted by researchers with two single mothers with the initials Y and S at a nursing home in Surabaya confirmed that they suffered and struggled to manage their emotions.

Previous studies have reported various psychological interventions that can assist individuals to regulate their emotions. One of them is Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). ACT is an evidence-based therapy developed by Blackledge and Hayes (2001) that has proven effective in treating various psychological problems, including emotional regulation problems. ACT therapy aims to help people learn how to deal with painful thoughts, increase positive emotional regulation, resilience, and self-control, and decrease negative emotional regulation in single-parent women (Mahmoudpour et al., 2021; Ghorbani et al., 2019). Apart from that, according to ACT theory, choosing actions that reflect a value becomes a mindset for someone to tolerate the torture they feel (Feros et al., 2013).

In the context of single mothers, ACT is expected to help them deal with feelings of loneliness, stress, financial worries, low self-esteem, and anxiety that they may suffer. By practising the concept of acceptance in ACT, single mothers can learn to accept, be grateful, be sincere about life, and not blame or hurt

themselves. It is hoped that, after undergoing therapy, individuals learn to deal with negative thoughts by accepting them as thoughts - not reality. Apart from that, single mothers can better manage their negative thoughts and emotions, accept what is happening in the present and focus on life now (Ardeshirzadeh et al., 2022)

Based on the background above, this research aims to examine the effectiveness of acceptance and commitment therapy in improving emotional regulation in single mothers. This study is vital to see the effectiveness of ACT on single mothers. Furthermore, through this intervention, it is hoped that single mothers can overcome negative emotions and become more accessible to regulate emotions (Wibisono & Erlina, 2021). Previous studies have shown that acceptance and commitment therapy are influential in improving emotional regulation. In this research, it is hoped that ACT will also play an essential role in improving emotional regulation in single mothers.

## METHOD

The method used in this research is an experimental method applying a one-group pretest-posttest design. The subjects in this research were ten single mothers randomly invited to be the experiment participants. Although it was randomly selected, the participants had some criteria: marital status (divorced or death divorced), age 20-50 years, and domiciled in Surabaya. The treatments were given to improve single mom's emotional regulation for three days with four sessions each. Session 1 was identifying events. Session 2 was identifying the client's experience. Session 3 was practising accepting events with value. Session 4, commitment and preventing relapse, was selected. The measuring tool applied in this research was the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation (DERS), initiated by Gratz and Roemer (2004). This tool is based on six dimensions of emotional regulation (1) non-

acceptance of emotional responses, namely ("I become annoyed with myself when I am angry"), (2) difficulties engaging in goal-directed behaviour ("I have difficulty completing work when I angry"), (3) impulse control difficulties ("I have difficulty thinking about other things when I am angry"), (4) lack of emotional awareness ("I feel overwhelmed when I am upset"), (5) limited access to strategies ("I believe that I will stay like that for a long time when I am upset") and (6) lack of emotional clarity ("I have difficulty understanding my feelings.").

Meanwhile, the data analysis technique uses the T-test data analysis technique with a descriptive and inferential quantitative analysis approach to determine whether there is a relationship between the average results of the experimental group. The activities in data analysis are grouping data based on variables and type of respondent, tabulating data based on variables from all respondents, presenting data for each variable studied, carrying out calculations to answer the problem formulation, and carrying out calculations to test the hypothesis that has been proposed. Data analysis in this research was assisted by SPSS 17 for Windows.

## RESULTS

Based on the intervention used, namely ACT (acceptance and commitment therapy), the number of research respondents is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Number of Research Respondents

Number of Respondents	Age	Marital status
10	38	Divorced
	30	Divorced
	47	Death Divorced
	24	Divorced
	39	Death Divorced
	28	Death Divorced
	30	Death Divorced
	38	Death Divorced

46	Death Divorced
46	Divorced

set by the researcher. Then, there are statistical test results from the interventions applied using IBM SPSS Statistics as follows.

Based on Table 1 above, the respondents have complied with the provisions of the criteria

Table 2: Average Results of Emotion Regulation Before and After Being Given the Intervention

		Paired Samples Statistics			
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
<b>Pair 1</b>	<b>Before being given ACT treatment</b>	132.3000	10	19.52235	6.17351
	<b>After being given ACT treatment</b>	85.1000	10	25.89916	8.19003

Table 3: Result of Paired Samples T-Test Emotion Regulation

	Paired Samples T-Test Results			
	t	Significance (p)	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
<b>Emotion Regulation</b> (pretest and posttest gap)	5.710	0.000	0.000	0.000

Based on the data presented in Table 2 above, it is known that the mean or average of the pretest and posttest scores carried out by the respondents shows a dramatic decrease. The pretest score before the intervention was given was 132.300, while the post-test score after the intervention was given was 85.10. Based on the average score on the pretest and posttest of the ACT, it shows that descriptively, there is an apparent decrease of emotional regulation in single mothers before and after being given the therapy. In Table 3, the significant one-sided p and two-sided p show a result of 0.000 (<0.05). Therefore, the results obtained show that ACT has a significant influence on those ten single mothers in managing their emotional issues.

## DISCUSSION

In connection with the aim of this research, the results showed that the ACT intervention significantly improved emotional regulation in single mothers. These results can be seen from the significant differences in the pretest and posttest results, which show before

and after being given the ACT intervention. It is proven that the post-test score shows a lower number than the pretest score. This statement belatedly proves that ACT intervention has a significant effect on improving emotional regulation in single mothers.

Emotion regulation refers to an individual's ability to recognise, understand and regulate what they feel. It can be seen that single mothers are less able to regulate their emotions, so there are many negative impacts caused by their lack of ability to regulate emotions. Examples of a person's inability to regulate their emotions are difficulty controlling their emotions, being easily angry, offended, stressed and even at risk of depression. Low emotional regulation is felt by single mothers in the Karang Pilang sub-district, Surabaya, namely difficulty controlling their emotions, stress due to caring for and paying for their children, and not being able to forget painful memories. The anxiety of single mothers in the Karang Pilang district of Surabaya after being given intervention began to show an increase in their emotional regulation.

The intervention provided is in the form of ACT, which is considered a therapy model that

is able to overcome various psychological problems effectively. This therapy helps individuals deal with painful memories by channelling increased emotional regulation, resilience and self-control. ACT intervention to improve emotional regulation is carried out with various agendas according to the rundown that has been made. The first session identifies events, feelings, and thoughts that arise and distributes pretest sheets. In the second session, the subject talked about events that had been pleasant or unpleasant. It can be seen from the faces of the subjects that they have a lot of stress and depression that makes them want to cry when they tell the story. Then, the next session is given to practice accepting the events that have been experienced by writing them down on a sheet of paper and in a daily report. Efforts to prevent the emergence of low emotional regulation by continuing with the fourth session include the researcher asking the subject to write on a sheet of paper, discussing avoiding the recurrence of bad behaviour and filling in the posttest sheet.

The results of the intervention provided improved emotional regulation according to what was expected from this research. The intervention provided changed the harmful intensity of single mothers in the Karang Pilang subdistrict, Surabaya. This research can be used according to the problem being complained of or subjects whose emotional regulation has improved, providing the benefits of this research to individuals who need it more simply.

## CONCLUSION

Based on this research, it can be concluded that ACT (acceptance and commitment therapy) plays an influential role in single mothers' emotional regulation. This is proven by the significant increase in pre-test and post-test results after the intervention was given. Providing ACT makes subjects able to deal with bad memories that occurred during their lives and can help them deal with feelings of

loneliness, stress, financial worries, low self-esteem and anxiety that single mothers suffer.

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